

GMM President's Report

May 12, 2020

COVID-19

Since the middle of March, much of what we've been focused on at Local 832 – like most of the world – has been COVID-19. Since many UFCW members are considered essential during this pandemic, our first challenge was ensuring that the workplaces where those members work were made as safe as possible, and that the risk of any UFCW member contracting this virus was minimized.

The next priority was to keep our staff as safe as possible while continuing to provide uninterrupted service to all of our members. To achieve that we quickly arranged to have all of our staff work from home and since the third week of March we have shut down all of our offices and both of our training centres with just a couple of people working at the Winnipeg office at any one time.

Provincially we have written to the Premier of Manitoba several times to lobby for better workplace protections for our members working in retail grocery, food production, food distribution, warehousing, security, assisted living and in personal care. We have also sought better protections for workers who need time off due to COVID and to have presumptive WCB coverage for any worker who contracts the virus.

To date, our province has declined that coverage and is the only Canadian Province to not have any money over and above the Federal programs dedicated to helping workers. They do, however, seem to have plenty of money to assist businesses.

Nationally, UFCW Canada has made many of the same lobbying efforts as we have provincially and just recently wrote the Prime Minister urging him to put regulations in place to protect workers in food processing plants such as the Cargill Beef plant in Alberta that has over 900 positive cases of the virus.

We have been inundated with media over the last 2 months and have probably commented on more stories and programs over that time than we have in the last 5 years combined. In every story we have showcased how hard our members are working and reminded them that we have over 1,000 members laid off that we are also working hard to assist.

While there is no doubt that we will survive this outbreak together, there is also no doubt that the world will not be the same place as it was before COVID. Here at UFCW we are already preparing for a new reality that will mean doing much of what we've always done in very different ways in the future.

Hylife Neepawa Bargaining

Bargaining for our 1,400 members working at Hylife Foods and Freezerco in Neepawa resulted in a tentative agreement in April, but due to COVID 19, getting that deal ratified presented a challenge as a meeting with over 1,000 people at the Yellowhead Centre violated the health order and had to be cancelled.

Instead, Secretary Treasurer Bea Bruske and the bargaining committee held 2 telephone town halls on April 21st to read through the deal with Hylife members and to answer any questions they had. The vote was conducted by mail in ballot, but unfortunately Hylife members voted 66% to reject the deal.

Bea and the committee are working to communicate with the members as to what their concerns are and to get the company back to the bargaining table.

COVID Cancellations

All of the conferences and conventions that had been planned by UFCW Canada and other organizations have been cancelled as large group meetings are not allowed. There are 3 of those that affect Local 832 specifically.

The next session of the UFCW Youth Internship Program was to be held in Winnipeg from July 20-25 but it has been cancelled and won't be rescheduled until the spring of 2021.

The National Defense Fund's annual conference was also scheduled to be held in Winnipeg July 26-28 and has also been cancelled. Since other venues for this event have already been secured for 2021 and 2022, it won't be returning to Winnipeg until 2023.

As I reported in February, our Secretary Treasurer Bea Bruske has put her name forward to run for the position of President of the Canadian Labour Congress at the convention that was to be held the first week of May in Vancouver. Unfortunately that Convention has also been cancelled due to COVID and the CLC is hoping to be able to run a convention in late 2020 or early 2021.

As reported by
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