

UFCW 832 Access Live
November 11, 2020

Jeff Traeger:

Good evening everyone. My name is Jeff Traeger and I'm the president of your union, UFCW Local 832. I want to welcome you all to the November telephone town hall general membership meeting for members of UFCW Local 832 which is now called to order. Before we start tonight's meeting, I want to say a huge and heartfelt thank you to all of you who are working on the front lines during this pandemic. I know many of us thought that this was going to be a short term inconvenience to our lives, but it has turned out to be much, much more than that. And through it all, you've continued to go to work, putting yourselves at risk, and helped us all to get through this so far. I've always known the value that UFCW members bring to the fabric of our society. The only difference now is that all Manitobans know it is well.

Jeff Traeger:

And indeed all Canadians know it is well. And I think people around the world do too. I also want to let you know that all of us here at UFCW are also working extra hard during the pandemic to do everything we can to ensure our members are safe at work and to continue to be here whenever you need us as we always have been. Our offices are under the same restrictions and protocols that many businesses are under, but we have found unique ways to stay connected to you and have even been able to bargain 15 contracts since we had our last membership meeting in May.

Jeff Traeger:

Besides major negotiations ongoing with Red River Co-op, Maple Leaf Winnipeg, and Exceldor poultry in Blumenort. We also have two strikes on the go at the same time, the first for Local 832. And we will be hearing from members from both picket lines and from another member at Exceldor where the pandemic has hit our members particularly hard. The restrictions that the government announced today are going to have an impact on our workplace here at the local. And we will be sending out an email communication to all of our members this week, outlining how our operations will have to change in order to meet the public health requirements. Rest assured however, that our union reps are specialists and the leadership of the local will continue to work on behalf of all of our members as we have throughout the pandemic. With me in the studio tonight is our secretary treasurer Bea Bruske and our current negotiator and former communications director Blake Crothers, who's at the controls this evening.

Jeff Traeger:

Our special guests joining us on the line tonight, are Nicky Davis Gerbrandt from the Stella's picket line, Alvin Balanon from Exceldor poultry, and Corey Van Owen from the Winnipeg school division number one bus driver picket line. We will also get a quick update on the status of that bus drivers' strike from the lead negotiator, Phil Gray Chuck. We have a full agenda. So let's get started. First order of business required by our bylaws is that we vote to approve the three reports at this meeting. And they are the minutes of the previous meeting, which was held back on May the 12th, the secretary treasurer's report on the current finances and my report. We will not be reading any of these reports, which will give us more time for our guests and for you to ask any questions that you might have.

Jeff Traeger:

All three of these documents have been previously posted on our website at ufcw832.com for you to review, and they will stay posted there in our archives so that you can see all of the documents from all of our telephone town hall meetings at any time. So just a reminder, if any of you would like to ask a

question, please press the star key followed by number three, and you will be placed in a queue to ask your question. I would ask that you please remember that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues or ask questions about matters that affect all Local 832 members. If you have a specific question about a grievance or an issue that affects your workplace alone, I would ask that you contact your full-time union representative whose name and contact information is available on the UFCW bulletin board in your workplace or online at ufcw832.com. So we will need a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting on May the 12th.

Speaker 2:

[inaudible 00:04:27].

Jeff Traeger:

So it has been moved and seconded. So please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad, or no by pressing the number two on your keypad. And once again, if you want to get into the lineup to ask a question, simply press the star key followed by the number three key and you will be placed in the queue. So our first guest on the line tonight is Nicky Davis Gerbrandt from the Stella's location on Sherbrooke. Hello, Nicky. How are you tonight?

Nicky Davis:

Hi, Jeff. I'm good. Thank you.

Jeff Traeger:

Good, good. Nicky so folks know is a server at Stella's, and who is also a shop steward, and has been a member of the negotiations committee with me, leading in the negotiations both times when we got the first contract last year. And when we didn't get an agreement at all this year. So as many of you know who were paying attention on social media on Friday, we were just informed that the store location, the restaurant on Sherbrooke has put up a for sale sign. So with that, how are you and the rest of the members doing Nicky?

Nicky Davis:

Yeah. Well, I think we're doing okay. There was a lot of emotions, I'm sure you can imagine. Disbelief, and shock, and anger, and disappointment. I think a lot of us had a feeling that we, I don't know, we didn't want to believe it but as rude as it might sound, I think some of us had a feeling of relief as well because we kind of knew going back into the work place that [Tore 00:06:20] and Rob were going to continue to make our lives as difficult as possible, hoping that we'd quit and then ultimately replace this with new more complacent workers. But yeah, it's difficult obviously losing your job, but yeah, especially since all the restaurants are closed early and doing takeouts, finding another restaurant job can be pretty tough for a lot of people, especially for people that only had restaurant experience. So that's not the best.

Jeff Traeger:

No, no, no. Must be a tough time. Now part of the reason why Stella's became unionized in the first place was the social media campaign called, not my Stella's. What can you tell us about that?

Nicky Davis:

Yeah, so not my Stella's was started by a few ex Stella's employees, through their not my Stella's an Instagram account. They started sharing negative experiences of past and present employees. These included employees being sexually harassed, bullied, and countless occasions of management gaslighting situations. It shed some light on the restaurant industry and the fact that situations like that are considered to be the norm in restaurants. It was extremely shocking for the public to hear those stories, especially coming from a family run, seemingly wholesome restaurant. And then ultimately not my Stella's was successful in what they set out to do, which was to have a CEO at the time Grant and his right-hand man, Brad fired.

Jeff Traeger:

Great. Yeah. And I know that, some of those people joined us on the picket line when we first started and I love their still not my Stella's signs, I got to say.

Nicky Davis:

Yeah. Well [revamp 00:08:12] on that one, so.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. So, as I said off the top, you're shop steward, you've been on the bargaining committee twice with. What made you decide to get involved in the union?

Nicky Davis:

Well, it was mostly a suggestion from a coworker and shop steward Tony, to get involved. Especially since I was the most senior worker at that location. I'm also pretty level-headed and I'd always had a good working relationship with upper and middle management. I actually had no idea what I was getting myself into, but that being said, I'm glad I did it and I was involved with the whole process. I wanted to do my best to help protect my fellow workers. And that seemed like the best way to do it.

Jeff Traeger:

Right. Yeah. Well, I bargain with employers all the time it's a part of my job, but I'm always interested in hearing from someone who really started with us a year or two ago and had no experience actually sitting down with management. You also are somebody that's been there for a very long time, probably the longest of anybody at the Sherbrooke location. So what was it like actually for you, sitting at the bargaining table across the table from management?

Nicky Davis:

It was interesting that's for sure. I've been with Stella's, well, now 11 and a half years. But yeah, it was weird. Like I said, I had really had no idea what I was getting into. It was very eye-opening to say the least. And prior to this, I'd been pretty pro company as a worker and I valued having a good working relationship with management. And I'd say on the first day in negotiations, Stella's true colors were very apparent. It was going to be a long and difficult process. I also experienced firsthand watching my current CEO, Rob Del Grosso act like a child throwing a full temper tantrum. I'm sure you can remember that Jeff.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, yeah.

Nicky Davis:

And at that point I think we all knew this was going to be a long and exhausting fight to get any sort of contract in place. And then that was ultimately proven when we went to the labor board with, I think it was 16 unresolved articles.

Jeff Traeger:

[inaudible 00:10:38].

Nicky Davis:

Yeah, when it came to the second time around, it was literally the same. The only difference was they didn't bring anyone to the bargaining committee that had any decision-making power. So right off the hop, that was pretty clear that they weren't taking this process seriously in any way. It felt like a complete waste of time for everybody as we were ultimately bargaining with ourselves and they came to the bargaining table the first day was nothing. They were surprised that we wanted to revise our entire contract. And yeah, B couldn't negotiate anything of any importance claiming everything was monetary and in some sense, and that was because of the pandemic and they weren't able to make any changes we willing to see which we all knew was completely untrue.

Jeff Traeger:

Right. Well, I was going to ask you about why you went on strike, but I think you kind of almost answered that one. How has your experience on the picket line been? What's it been like for you to walk that picket line?

Nicky Davis:

Yeah, it's been good. We've experienced a lot of support from the public, and other unions, and just random people, honestly. It's felt pretty empowering and nice to see everyone coming out and supporting us, and walking with us when they could, when we didn't have restrictions on how many people we could have out there. But yeah, it was kind of cool to get out there and sort of take a stand for what we believed in. So yeah.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. That was one of the most interesting picket lines I've ever been on just because of the youth out there. And no, you're not going to sell the story about them trying to teach me how to twerk. Are you? And I'm pretty sure there are no videos of that.

Nicky Davis:

Unfortunately, not.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. So what would you say to someone who tells you, because I've heard this and I've been asked this question in the media, but what would you say to someone who says, "Hey, you shouldn't be on strike during a pandemic, especially when you're striking a restaurant."

Nicky Davis:

Well, pandemic or not employers shouldn't be allowed to treat their employees with such disrespect. We were simply asking for a reasonable schedule, some form of job reliability, and to stop being punished for taking breaks. These issues shouldn't be disregarded just because there's a pandemic. And during an uncertain time like this you'd think an employer would make sure their staff felt safe and appreciated. They literally did the opposite. Restaurants are obviously being hit super hard, but so are the people employed by them. So I don't really see an issue with being on strike during the pandemic for those reasons.

Jeff Traeger:

Ask me that I'm going to give him your phone number. So all of us here at 832 are incredibly proud of you and all your fellow Stella's coworkers for standing up against your employer who is clearly one of the most difficult employers I've ever had to deal with. Is there anything else you'd like to tell the rest of the members on the call here?

Nicky Davis:

Yeah. I mean, it was obviously awful that it had to come to this with the sale of the building and all, but ultimately I think myself and my coworkers can look back on this with pride. Not many people get the chance to stand up to such a terrible employer. People need to know that Stella's is not the wholesome, homegrown family restaurant that they've made themselves out to be. They are vindictive, soulless, and they have no regard for the people who have made them successful, their frontline workers. So if anything, that alone has made this fight worth it, not only for Stella's workers, but for everyone in the restaurant industry, actually. I hope that seeing this whole thing unfold in the media will help other restaurant owners see that the importance of treating the workers with respect.

Jeff Traeger:

Thank you so much for coming on tonight, Nicky. We really, really appreciate you doing this.

Nicky Davis:

Oh yeah. Thanks for having me Jeff.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. So I can see on the screen here, the minutes of the last meeting have been approved [inaudible 00:14:57].

Speaker 2:

[inaudible 00:15:05].

Speaker 4:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

[inaudible 00:15:11] the mic over to Bea Bruske, to introduce our next guest. Bea.

Bea Bruske:

Thank you for that. So our next guest is one of our fantastic shop stewards, Alvin Balanon who is also on our bargaining committee for Exceldor, which was previously granny's poultry. And Alvin has been working at that plant for a significant number of years now. He works on the night shift and he is very, very experienced on the many issues that the plant is facing right now, as well as what we're going to be dealing with going into negotiations. So good evening, Alvin.

Alvin Balanon:

Hi Bea. Hi everyone.

Bea Bruske:

Thank you for joining us this evening Alvin. I do have a couple of questions for you specific to COVID and some of the challenges that have been happening at your workplace. We've been hearing a lot in the media over the last two and a half to three weeks that the plant in Blumenort, Manitoba, has had a significant number of COVID cases and that the employees have been impacted by that particular outbreak. Today the total amount of cases that had been confirmed since the outbreak at that particular workplace location is a total of 63.

Bea Bruske:

There are only a handful that are still active at this moment in time, but we wanted to talk a little bit about, some of the challenges that you're having within the workplace and as well to acknowledge that UFCW 832 lost two members who worked at that plant over the last couple of weeks, which is of course very tragic. Now we are aware that both members had some underlying health issues that contributed, but nevertheless, having COVID certainly was a part of that particular issue that occurred. In your estimation Alvin, other than stopping production entirely, is there anything else that the company could be doing to keep workers safe at work?

Alvin Balanon:

So, I just want to give a good idea on how things are in the workplace right now, because these two employees are members. I actually am a good friend to one of them, the other one I know because he's part of our social circle. So these losses are actually very emotional on a lot of our members. So it's quite tough, especially for some departments who are affected by this. And on the part regarding the company doing something, I just want to give a good background on this pandemic. As most of our members know, a significant percentage of food processing facilities, especially meat facilities in Manitoba are comprised of immigrants.

Alvin Balanon:

And it's quite normal for these workspaces, Exceldor, which is previously Granny's may belief, highlight and [inaudible 00:18:45] right, who have some workers going on holidays or vacation in their home countries. So back in March, I was actually in discussion with our HR regarding some of our coworkers in the Philippines because of COVID restrictions. So around that time companies have been doing a lot of adjustments and from my experience and from the way they handled it, it was actually very good. They invested so much on improving the facilities and everything, and it's a very good run for us for the past couple of months. For about six months we handled it really well and yeah, around this October when things got worse, then we need to make further adjustments.

Alvin Balanon:

And yes, right now the challenge that we have is mostly, I would say, adherence. Like how our members follow the public health guidelines that we have. Because it is a challenge considering that if work places like us, that has about like 400, 500, 600 people in there, we can't leave everyone to follow these guidelines inside and outside the work. So on my part of the shop steward I would say that the frustrating part on, because some people they have a different approach or understanding of things. So the challenge is to like informing them, giving them the right information and to be more aware of things. So yeah, that's my part on that.

Bea Bruske:

Thank you for that Alvin. I know that certainly any of the issues that the union has raised, that the employees have raised with us, any concerns have been addressed by the employer and they've been very quick to address those issues. And of course we're constantly reminding people to ensure that they're following all of the safety precautions and all of the rules. We are aware that CFIA workplace safety and health membership of public health have toured the plant numerous times. And in my estimation, and in our discussions, I know you've indicated to me that there really aren't any other outstanding issues that you could see that we need to be addressing with the employer that everything has been addressed in terms of workplace safety and health and public health aspect. Is that still the case, or are there new things that have cropped up that people are concerned about?

Alvin Balanon:

It is good, theory wise or the procedure like it is good, but like what I said earlier, the challenge is usually with the workers or how the work is being done. And I think this applies to almost everyone, even with our members listening here right now and working in our plant, in Maple Leaf in [highlight 00:22:02]. But considering the scale of production that we have, let's say, if you work in a production line that has about, let's say 30 or 40 people, so these workers they go on the breaks, right? At certain point of the day they go on a break almost altogether, right now what we do in the workplace that may divide usually people in different areas with multiple lunchrooms. We have the luxury of that right now, having more lunchrooms. And the challenge is still with our CBA that says that we need to have a 15 minute break.

Alvin Balanon:

Coming and going back to their workplace. The challenge is when you come back to your work, did you to wash your hands. So when you have like, let's say three or four wash stations, and you have like 30 or 40 people coming back in public health guidelines that you need to spend like 20 seconds to wash your hands properly. So from doing the math on this, you're spending about five or six minutes already to have these 30 or 40 people washing their hands. So that itself is a challenge. And that is one of the, I'm not even sure if the CFIA or public health are addressing some of these issues. But these are loopholes in that guidelines that we have. So yeah, I think that's [inaudible 00:23:26] not just our plan, but even to highlight Maple Leaf and everywhere. So yeah.

Bea Bruske:

Yeah, for sure. Congestion in those spots and as well, going into the washrooms and in the hallways is an ongoing issue that I know the employers have talked to us about. And have tried to manage by having people have [separate 00:23:48] start times and finish times and all of those things. Outside of that Alvin, are there recommendations that you have for the union in terms of how we're responding to an outbreak in a production facility that you would like us to be aware of?

Alvin Balanon:

I think we handled this really well, especially the email that we're giving to members. Because what we know, they do disclose information. They're quite transparent actually, but they don't give the day-to-day updates or they would give [in 00:24:24] maybe an updating maybe three or four days or something like that. Because we basically monitor this thing from day to day, right? So it's good that we're doing this, but I would suggest, not just to the union, but even to remember. The most important thing right now for us is to be educated and access the proper information. And I hope moving forward that the union would help our members on this part.

Alvin Balanon:

It's very easy right now to access information on social media and on internet. It's not similar to what we have years ago where you need to read books or magazines to have the accurate information. For some were business papers. Now you can basically go to social media and find information. But the problem with this is that we see a lot of manipulated information, conspiracy theories, a lot of assumptions and those things. So we need to feed people the proper information regarding COVID. We need to be scientific, have medical information, not from, I would say people that we think are good. So that's the most important part I think. Educate and get the proper and accurate information.

Bea Bruske:

Thank you for that reminder Alvin for us to all make sure that we're getting the proper information and following all of the protocols. You've raised some really important points. And one of them that I do want to highlight once more, before we finish with this part of the discussion is the email aspect. And to indicate to all of our members listening that your union is communicating a lot, especially during these times by sending mass emails and especially that are specific to your particular workplace. If we do not have your email address, we can't reach you, if you're not sure whether or not we have your email address, please connect with your rep to update your information so that we can ensure that you are a part of any mass emails that go out that are very specific to your workplace and to COVID and any other important pieces for your workplace. Thank you so much Alvin for coming on tonight and for talking to us about the issues that are at Exceldor.

Alvin Balanon:

Yeah. Thank you so much. And it's actually my first time to be doing this meeting, because I work night shifts. So it's actually is in conflict with my schedule. So I really appreciate this chance.

Bea Bruske:

I really appreciate you being part of it. Thank you so much Alvin.

Alvin Balanon:

Thank you so much to the Bea.

Bea Bruske:

[inaudible 00:26:57].

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Thank you so much Bea and thank you Alvin. Alvin when you were talking about misinformation on the internet made me think about some of the stuff going on in the United States these days, and all I'm going to say about that as ding dong the witch is dead. But I also see that the vote to approve the secretary treasurer's report has been passed. So it's time to make a motion to approve the president's report, which is the final document that we have to approve it tonight's meeting.

Speaker 2:

[moved 00:27:27].

Speaker 4:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded. So please press the number one on your keypad to vote yes, and the number two on your keypad to vote no. If you have a question about the president's report or anything else at all, press star three, and we'll gladly take your question. And speaking of that, we're going to go to the phones right now. And we're going to take our first question from [Bereket 00:27:49]. Go ahead. Bereket. Hello? Are you out there Bereket?

Bereket:

Hello?

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. We'll move on to our next caller, which would be Ruth. Ruth, are you there?

Ruth:

Yeah, I had a question about the mail in ballot that I received late, because I don't know why, but anyway, I just received it on Friday and I didn't have time to get it in because of COVID everything is delayed. And I know you'll be counting the votes tomorrow. So how can I vote?

Jeff Traeger:

What unit do you work at Ruth?

Ruth:

I'm sorry?

Jeff Traeger:

Where do you work?

Ruth:

At Portage la Prairie.

Jeff Traeger:

At what workplace?

Ruth:

At Queen Avenue.

Jeff Traeger:

Is that life's journey?

Ruth:

I didn't get that. You mean my position?

Jeff Traeger:

No. I mean your employer, what's the name of your employer?

Ruth:

Visions of independence.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, okay. All right. What I'm going to have, is I'm going to make sure that either the negotiator or your rep, I think your rep is Phil. Who's going to be on the line and a little bit. Actually we can put Phil on right now to respond to that question.

Phil:

Hey Jeff, thanks for that. I was hoping were going to flip it over to me. And hi Ruth, how are you doing?

Ruth:

Oh, hi good, thanks.

Phil:

Awesome. Yeah, no, when we had our last town hall meeting there, the ratification meeting, you had indicated that you hadn't received the ballot. So we sent another out on October 30th.

Ruth:

Yes. I just got it on Friday actually, but I couldn't put it in the mail till Monday, but you won't get it probably before you count the vote because of COVID everything is slow.

Phil:

Yeah. Well, hopefully we could get it in by the deadline, the cutoff is tomorrow. But obviously without being able to go to the office and it being a remembrance day, we won't be counting until the Thursday. So hopefully, did you get it into the mail today?

Ruth:

Yeah.

Phil:

Okay. So hopefully it's there by Thursday. Because I believe I will be in the office on Thursday counting those ballots.

Ruth:

Yeah.

Phil:

Thank you.

Ruth:

Well it took over two weeks to get a mail going one hour away.

Phil:

Yeah. I don't know what's going on with yeah, I don't know Ruth. And when we initially sent out the ballots, we sent them out almost three weeks in advance knowing that that's happening. The mail is very unpredictable sometimes. So, I know I've gotten a lot of ballots back from visions of independence, quite a few. So hopefully we get yours in in time. But at some point we do have to have a cutoff and we do have to make sure that we get that ballot in.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. All right.

Phil:

Thank you.

Jeff Traeger:

Thank you. Thanks very much for that, Phil. Appreciate it. We're going to move on to our next caller, who is Arel. Arel, go ahead.

Arel:

Hi Jeff and guest. Thanks for [inaudible 00:31:13] my call.

Jeff Traeger:

No problem.

Arel:

The pandemic obviously is much worse than it was back in early spring and summer. And yet the retail giants are seeing profits rising month after month. And the risk to employees is much greater than it was since back then. My question is, why are we not pushing to reinstate the hero pay that we received back in the spring and summer?

Jeff Traeger:

[inaudible 00:31:39] off there. But I think your question was, why are we not pushing?

Arel:

Yeah. Why are we not pushing to reinstate the hero pay that we received back in the spring and summer?

Bea Bruske:

So we're having some technical difficulties with Jeff's headset, but I can give you the answer to that. We have been, we've been consistently speaking with every single employer where we have members working, including all of our retail employers, all of our packinghouse employers, security employers and everyone else. And especially at this time on the entire province of Manitoba is in code red. We strongly believe that people should be getting the COVID premium and getting paid addition for the additional stress and health and safety issues.

Bea Bruske:

And so on that come up as a result of that. So we are going to continue to push the workplaces and especially the retail employers who at this moment in time are making even more profits, at a time when there's an additional stress factor placed on employees. So rest assured we are on that. You will be seeing some things on that in the future, and there may be some opportunities to sign petitions and to put those forward to your coworkers and family members as well.

Arel:

Okay. Thanks Bea that's a great answer. That's what I wanted to hear. And be safe for everyone.

Bea Bruske:

Thank you. You too.

Jeff Traeger:

Thanks Arel, appreciate that. Now we're going to head out to Brandon and we're going to hear from Richard. Go ahead, Richard.

Richard:

My question, I don't know about other unionized places, but when we get screened in the morning we always get asked if we took any medication, like Tylenol or aspirin. I don't know about other places that are part of this union [inaudible 00:33:23]. But, thing of it is, people have been taking Tylenol and aspirin and Advil or whatever along before this COVID thing, show why all of a sudden last few months, why would that be a concern?

Jeff Traeger:

[She's 00:33:46] Richard. I actually don't have an answer to that question. I'm not medically trained. I would imagine it would have something to do with the COVID screening process. Or it might have something to do with your temperature as well. Because I know they're screening you for temperature there at the same time. But what we'll do is we can actually ask about it. I think your union representative Brenda Brown is on the line and we'll have her ask that question of management and she'll be in contact with you over the next day or two with what the response was. So now we're going to go to Fitsam - go ahead, Fitsam.

Fitsam:

Hello. Nice to meet you. This is my first time. Hello.

Jeff Traeger:

Hello there. Well, welcome.

Fitsam:

Hello, hello.

Jeff Traeger:

So what is your question?

Fitsam:

Yeah, my question is the difference. We have, I work at [Eve's 00:34:46] department in Dunn-Rite Product. Hello?

Jeff Traeger:

Hello, go ahead. What's your question?

Fitsam:

Yeah. My question is we have a different a contract on agreements. We have different on, Ron knows about that. If we need to pump or to work overtime in the places, then they don't allow us to work. Yeah.

Bea Bruske:

Can you confirm for us where you work? Because we're having a hard time understanding.

Fitsam:

Okay. I work Dunn-Rite Product.

Bea Bruske:

Oh, you work at Dunn-Rite? Okay.

Jeff Traeger:

I see. Okay.

Fitsam:

Yeah. Yeah. Ron is my representative.

Jeff Traeger:

Right. Okay. And your questions was about overtime?

Fitsam:

Yeah. No, no, no. On contract [inaudible 00:35:42] different one from other departments. I work in Eve's department.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, I see. In maintenance department. And you have a separate agreement. That's another one that we're going to put Phil Gray Chuck on the line to speak to because Phil was the negotiator for your contract. Go ahead, Phil.

Phil:

Hey, thanks for that. I got to get you to repeat that because I didn't hear the question well.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay.

Phil:

Either that or I give you a call back Fitsam. I don't mind doing that if you're, if you're still around this evening.

Fitsam:

Yes. I know.

Phil:

Okay. I'll call you after this is over here and we could chat a little bit further.

Fitsam:

Okay. Another question is in my workplace, we get once a week, one mask.

Jeff Traeger:

One mask?

Fitsam:

Yeah. Only the whole week. One mask.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, okay. Well that's something that we should be dealing with because that's absolutely not appropriate for you to be getting a single mask for the whole week. So I'm going to get your rep Ron to follow up with the company. And he'll give you a call back on this issue within the next couple of days. Okay? So we'll move on. We're going to take one more and then we're going to go on to our last interview. So we've got Daniel, Daniel, how are you doing? I haven't talked to you in a long time.

Daniel:

[inaudible 00:37:14] well.

Jeff Traeger:

Good to hear.

Daniel:

What I'm dealing with is, I've been listening attentively every day to Dr. Brent Rusyn and his programs that he deals with this problem is it's perpetually getting worse and worse. And one of the things that caught my eye, is he was very critical of us on generating contact lists, and I thought to myself, myself and my brothers and sisters sit at the Richardson building and we sit at all those buildings down town. We sit at the main entrance and what are we generating? We're generating lists. And those lists now are becoming ever increasingly important. And even now some clients are asking for a phone number because, should something happen in that building, the health authorities are going to say, "Who's been in this building and how long were they here?"

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Daniel:

He asked that of us personally, do you know who you've been in contact with over the last 24 hours? Can you name every single person? And I said, "That's a tough question." But I think that's happening now. I [inaudible 00:38:24] seen it in restaurants. I think it's McDonald's requires your name. They require your phone number, and of course you can't sit down. So that level of scrutiny involving the contact list it's becoming very, very important. It's a way of battling this pandemic, I know where it's been and that's all I have.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Well, I appreciate that, Daniel. Thank you for that insight. So we've had Phil on the line a couple of times. So what the heck? How about one more time. We're going to, yeah Phil is the lead negotiator on the big school division number one strike. And he's going to give us an update on the status of that strike and an idea on when the almost 100 drivers can expect to get back to work. So take it away Phil.

Phil:

Awesome. Jeff, thanks for having me here.

Jeff Traeger:

No problem.

Phil:

So first I just, I mean, I got to say thank you to everybody. The amount of support that the drivers have seen is been incredible much like the Stella's line. The public, the membership of the staff at 832, everybody has just been incredibly supportive to the whole thing. So, it's made it a lot easier on those 90, some odd work, we didn't even know walking the line up until recently. So just quickly we went on strike September 8th. Just prior to going on strike we were hit with some new information that made it appear that the government's been interfering in the background of our negotiations.

Phil:

We asked the employer to confirm what this information was, to give us information about their conversations with government. They refused to do any of that to the point where they actually wouldn't even answer our calls, or our emails, or any of that. So obviously the strike didn't begin well because we were seeing obvious signs of, what would lead us to believe that this strike could go on for a little bit longer than what we traditionally see, which means going the distance, going to ADR, which has legislation we have in Manitoba that takes us to arbitration.

Phil:

So fast forward a bit, we've filed an unfair labor practice against the employer for three reasons. And this came in at the early October, was one, they didn't show up the bargaining in our last two days of bargaining scheduled for August 25th and 26th. We've asked the employer a whole number of times, let's go to binding arbitration. We have a solution at our fingertips, let's do this. They talked about it in the media. They use the media as a way to try to gain public support. And they talk about binding arbitration. So we actually approached them and said, let's go. They never answered us on any count.

Phil:

And then the last point and the most important point is that there was a letter that sent out. And it began with, at the request of Winnipeg school division, at WSD. And Winnipeg school division says, we have no idea what they're talking about, even though the government wrote them this letter. So that's the basis of our unfair labor practice. There's a lot of other smaller things that go along with that. So in this whole process, we're actually fighting an unfair labor practice, bargaining in bad faith is what that is. So just recently last Friday was day 60 on the picket line. So in Manitoba alternate dispute resolution is where either party after a certain point to apply, to have the labor board essentially settle our agreement, everything outstanding would go to an arbitrator and the arbitrator makes a decision on what the new contract looks like.

Phil:

So we hit that day 60, last Friday, to make sure that we were in compliance with the law, we've applied for ADR. We did that yesterday morning. And then so far, all we've got from the labor board was just confirmation. We got your request in here. So what happens after day 60 is the labor board has 21 days to assess the file, essentially look at it and say, if we put them back to bargaining, could the parties get another contract? That's not common. I mean, at this point, we've been out of work, we withheld our labor for 64 a days. So for 64 days, we've been unable to get a contract. We've tried twice a conciliation to bargain and to get some things off the table and of the eight days that we had of actual bargaining prior to our conciliation days, the two conciliation days were the biggest waste of time we had.

Phil:

It was very clear that the employer had absolutely no interest in doing anything but wasting our time, which is what they had done the entire time. This employer is, Stella's another difficult employer. This one is a difficult in other senses. They don't want to give anything. This fight wasn't about the poor treatment in a workplace, this fight was about wages and taking things out of the collective agreement. So we've gone on to apply for ADR. Right now we're in the process of making our way through the labor board, through that 21 day period at any point the labor board can say, "Okay, we're going to arbitration." But the most important thing with this is that the labor board is the one that ends everything.

Phil:

They're the ones now that will put us back to work. So in reality, is that going to happen tomorrow? Probably not. Could it happen tomorrow? Absolutely. If you kind of, the timelines to think about a 60 days following 60 days, the labor board has 21 days. And after that 21 days, the labor board has 10 days to assign this to an arbitrator. And then from that 10 days, that will essentially end the strike and people will go back to work. When does an arbitration happen? An arbitration will happen within 60 days of when the case is appointed to an arbitrator. So if that happens on November 30th, then we have 60 days from November 30th we'll have a hearing. And then from that hearing, I believe it's another 30 days to render a decision on what the terms of the contract looked like. So needless to say, there's been a lot of legal work done here. There's been a lot of support, a lot of help from a leadership at the local and a heck of a lot of help coming from all the reps and stuff involved. But most importantly, work in a picket line, when it's getting cold and we're walking through a global pandemic.

Phil:

There's a lot of uncertainty out there and the ones that need to be thanked for the most and given the biggest round of applause is the ones that actually are taking on this government, and this employer in a way that absolutely no other union or other workplace has taken on an employer in this fight against the bill 28 and the conservative government and their mandated wage freezes. So big ups to Winnipeg school division. But that's where we're at right now. It's been an interesting road. This doesn't happen often. I don't think UFCW has used ADR. And I think Jackie probably eight, 10 years, I think anyways, I know we've used arbitration, but actually going through the labor ward ADR it's been quite some time. So not often used, but it's a tool that we can use for managing also. So thanks for having me and have a good safe night, everyone.

Jeff Traeger:

Yes. Thanks for that. Phil. We've been close a couple of times with Malteurop and with Diageo but you're right. We seem to manage to settle it before we go the distance. I think the last one that ended with an ADR hearing was granny's hatchery, which would have been in 2011. So I see the vote to approve the president's report has been passed. So that means it's time for our last guest this evening. Online with us now is Corey Van Owen, a bus driver for the Winnipeg school division. Who's been on strike since September the eighth. Hi, Corey, how are you doing tonight?

Corey:

Good. Hi, Jeff. Thanks for inviting me to join tonight.

Jeff Traeger:

No problem. You're a very famous voice at UFCW. I hear you in my car every time I'm driving to work.

Corey:

Sorry.

Jeff Traeger:

No, don't be sorry that isn't, usually I hear my own voice. It's much nicer to hear yours. You were one of the picket captains from the school division and you were also on the negotiating committee, but how

long have you been at the school division? And although I think I know the answer to this. What do you do there?

Corey:

Oh, gee, I think I'm a bus driver.

Jeff Traeger:

Got it.

Corey:

I don't think [inaudible 00:46:53]. I'm sorry. Yeah, I've been with the division, not working specifically for division since 1997. We were contracted out through different other companies, but we were working for the division.

Jeff Traeger:

And that's almost 25 years, right? Yeah. 1997, so 23 years. Wow. That's great. And how many times have you, participated on the bargaining committee?

Corey:

This is my second time. The last contract, August 15th to June 30th of 19, the vision wanted to bring busting in-house for that contract. Yeah, we had Henry Clay's then on the negotiating committee on a division side, and then he wanted to bring busing in-house and he also wanted to get the drivers wage parody because we were the lowest paid drivers.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. So what was so different to bargaining this time around besides Eric Barnaby?

Corey:

This time bargaining with the division because of bill 28. Yeah, Eric Barton would be trying to stand behind the bill 28.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. So were you surprised that the strong strike vote that we got didn't change any of the positions that [part 00:48:29] to be in the school division were taken at the table?

Corey:

Oh, very, oh very. We the drivers were hoping that signed contract or we're hoping to have a contract signed by the end of June or so sooner, but COVID hit of course and put everything on hold for us. We were supposed to go out, right at the end of spring break, but because of COVID it got put on hold, so.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. So what if someone asks you question or why [inaudible 00:49:01]. What would you say?

Corey:

[inaudible 00:49:07].

Jeff Traeger:

[inaudible 00:49:09].

Corey:

Oh, unfortunately COVID struck and put a hold on our strike and nobody really wants to strike in any case. We tried to get a contract before school opened up again, but every attempt that we had was of course not, division was not coming forward. Because we had the strike mandated, we took a vote again and we decided to carry through at the strike then.

Jeff Traeger:

[inaudible 00:49:51].

Corey:

Yes. I think your mic is all messed up again. Because I can't hear you.

Bea Bruske:

Reason for the actual strike of school bus drivers.

Corey:

I'm sorry.

Bea Bruske:

So the question that we're trying to get out here. Sorry we were having some significant technical difficulties here today focused. But the question was, if a member of the public asked you why school bus drivers have taken strike action, what would you say to them?

Corey:

We've had the strike already in place. It was mandated for spring break and because COVID hit, we had to put it on hold. And then during the summer we did try to negotiate with division and they hadn't shown up for a few of our meetings. Everything that was handed to them came back with a no, no, no, even the dates of negotiating. So we thought, you know what, we've got this going, we're going to continue.

Bea Bruske:

And how is the morale still on the picket line now? I know that you guys aren't actively picketing because of the code red situation, but the morale amongst the folks who are taking strike action still, would you still say that it's very positive and upbeat, or would you say that people are getting worn down?

Corey:

It's kind of a little bit of both, but we believe in what we're striking for and we're all going to stand by that belief. If the strike goes, like if we go till December eight, I believe it is, we're going to do it. We're going to stay. We're united on this.

Bea Bruske:

And having been to your picket line quite a number of times, I have to second Phil and Jeff's commentary that you guys have been an amazing group, very dedicated and pulling together in an awesome way. And I very much appreciate all of the hard work that you guys have put in fighting to get a fair deal and to challenge Pallister on bill, on the unfair labor bill with regards to wage freezes. So I give you guys kudos for doing that. That's amazing. We want to thank you so much, Corey for coming on tonight and giving us a little bit of insight as to what that picket line has been all about and what you guys have been on strike for us. So thank you very much for that.

Corey:

Okay. Can I just say thank you to the UFCW?

Bea Bruske:

Of course you can.

Corey:

It feels phenomenal. So I think between him and Ron, the support that we've been getting from them, the advice that we've been getting from them. I think that's one of the reasons why we go, it's just been phenomenal the support. Chris Noto, Bea yourself, the rest of unions that have shown up in bargaining with us, or sorry, strike to walked with us. The back people that bring us our water and make sure the toilets are clean and keep us fed, it's been great.

Bea Bruske:

Well, thank you so much for that. And we can tell you that it does take a village to make this happen. And unfortunately, we've had lots of practice at this and yes, Ron and Phil are a very dynamic deal when it comes to managing a picket line. And of course, Roberta dealing with the other picket line, they've all been amazing and all of the back behind the scenes folks managing all of that and making sure that the supplies were there. Our staff were awesome and they absolutely deserve that. Thank you. So thank you so much Corey, for identifying that. We really appreciate that. Thank you.

Corey:

Thank you.

Jeff Traeger:

Yes. Thanks so much Corey. So we've just got time for, as long as folks can hear me, I've burned through a couple of headsets already tonight. But as long as folks can hear me, we got time for another question or two, before we wrap it up for the evening. So we'll go to our next caller. Go ahead. Hello. Are you on the line? I don't see a name there, so I can't go by a name, but it's 571.

Russell:

Hello?

Jeff Traeger:

Hello there.

Russell:

Hi, Jeff. It's me Russell from Brandon.

Jeff Traeger:

Hey Russell. How the heck are you?

Russell:

Good. Good, good. I just wanted to follow up again with, of course I want to be beating that dead horse again, a couple of town halls ago about the app prescription drug card for Safeway members. And I also sent an email to PBS about it, and it got no response. But also copied you and Bea on that email. But I just wanted to know if you kind of just go over that again and kind of just let everybody know, the Safeway members why we don't have our prescription good card back some of the other collectives in the units have.

Jeff Traeger:

Sure I can do that Russell. And I tell you that I saw the email that you sent, but it was directed to PBS. So obviously I was hoping that you would get a response and I will commit on Thursday when PBS is open again. Because I think they're closed tomorrow for remembrance day. I will contact the executive director of PBS and instruct them to get back to you on that email. But the nuts and bolts of it are just that the finances are tight. We have just got really enough finances and investments right now to make sure that we secure all of the benefits that are covered for all Safeway members and to go to a drug card right now would have an initial setup cost, and then an ongoing fee for the company that would actually be administering that card.

Jeff Traeger:

And the setup card part of it is the printing and mailing of all of the cards out to people. And then the setup of the direct pay systems. So it's not a small number that it takes to do that. We have identified at our meetings with Safeway and the other trustees that this is a priority, most benefit plans have that ability with the drug card and the ability to just pay direct and not have to have our members go out of pocket so long for their prescription medications, especially if there are people who might have significant number of medications because of their medical condition. And I have definitely let the employer trustees know that when we get into a better financial position, that we will prioritize that as the first benefit improvement that we'll be looking for Safeway members.

Russell:

All right. I appreciate that. Because the current system is just so archaic, but thanks again, Jeff.

Jeff Traeger:

It really is. And you're welcome, Russell. Take care out there. So we're going to go to Marla now. Go ahead, Marla.

Marla:

Okay. Well, to you Jeff, the person that was talking about, Tylenol, I know because I work at a hospital here.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay.

Marla:

They ask about it because it masks the symptoms of fever.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, I see. What hospital do you work at by the way?

Marla:

Grace.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, it's Grace. Okay. All right. And so that's why they ask.

Marla:

Yeah. That's why they ask a lot of people that take it for their pain they don't realize they have a fever because they are in pain and fever. So you don't realize you have one of the symptoms and so you're having trouble breathing or one of the other symptoms show up.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, excellent. Well, Richard of Brandon will be very happy to hear that answer. So thank you very much. I appreciate that. The next caller is a 638 number. I don't have an ID on this caller. So go ahead please.

Hank:

Hello.

Jeff Traeger:

Hello.

Hank:

Hello?

Jeff Traeger:

Hello there. How are you?

Hank:

Good.

Jeff Traeger:

What's your question?

Hank:

Oh, my name is Hank. Am I've work at no-frills here in Dauphin.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, yeah.

Hank:

And I was just going to ask question, back in September we got an email that we were supposed to get a wage increase and this was back in September 28th and we still have not received it. I have been in touch with my union rep and over the span of eight weeks or six weeks now. And finally the union filed a grievance just last Friday, company, because this is not just our store but throughout the other no-frills store. And my question is why does it take the union six weeks to finally file a grievance against this company?

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, well, Bea Bruske would like to answer that question. She's got her hand up over here. So go ahead Bea.

Bea Bruske:

Hi, Hank. I'm not aware of your very specific issue and most certainly raised that and go through it with your union rep to find the solution to that particular problem. But what I can tell you is that we've been in contact with senior management at no-frills in Toronto, dealing with the minimum wage adjustment that's in your current collective agreement. And they just realistically got back to us about 10 days ago with a final signed off document indicating that they're increasing the rates as we have demanded. And so if they have not yet made that adjustment, they will use owe you retroactive pay and we will ensure that that happens. So we will get back in contact with you to ensure that this is happening and that you're getting the proper wage rate.

Hank:

Well, yes, I just wondered why it took this long for the union to file a grievance, because I would think that after a certain period of time, grievance should have been filed against this company.

Bea Bruske:

So Hank, I will follow up on exactly the course of action and the length of time that that's taken, but it's not that unusual to have the question raised, to have a number of meetings with management to try to resolve the issue. And if it is not resolved within a period of time to file a grievance, that's not to say that it's a dead issue, obviously. And certainly if it goes back to the beginning of October to when minimum wage increased, our expectation is that you get retroactive pay for that period of time.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Thank you for that Bea. It's almost eight o'clock but we have one more question, one more caller on the line. So go ahead, Modi.

Modi:

Hi guys, Modi is [inaudible 01:00:26]. Jeff, I don't have any questions. I just want to say hello to Jeff and my WST Corey and Phil and Bruske.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Excellent. All right, well hello, back.

Modi:

Yeah. Thank you.

Jeff Traeger:

You're very welcome. All right. So I want to thank all of you for joining us on our November telephone town hall GMM. We will be conducting our next one on Tuesday, February the 16th, 2020, my birthday, by telephone town hall as well, beginning at seven, oh, sorry, 2021. Not 2020, but still my birthday, by telephone town hall as well, beginning at 7:00 PM. So stay safe everyone, stay well, be careful out there and we are now adjourned.