

Weekly bulletin from
UFCW Canada National President
Wayne Hanley

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DIRECTIONS

Major compensation award for migrant worker

For the first time in Quebec, the CSST (the province's workplace health and safety commission) has ordered the payment of benefits for a period of 40 years to a seasonal migrant worker – thanks to the assistance of UFCW Canada and other labour activists.

“Our activism in supporting migrant agriculture workers in Quebec and elsewhere is really paying off,” says UFCW



Canada National President Wayne Hanley. “The network that has been established worked as it should in order to ensure this particular migrant worker won the compensation he deserved.”

Just a few hours after the right arm of Rigoberto Quieju – a 28-year-old Guatemalan – was caught in the gear assembly of an old, modified straw baler, the CSST investigated and concluded the equipment had not been adequately protected, making the employer liable under the Quebec *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

Public awareness through the media kept the CSST focused on the case, as did public solidarity and networking. A member activist in the PSAC, Guy Roy – who founded the *Organisation québécoise de solidarité internationale des droits humains* (Quebec Organization for International Human Rights Solidarity) – learned of the case and visited Quieju in hospital and also followed up with the CSST.

After reading about the Agriculture Workers Alliance (AWA) migrant support centre – founded by the late activist Patricia Pérez and supported by UFCW Canada – Roy contacted UFCW Canada Local 502 union representative Nicolas Lemieux, who in turn put Roy in touch with the centre working with the local union's legal counsel to pursue the case with the CSST.

At the AWA centre, meanwhile, UFCW Canada national

representative Andrea Galvez – the centre's coordinator – had been contacted independently by Quieju's brother-in-law who was searching the province for him. After Roy's call to her about the injured worker, she went straight to the hospital to provide further assistance.

In addition to the financial compensation granted by the CSST, Galvez says she is pleased to find the migrant workers centre has contacts in more than just the Saint-Rémi community in which it is located. “It's wonderful that Patricia Pérez's torch has been passed on to ordinary citizens who, on a totally voluntary basis, decide to help a person in need,” she says.

Pictured left, courtesy of *Le Monde Ouvrier*, publication of the FTQ – Quebec's labour federation – are (l-r) Lemieux, Galvez, and Roy.



Walmart told to take a hike

A small group of community activists served a setback to the world's largest corporation on March 4 by convincing the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) to prevent the development of a sprawling Walmart supercentre in the middle of Toronto's Leslieville neighbourhood.

“The OMB decision is a huge victory for the people who live and work in the Leslieville community,” says UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley. “It also reconfirms a very important fact: no matter how big and powerful a corporation becomes, it can never match the combined will and strength of working people.”

The OMB's decision follows two years of community meetings, demonstrations, and lobbying efforts that involved Leslieville residents and various stakeholder groups, including our union. The UFCW Canada National Office played a key role in the campaign's early stages by inviting a group of experienced “site fighters” – called the Wal-Town group – to help organize and mobilize the community (pictured).



“This decision supports the city’s official development direction, by preserving an important community within Toronto,” President Hanley says. Leslieville is known for its activist culture. It is one of few jurisdictions in Canada represented by social democrats at every level of government. As part of downtown Toronto’s east side, it enjoys a much higher union density rate than the national average.



Lifelong activist John Forster dead at 66

Former UFCW Canada national representative John Forster, who retired in 2005, died on March 3 after a lengthy battle with cancer. He was 66.

Brother Forster joined the national staff of UFCW Canada following the 1986 merger of his union, the Brewery, Flour, Cereal, Soft Drink, and Distillery (BFCSD) workers’ union, where he had been on staff since 1982. A teenage immigrant to Canada from England, John found work in a Brewers Retail (now The Beer Store) outlet in Toronto, and quickly became an activist in his union.



“John was always a champion of the workers he represented, from the shop floor on to his work at the national level,” says UFCW

Canada National President Wayne Hanley. “You would have to go far to find someone more in touch with and concerned about the needs of members. John always found unusual and unconventional approaches to problem-solving. He enjoyed being creative in finding solutions for members.”

As a national representative, John’s skills as a trainer and educator came to the fore, and he became one of our union’s leading facilitators in areas ranging from health and safety to grievances and arbitration and more. “John was naturally outgoing and engaging,” says Winston Gordon, a UFCW Canada national representative and former president of the now-merged Local 503W, then part of the BFCSD. “It made him doubly valuable as a trainer – bringing out the best in people – and as an organizer with his gift of being able to communicate with people on their own terms.”

Memorial arrangements for Brother Forster were being arranged at the time this issue of *DIRECTIONS* went to press. John leaves his wife, Donna (née Poirier, whom he met working in a UFCW Canada office in Halifax in the late 1980s) and two daughters, as well as a son and daughter from a previous marriage. He was pre-deceased by Jen, a daughter from the first marriage who worked on UFCW Canada’s agriculture workers campaigns, and died in a traffic accident in 2006.



New website for Walmart workers

UFCW Canada’s long-standing campaign to help Walmart workers join the union and improve their lives through collective bargaining received another boost last week when the union’s National Office relaunched www.walmartworkerscanada.ca. The redesigned website provides information for Canada’s 80,000-plus Walmart workers regarding their rights and the organizing process.

“For Walmart workers, our members, and the general public, the effort to make Walmart a better employer is a crucial fight for all of us,” says UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley. “As the economy continues to lose thousands of manufacturing jobs, more and more working people are finding themselves in the service sector where it can be very difficult to make a living.

“Turning that sector into a place where people can earn enough to support a family is a priority for UFCW Canada,” President Hanley adds. “Organizing Walmart – and other major retailers – is key to accomplishing that.”

UFCW Canada activists can contribute to the organizing campaign by telling friends and neighbours who work at Walmart about www.walmartworkerscanada.ca, and by encouraging them to exercise their rights as workers in Canada. The French companion site is in development as well, and will be relaunched soon.



Calendar

March 15: UFCW International Scholarship application deadline

March 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

March 22: World Water Day

April 2: World Autism Awareness Day

April 6-7: National Council Workplace Rights Committee meeting, Montreal

For more information,
please visit us at
www.ufcw.ca



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