

GMM PRESIDENTS REPORT

NOVEMBER 10, 2020

Covid-19

With the continuing progression of the pandemic over the last several months, much of the work we've been doing here at Local 832 has been focused on ensuring the health and safety of our members in the various workplaces. While we now know that it's unrealistic to expect that we will have zero cases in UFCW workplaces, we also know that the proper protocols and personal protective equipment can help to limit the spread of this deadly virus.

As an employer, we have had to ensure that our staff are as safe as they can possibly be while at the same time continuing to provide the first class service that our members have come to expect. To meet those two requirements we have moved many of our staff throughout the province to work from home, initiated protocols that meet or exceed the public health requirements and found creative ways to continue servicing and negotiating our member's contracts. We have ratified many new collective agreements since the pandemic began and our reps and specialists are available to you whenever you need them.

We have also been in regular contact with senior officials from many employers to ensure that they are implementing best practises in the workplace. We are regularly lobbying both government and public health to mandate practises that keep our members safe but many of our recommendations have fallen on deaf ears as the current government seems more concerned with the economy than they are with the safety of Manitobans.

Despite these efforts we have seen a number of cases at the following UFCW represented workplaces:

Exceldor Poultry

In the last month Exceldor Poultry in Blumenort Manitoba has reported 60 cases and unfortunately two of our members have passed away from the

virus in the last two weeks. Our sincere condolences go out to the family, friends and co-workers of these members and we send our best wishes for a speedy recovery to the other members still fighting the virus.

Brandon Maple Leaf

In August, an outbreak in the Prairie Mountain Health region saw 96 members affected, and fortunately there were no deaths as a result of those infections. All of those members have now recovered and there have been 2 isolated cases since then and only one of those is currently active.

Retail Grocery

There have been approximately 25 positive cases at retail grocery locations across the province since the pandemic began and fortunately no deaths to report. There are currently 5 active cases and we continue to lobby these employers and others to restore the “hero premium” that was being paid to our members this spring.

Winnipeg School Division #1 Strike

On September 8th we began a strike at the Winnipeg School Division #1 which we had delayed since April because of Covid. Despite the fact that the Public Service Sustainability Act was deemed to be unconstitutional, the employer still tabled the wage component with a 4 year deal at 0%, 0%, .75% and 1%. We offered to take the matter to arbitration to end the strike but the employer refused. We will be applying for an arbitrator to settle the contract through the Alternate Dispute Resolution procedure under Manitoba Labour Law on November 9th.

Stella’s Sherbrook Strike

On September 21st we started a strike at Stella’s on Sherbrook after negotiations broke down at conciliation. The strike is not about money, but rather about respect and dignity for our members who have been treated very poorly since they voted to join our union. We also offered to end this dispute through arbitration and again the employer refused. There is a rumour that Stella’s is now trying to sell the location but either way we will be applying for Alternate Dispute Resolution on November 23rd.

Maple Leaf Winnipeg Negotiations

Negotiations officially opened on September 11th but preparations had started back in April. We have met on 13 dates so far and all meetings are being conducted with the employer over Zoom. Monetary talks started the last week of October and it is our committee's hope that we can reach an agreement by the end of this month. Ratifying a contract for such a large group of members will prove to be challenging in a Covid environment.

Red River Co-op Negotiations

Marie Buchan is leading this round of talks with the Co-op and the committees were in crunch bargaining from November 3rd to the 6th. Marie will give an update on the status of negotiations at the General Membership Meeting on November 10th.

Exceldor Poultry Negotiations

Bea Bruske is heading up negotiations with Exceldor Poultry and although they had scheduled multiple dates for bargaining in November, all but one had to be cancelled due to the outbreak at the facility in Blumenort. As a result, there has only been an initial exchange of proposals and further updates will be provided once we get further into the negotiation process.

Bill 16 – Anti-Worker Legislation

In the middle of a pandemic where the government's response has been under extreme criticism, Premier Pallister has decided to advance his anti-worker agenda by tabling Bill 16 which will gut major portions of the Labour Relations Act and eliminate many rights workers currently have. The changes include:

- Eliminating Alternate Dispute Resolution which will mean there will be more strikes in Manitoba and they will last much longer.
- Eliminating technological change provisions which currently require employers to retrain employees when their jobs are eliminated by technology.
- Lowering the decertification threshold so it's easier for workers to decertify a union.
- Making it tougher for workers to join a union where one doesn't already exist.
- Making it easier for employers to fire striking workers for behaviour within the law.

- Eliminating successor rights.
- Giving employers the right to trigger intermingling votes among different bargaining units or between bargaining units and non-unionized workplaces.
- Delaying first contracts so it takes workers longer to be covered by a contract once they make the decision to join a union.
- Forcing unions – but not other non-profit organizations – to publically disclose financial information on a government website.

These changes will set Manitoba back 30 years and tip the balance of power away from workers and firmly towards employers. UFCW plans to be present and very loud at the public committee hearings on this Bill as we believe that if this government doesn't get significant push back against this anti-worker legislation there will be much more to come in the future.

As reported by,
Jeff Traeger
President
UFCW Local 832