

InsideOut

Canadian Union of Postal Workers
Edmonton Local

MARCH 2012



Cori Longo in CUBA November 2011....International Conference for the Release of the Cuban Five and Against Terrorism, Holguin, Cuba. Read her report inside!

Message from the Editor...Karen Kennedy

Remembering Chris Sobkow...

Sadly, on January 21, 2012 we lost Chris Sobkow to pancreatic cancer. Our condolences are extended to his family and friends, and especially to his postal worker spouse, Sherry Sobkow. Chris will be remembered as a wonderful person, thoughtful and always willing to lend a helping hand, and always ready for a good laugh. Chris was a shop steward off and on during his years at Canada Post and was guided by a strong sense of fairness. He fell sick suddenly, at the end of May 2011, and he fought hard to stay with us, surpassing the Doctor's prediction by 6 months. Chris spent almost 20 years as a volunteer firefighter in Grande Cache and in Carstairs before working with Canada Post. It was Chris's wish that donations in his memory be made to the Firefighters – Burn Treatment Society...Edmonton Chapter. May he rest in peace.



Chris was a CBC fan



Chris, far right, on picket line 1997



**HAVE YOU MOVED?
ARE YOU PLANNING TO MOVE?**
Don't forget to contact the union office
with your new address and phone number.

Inside Out Deadlines

Friday at noon

April Issue: March 9

May Issue: April 13

February 2, 2012 Bulletin No. 92

FEDERAL COURT DECISION OVERTURNS MINISTER OF LABOUR'S APPOINTMENT

THE DECISION ... WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

On January 27, 2012 the Honourable Judge Luc Martineau of the Federal Court in Montreal, Quebec rendered his decision which overturns the Minister of Labour's July 22nd appointment of the Honourable Coulter A. Osborne. In his decision he upheld the Union's arguments on the necessary qualifications for a Final offer selection (FOS) arbitrator. He ruled that any of the proceedings or decisions that had transpired under arbitrator Osborne should be quashed on the grounds that the Minister of Labour has unreasonably exercised her discretionary power by ignoring the two essential qualifications required of the arbitrator. He agreed with the Union that any appointed arbitrator would have to be bilingual and have a degree of recognized expertise in labour relations.

In his decision Judge Martineau states:
 "[*Translation*]... it is inconceivable in this case that the Minister would appoint someone who is not bilingual." ...

"[*Translation*] Before appointing a new final offer arbitrator, the Minister shall take into account the grounds of the Court's decision and ensure that the person selected has some degree of recognized labour relations experience and is bilingual."

In his decision Judge Martineau also comments that final offer arbitration:
 "[*Translation*]... leads to one-sided law-making.... It is the prevailing party, as designated by the final offer arbitrator, who will

dictate to the unsuccessful party, for the next three years ... Therefore, the weight of responsibilities is enormous."

Further he comments on how this "extraordinary process" will affect some 50,000 postal workers and that:
 "[*Translation*] Caution is required to avoid the deterioration of the working environment for years to come."

This is a major victory for the Union. The effect of this decision is that essentially it takes us back to where we were, in the process, in July 2011. The Union will continue to fight for postal workers against this unjust legislation.

THE STRUGGLE AHEAD...

There is little doubt that when the new arbitrator is nominated by the Harper government, Canada Post will submit a final offer that will aim to reduce or eliminate protections and rights acquired over many decades, all in the name of more profits. The Union will do all in its power to preserve these protections and rights but there is nothing like the collective strength of all 54,000 postal workers. Tell the employer on the shop floor that you deserve better, that you deserve respect and equality, that your health and safety must be a priority, and that you want to retire one day with a secured pension and, in one piece, not with a broken body.

Make your voice heard.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES ... MORE THAN EVER.

In Solidarity,
 Denis Lemelin
 National President and Chief Negotiator

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Get the latest information from CUPW delivered right to your inbox. Sign up for cupw.ca/eDigest

Report from the Education Committee

First off thanks to everyone who applied for the Regional courses. We had many great applicants but space is very limited so if you didn't make it this time there will be more courses coming up in the fall. Those attending from Edmonton are: Nadine Carpentier, Sharla Funk, Erin Mannix, Kathleen Mpulubusi, Rodney Craig Schwartz, Elly Onyschuk, Amir Sheikh, Jerry Woods, Albert Kwan, Cathy Furtak, Mary Lussier, Glen Mottershead, Dan Murri.

We just held a local Quality of Work Life (QWL) course February 16 and 17, with the help of Brother Dave Bleakney, national union representative for education (English). Sister Asma Burney also facilitated. It was a great opportunity for those who could attend and their input and experiences will be going into a new and improved QWL course for the National Union.

Right now is the time to apply for the Union Education Program. This is a four week education program in Port Elgin, Ont. and is an amazing experience that is one of a kind. The opportunity to meet and spend time with Sisters and Brothers from all across Canada, comparing workplaces and experiences while discussing everything from sexism to globalization is something not to be missed. Applications are available in the Union office until the February 24 deadline.

Coming up next will be a Pension Question and Answer evening with Sisters Karen Kennedy and Cathy Furtak on March 8th from 3pm to 6pm. This is a great opportunity to come down to the Union office, have a cup of coffee and ask about what to expect and what to watch out for as you approach retirement.



The local will put on a full one day pension course if we get enough requests, so sign up today!

The next local course will be a basic shop steward course so if you didn't get in to the regional course hopefully you will be able to attend. If you haven't applied yet there is still time: call the office and leave a message with your name, number and work location.

Welcome to Sister Tara Forbes who was just elected to our education committee.

Darcy Griffiths
Education Officer
CUPW Edmonton Local

From the Acting-Secretary-Treasurer ...Cathy Furtak

There comes a time when people want or need to make changes in their lives. That time has come for me.

Many of you already know me but for those that do not, I have been at Canada Post for almost 32 years. I have worked in many different positions within Canada Post. I have been a letter carrier, a PO-04, and a PO-05. Also a shop steward and Chief shop Steward.

Since the lockout this past June I have been working full time in the union office as Acting Secretary-Treasurer. Although it has been a challenge at times it has also been very rewarding for me to be able to help our members. I am however envious of those of you that I have helped with your retirement plans. Many of you have some great plans for your time away from Canada Post!

During the last six months I have been quite active in consultations. I've also had input in getting the vacation schedules for 2012-13 corrected to have 36 consecutive weeks per column (as the collective agreement provides for).

I have never been one to give up on something that I believe in and I believe that our members need the support of strong knowledgeable fulltime officers. I am committed to learning the many aspects of the job of the Secretary – Treasurer. I have never been one to shy away from a fight to get what is provided for in the collective agreement and will continue to fight to enforce and protect the rights that we have.

I also attended the last National Convention at which I was elected as a National Trustee (alternate). I was also asked by our National Director Gord Fischer to sit on the National Human rights Committee as my daughter is disabled and I have been her advocate for 22 years.

After much consideration I have decided to run for the full time position of Secretary-Treasurer. Since I started, I have been working hard to learn and have managed to learn many aspects of the job. I also intend on continuing my education for this position through several educations offered by the National and Regional offices.

I would like to ask you to support me in my efforts to become your new Secretary – Treasurer.

-Cathy Furtak



Starting the Conversation: Facing Racism in the Workplace

Date: Tuesday, March 20, 2012
Location: AFL Meeting Room, 10654 – 101 Street, Edmonton
Cost: No charge
Time: 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (lunch will be provided)

The Workers of Colour and Aboriginal Workers Committee of the Alberta Federation of Labour is proud to sponsor a workshop facilitated by the Centre for Race and Culture entitled "Starting the Conversation: Facing Racism in the Workplace." This event is open to all AFL affiliates and activists.

The workshop will be an exploration of cultural competency and anti-racism in Alberta today. Diversity is no longer the goal – it is the reality and labour, community, business, government and individuals need to build the capacity to address both the opportunities and the challenges of a changing and complex workforce.

The labour movement has long been at the front of struggles against oppression from workers' rights to the rights of women and minorities. Today organized labour still has a role to play in struggles against injustices, from the challenges of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, to the real experiences of discrimination that many racialized workers still face in the labour market. In this workshop we will dialogue about the implications of inequity, racism and anti-racist practice in your work and life and strategize equitable responses to racism as union activists.



Topics covered will include:

- The context and realities of inequity in the Alberta and Canadian labour market;
- Tools to understand how racism and inequity manifest in the workplace;
- Resources for AFL affiliates to educate about equity and racial justice; and
- Strategies for being an ally to those who experience racism in the workplace.

Please join us for this important event. Register early as there is limited space.



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada

Deadline to register is March 16, 2012. contact Linda Robinson, AFL-10654-101 Street, 780-483-3021, 1-800-661-3995, lrobinso@afl.org

Cori Longo Reports on her trip to CUBA with CUPW

At National Convention 2011, the CUPW membership passed a resolution demanding the United States government free the Cuban Five political prisoners currently being held in American prisons, that prisoners' family member be allowed to obtain humanitarian visas and that American citizens be allowed unrestricted travel to Cuba. This resolution was widely accepted on the convention floor and CUPW became the first national union to constitutionalize support for Cuban struggles. To continue international solidarity and increase the pressure for freedom of the "Cuban 5", CUPW for the last 2 years, has sent members to the International Conference for the Release of the Five and Against Terrorism, in Holguin, Cuba. This last year, I was fortunate to be one of the two delegates sent to this conference. Here is a summary of my trip and what I learned:

The Conference

Over 400 delegates, representing 50 countries, traveled to Holguin in Eastern Cuba. The central focus of the five day conference was to strengthen action and build support for the immediate release of the Cuban 5. In 1998, these 5 heroes; Ramon, Rene, Fernando, Antonio and Gerardo were sent to Miami, Florida on a mission to monitor activities of Anti-Cuban terrorist groups and report information of threats against Cuba. Once this information was shared with the American government, these men were arrested and charged with 26 counts of violating American federal laws. However, 24 of those charges were merely technical and minor offenses. None of them reflected violence against the U.S., use of weapons, property damage, threats or injury to anyone, nor transfer of classified American information. Nevertheless, the Cuban 5 were sentenced to four life sentences, 77 years in U.S. prisons, collectively. Shortly after the sentencing, the Cuban 5 endured 17 months of psychological torture in solitary confinement. The trial has faced much international criticism; the United Nations states that the trial did not take place in a climate of objectivity or impartiality and claims the trial was biased and unfair. Amnesty International argues that the punishment for such crimes is severely disproportionate and there has been inhumane treatment of the prisoners. Furthermore, Amnesty claims the American government has violated human rights by not allowing the prisoners' families to visit. There has been a global outcry for a fair appeal and justice to be served. An international campaign has been supported by 8 international Nobel Prize winners, former US president Jimmy Carter, Noam Chomsky, Danny Glover, Gore Vidal, amongst many others. Most recently in October, 2011, Rene Gonzalez was released after completing 13 years of imprisonment. However, Rene remains detained in the U.S. due to a compulsory 3 year supervised probation. Many argue, including his wife, that as long as he is held in the U.S., his life continues to be endangered.



The conference held many activities and numerous speakers. The National Director of ICAP (Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People) welcomed the delegation and attested that international solidarity would win the fight for the freedom of the Cuban 5. It was acknowledged that support from global, as well as grass roots organizations, would allow justice to prevail by returning the heroes to Cuba and their families. The real face of the conference was represented by the mothers and sisters of the Cuban 5. I learned that the Cuban people place a large emphasis on family

(continued page 12)

Rural Ramblings

Greetings once again to all RSMCs and RSMC advocates! No doubt you've all been enjoying the mild winter thus far and are anticipating the arrival of spring. As the calendar pages fall, negotiations towards a new collective agreement for RSMCs continue. In the meantime, the employer continues to use a variety of tactics to cause unrest and distress with RSMCs across the nation. However, if you know your rights, you can minimize the effects these tactics have upon you and your co-workers.

One of the most widely used tactics is intimidation through the employer's S&I (security and investigation) teams. There have been reports from around the country of S&I members stopping RSMCs along the roadside and demanding access to their vehicles, and even of S&I demanding access to RSMCs property to confirm or deny "reports" of misappropriated corporate equipment, improper handling of unaddressed admail, or even theft of mail and parcels!

How can you protect yourself? First, understand that NO ONE can pull you over and demand access to your vehicle except a police officer. Not S&I, not your supervisor or any other management person, there are no other exceptions! We are required to provide our own vehicles for use, therefore Canada Post has absolutely no legal right to demand a search, as they do not own the vehicle! If you find yourself in this situation, you have every right to categorically refuse access to your vehicle unless they are accompanied by a police officer. And remember that if any Canada Post management or security personnel do arrive with a police officer, ONLY the officer has the right to access your vehicle; under no circumstances can the S&I members access your vehicle without your express permission.

The same rules apply at your home or property. It is not unheard of for Canada Post management or S&I personnel to arrive unannounced at an RSMC's property and ask to have the garage opened because they've had "reports" of mail bins or other equipment being used for personal reasons. The rules are even stricter in this case as they must be

accompanied by a police officer, and that officer MUST have a search warrant! Under no circumstances should you provide access otherwise.

What can you do to protect yourself from being placed under suspicion? Exercise due diligence! Ensure that any surplus admail is properly disposed of at the end of your day, and not left in your vehicle. Ensure that all mail and parcels is either delivered or returned to the depot before you sign out at the end of your shift; the same applies for any mail tubs or other corporate equipment that you may use for your deliveries. We can all be lax and cut corners, but failure to do any of the above can leave you very vulnerable so take the few extra moments to protect yourselves.

Finally, what do you do if you are in one of these encounters? Inform a union representative at the FIRST possible moment. Try to get as many details like names on ID badges, make note of times and locations, and the verbal exchanges. If the situation does involve a police officer, ensure that you get a copy of the report, which will include the cause of why you were stopped. Ask for a written inventory of any items they remove from your vehicle or property. If the police are involved, it is in your best interest to engage the services of a lawyer, although it must be stressed that the union will not reimburse any legal expenses. Remember that your union will fight for you, but the more documentation that you can provide, the better the case can be made for you.

I hope this knowledge will dispel some of the fear that many members have regarding these matters. Remember that diligently following procedures is your best protection, but it's also critical to know your rights to minimize your risk should the situation escalate. In the meantime, take care and drive safe!

Doug Frechette
Chief Shop Steward
RSMC
Edmonton Local



RSMC Meeting

Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers

Saturday, March 17

10am to Noon

At the Union Office

11001 – 107 St. (Red and white house across
from the church)



CUPW EDMONTON LOCAL CUPW EDMONTON LOCAL
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Sunday, March 4, 2012

Noon to 2 PM

Green and Gold Room

Commonwealth Stadium

(use Team store entrance, parking at LRT lot across the street)

Agenda:

Auditor's Report 2010\2011

Elections:

Local trustee committee, 1 member

Local elections committee, 5 members and 4 alternates, term to Dec 2013

Local Temporary Workers Committee 8 members

Local area council delegates 8 members*

United Way Union Counselling Level 2 5 members

Prairie School for Union Women 2 members (pending motion and 7.58 funding)

***to be eligible for election as an Area Council delegate, you must have attended**

50% of the membership meetings in the previous year.

Report on the February 5 2012 General Membership Meeting

Meeting called to order by President Bev Ray @ 6:15 p.m.

Financial Statements for November, December and January were tabled for a different break out of monies and to come to the next meeting.

Correspondence:

Petition by EMPP members to have a controlled cross walk light at 149 street and 121A Ave, to be circulated in the local.

.AFL centennial celebrations 1912-2012, Fort Edmonton Park, June 16 2012.

Public History Conference held in June @ UofA, part of AFL 100 Anniversary Celebration.

Labour Education seminars on understanding WCB Claims - June 13, September 26.

EDLC requesting participation at Labour Appreciation Night April 14 2012 - \$65 per person.

EDLC letter asking about appointments to EI Board of Referees.

Caterpillar to close Canadian Locomotive Plant - article from Retirement Weekly.

Re-alignment of RSMC routes going on at depot 8.

Numerous Dues Waiver requests were voted on and carried, some were to be investigated and brought to the next meeting in March.

Moved, Seconded and Carried to excuse: **from the November & December GMM**

Raj Sharma, Todd Brooks November 6, 2011 GMM

Devinder Sunner, Bena Pattni, Carol Read, Michelle Woods December 4, 2011 GMM

M/S/Carried -

To send up to five members to Beyond Acute Care Conference Feb 24/25 2012. Money to cover registration fees & expenses, not to exceed \$999, from Education.

M/S/Carried -

The local to update the website regularly.

**Elections: Women's Committee (Sept 2011 - 2013)
3 vacant positions:**

Nadine Carpentier , Mary Lussier , Kathleen Mpulubusi

Route Measurement Committee (Nov 2011 - 2013)

Todd Brooks , Jerry Woods , Jean Marcel ,

Lorraine Newton

Trustee Committee (Sept 2011 - 2013)

Randy Kennedy (accepted by note)

Education Committee (until November 2012)

Tara Forbes

EDLC Council Delegates (until Feb 2013)

Raj Sharma, Jerry Woods , Nancy

Dodsworth , Nadine Carpentier , Karen Kennedy,

Brian Henderson , Donna Tyson ,

Lorraine Newton

EDLC Annual School (Feb 24, 25 & 26 2012)

Tara Forbes , Donna Tyson , Parminder

Pannu , Lorraine Newton

Beyond Acute Care (Feb24/25/ 2012)

Bev Ray, Cori Longo , Craig Swartz

Local Area Council Delegates up to 34 members:

Lorraine MacKenzie, Norm Burns,

Cathy Furtak , Sue Wilson (accepted by note),

Linda Nyznyk, Bev Ray , Mike Painchaud ,

Brian Blair, Darcy Griffiths , Carol Read,

Karen Kennedy, Cori Longo, Nick Driedger ,

Raj Sharma, Wray Hoffer , Bena Pattni, Jim

Crowell (accepted by note), Asma Burney ,

Jerry Woods , Todd Brooks, Yvette Brusseau ,

Robin Feakes , Ajay Sharma , Parminder Pannu,

Devinder Sunner , Doug Frechette (accepted by note)

Total 26 elected, 8 more to elect at the next General Membership Meeting in March, plus alternates.

Meeting Adjourned @ 8:15 p.m.



Cori Reports on CUBA...continued...

connections and bonds. The lived experience of the family members was heart breaking, but their unshaken conviction was incredibly inspiring.

Many speakers shared actions happening around the world to demand release of the Cuban 5. The following actions continually apply pressure to the American government: marches to protest the unjust imprisonment, petitions to demand the release of the Cuban 5, acknowledgement and explanation of the situation on different media sources, letters written to Obama to request visas for the wives, theatrical performances, poems, songs and art exhibits spreading the message, support from international bodies of athletes, churches, political groups and unions. It is important to support these actions, but new campaigns and strategies must also be created in order to achieve our goal, of liberation and return of all 5 Cuban heroes.

Women's March

The delegation was fortunate to join in with local women of Holguin, in a march to demand the immediate return of the Cuban 5. This was a sight to behold, with thousands of powerful and vocal women rallying together. As the march concluded, speakers explained that when vigorous action is taken by the public, injustice crumbles. The women of Cuba believe in truth and justice and will not rest until their 'husbands, brothers and fathers' are released from prison. The crowd was electric, as we all raised our voices in unison.

University of Holguin

We enjoyed a tour of the local university and campus. The university has 14 five year degree programs with over 2200 students. Including international students, more than 1000 live in residence. The accommodation and tuition is paid for by the government. In addition, transportation and accommodation is provided for out-of- province students. Students receive a stipend for living allowances. In comparison with absurd tuition rates and other difficulties faced by Canadian students, the post-secondary system of Cuba looked enticing and logical.

Agriculture Machinery Factory

Early one morning we toured a factory that employs 700 workers and was originally opened 30 years ago by Fidel Castro. This factory is responsible for manufacturing 40% of Cuba's farming equipment. Upon arrival, the workers all gathered to welcome us as delegates of the conference and together we sang the national anthem. The workers were given leave to attend the previous day's march. The factory runs 2 shifts, Monday to Friday at 44 hours a week. The majority of workers come from post-secondary education and completed their practicum at this factory. The factory focuses on producing new technology to improve agricultural conditions and make farming more efficient. Unfortunately, due to an aging population and the economic consequences of the U.S. embargo, Cuba has raised the retirement age to 65 years old for men and 60 years old for women. Maternity leave consists of 12 months full salary and paternity leave is also available. When sick, the employees receive full pay for the first 3 days and after that a doctor visits the worker in his/her home for certified illness. Since opening the factory, there has been a



(Photo....Cigar Factory)

strong presence of women on the work floor. The factory is concerned with energy conservation and keeps a current usage record in the common area. I was impressed with the working conditions at this factory as they were comparable, if not better, than a Canadian workplace.

Lenin General Hospital

We were able to visit a local hospital and speak with the director, as well as nurses and other hospital workers. The hospital employs 3000 workers, including 500 doctors and 760 nurses. A nurse is responsible on average, for only 3-4 patients. In the absence of a hierarchy, doctors and nurses were considered of equal importance. Shockingly, 70% of the doctors were female. All health care is free for Cubans; this includes surgery, medications, treatment, rehabilitation, cosmetic surgery, even gender-reassignment surgery and termination of pregnancy. The Cuban health care system focuses resources on preventative care. Neighborhood physicians are accessible within the community and provide services through home visits. Vaccination and infant mortality rates are on par with Canada and the United States. Cuba is home to the largest medical school in the world, the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM). Students from all over the world, including the U.S., attend ELAM where tuition, accommodation, board and stipends are free. The mission of ELAM (reportedly conceived by Fidel Castro) is to provide competent and advanced doctors, assisting in humanitarian and response aid all over the world. From my interaction within the Cuban health care system, Canada's system could adopt some of their policies.

Cuban Countryside – Baguanos

We had the absolute pleasure of traveling into the countryside to Baguanos, a smaller city of 50,000 Cubans. As we came close to the city, we were greeted by thousands of locals. Men and boys lined the streets, as the women and girls marched displaying Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) flags and signs. It was breathtaking! The FMC was established in 1960, and is symbolized with a powerful picture of Vilma Espin, who was a revolutionary leader. This organization has been responsible for eradicating illiteracy in Cuba in 1961, bringing women out of the homes and into the work force, mobilizing women in political and government administration and developing communal services to alleviate domestic work and childcare. After the march, we were welcomed and thanked for attending the conference and supporting the Cuban 5 campaign. We toured the town, had lunch at a culinary school for kids, enjoyed the central park dedicated to mothers and took pleasure listening to music performed by an orchestra. It was a wonderful experience.



Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR)

One evening, we participated in a CDR meeting. The CDR system was originally formed in 1960 by Fidel Castro, to promote social welfare and report counter-revolutionary activities. Currently 75% of the Cuban population is registered as CDR members. The purpose of such neighborhood groups is to provide social support, arrange festivals, organize rallies and community projects. Additionally, CDRs play an active role in vaccination campaigns, blood banks, recycling and emergency response procedures. It was a lovely evening of celebrating community involvement, sharing food, singing, dancing and interacting with the local Cubans.

Child Care Center

It was really fun to visit a child care center. Workers in Cuba have free access to child care and drop off their children in the morning and pick them up in the evening. The caregivers are university educated in infancy and childhood development. Also, each facility is required to have a registered nurse on staff. The purpose of the child care centers is to provide assistance to families and educate children, not obtain profits as is normal in Canada. We entered one room, where the children sang us a song. The facility was clean and well-maintained. A large emphasis was placed on arts and crafts, with play houses and furniture built from paper mache. As we were leaving, we walked by the garden where young



children were learning the medicinal properties of the plants they were growing. In my opinion, families in Canada would greatly benefit from a similar system.

Emphasis on Arts and Recreation

It seemed wherever we went, there was an interest and value placed on the arts. Because there wasn't any advertising, billboards had paintings and walls were covered with murals. I found it extremely refreshing not to be constantly assaulted by corporate messages but rather indulged in beautiful works of art. Nearly every assembly we attended was lead and entertained by

live musicians and some with dancers. The delegation was fortunate to be invited to two different performances at the stunning and modern local theatre. The first was a historical drama and musical of Cuba presented by children. The props and costumes were elaborate and striking; not to mention the sheer talent and confidence of the young performers. I noticed this throughout the trip, that an importance was placed on encouraging and developing the future generation. The closing gala was a collection and display of dancing from ballet to jazz, and singing from choir to opera. While spending time in the main square, I observed brass instrument classes during the day and gathering of people singing songs and playing guitars during the evening. At the beach, it was common to seem clusters of families eating and playing together. Wherever I looked, the people of Cuba seemed to be enjoying leisurely activities and benefiting from reduced stress and relaxation.

Cuban Cigar Factory

One day we had the privilege of exploring a cigar factory. It's interesting to see the extensive process of making the world's finest and most expensive cigars. The skill of the workers is incredible! There are 480 employees at this factory, which on average produce 90 cigars per person, per day. This factory provided 9 months of training and employed the most qualified and efficient workers. Apprentices receive equal pay to trained workers. Watching these workers, was honestly a thing of beauty. Security was high, no photos allowed and they checked our bags before we left.

Provincial Workers Centre

Throughout our trip, we were escorted by the provincial secretary of the Workers' Central Union of Cuba (CTC). Since 1939, the CTC has been the only organization representing workers from all industries. Recent economical difficulties resulted in the introduction of free market reforms in 2006, in an attempt to boost the Cuban economy. The CTC provincial secretary explained the union's involvement in the private sector has produced positive results. Businesses such as bicycle taxis and cafes have been privatized but are still affiliated with the CTC. As a side note, Cuba has an interesting and effective carpooling policy. It is required by law that anyone driving a vehicle with vacant seats, must pick up those waiting on the road. This goes to show the collective nature of the Cuban people.

Cuban Post Office

We learned that the Cuban Post Office handles mail delivery, but also provides banking, bill payment and internet services. The city of Holguin has 9 depots and 72 letter carriers. While talking with the workers, I was surprised to hear that only men can be letter carriers in Cuba. It was strange to see the incongruence between the advanced Cuban feminist movement and the prohibition of women to be letter carriers. However, the female workers present



(photo: Cori, Cuban Letter Carrier, Don Foreman CUPW)

seemed to take no issue with this and were content with the other jobs. Low injury rates were due to extensive training to familiarize the carriers with their route and area. If a walk was over 10km, the worker was provided a bicycle, which was replaced every 2 years. Shifts were 8 hours, with 2 deliveries: one in the morning for newspapers and a second wave to deliver mail. The mail is sorted by other workers. I really enjoyed our tour of the post office, as it felt familiar to me.

International solidarity proves to be extremely useful and necessary to bridge the gap between working people everywhere. Humans from every country face similar struggles, and to improve our world, we need to understand and support each other. Workers in Canada are directly affected by what happens to other workers in the world. I was proud to be a representative for CUPW and support the freedom for the Cuban 5 cause. Attending the International Conference for the Release of the Cuban 5 was life altering and changed the way I view the world. I will forever be grateful to CUPW for this tremendous opportunity.

-Cori Longo

**(photo...Holguin,
Cuba)**



MARCH 2012 Events:

March 3...Environment Committee Meeting 3:30 to 5pm, Muttart Restaurant

March 4...CUPW Edmonton Local General Membership Meeting at noon, Green and Gold Room, Commonwealth

March 8...International Women's Day

...drop in pension Q & A session 3:00pm to 6:00pm Union Office

March 9...deadline noon for articles for April issue of InsideOut

...deadline to apply for 5-day Spring Educational Gimli, MB

... Advanced Shop Steward Course, April 24 - 29

March 15...Mail Out election Ballots for areas outside Edmonton

...Edmonton Local Executive meeting 9am

...Bottled Water Free Day!

March 16,17,18...Prairie Region 3 day school Edmonton

March 17...RSMC Meeting 10am to noon

March 19...EDLC meeting 6pm, Carpenters Hall, Princess Elizabeth Ave

March 20...AFL Fighting Workplace Racism Workshop 9am to 12:30pm

March 28...Advance Election Poll Union Office 7am to 6pm

March 30...Pick up Ballots returned from areas outside Edmonton

April 1.....Voting for Executive Elections Union Office 7am to 5pm

...General Membership Meeting 6pm Green & Gold room

Carl Scullion, Depot 11 Letter Carrier, Retires



Carl wears the hat he wore delivering mail in the 70s, while JoJo waits for cake!

(photo K.Kennedy)

Depot 9 Letter Carrier, Ron Marsh, Retires



Local President Bev Ray delivers farewell hugs to Ronnie on his last day. (photo K.Hutzcal)