

Wayne Robinson, 1958-2008

Wayne Robinson, the Loblaws/RCSS director for UFCW Canada Local 1000A in Ontario, died in his sleep from heart failure on February 26. He leaves behind his wife Donna, their two children, Christopher and Michael, and many, many people who were not related but felt like they were.

For almost all of his 49 years, Brother Robinson had devoted his life to improving the lives of others at work and in the community. “The morning after Wayne died, the phone never stopped ringing,” says friend Kevin Corporon, president of Local 1000A. “You realized how many people Wayne meant something to. He was so approachable. He was a very genuine guy and he had time for everyone.”



In 1973, Wayne started out as a grocery clerk at a Loblaws store in Brampton, Ont. Five years later he became a steward and spent the next 15 years watching out for his co-workers as a health-and-safety rep and later as a bargaining committee member.

In 1993, he was hired as a full-time staff representative at Local 1000A, servicing members at stores across south-western Ontario. He had a sharp eye for what made a store tick. “Wayne had these tremendous observation skills from the viewpoint of rank-and-file members as well as store operations,” says Brother Corporon. “He was very decisive and stood up for the members every minute of the day. But he was also respected for his integrity and plain speaking.”

In 2002, Brother Robinson was appointed as the director of the local’s Loblaws sector, with over 21,000 members across Ontario. His commitment to trade unionism and the community went beyond work. “There wasn’t a rally, or NDP candidate’s meeting in his riding, or a leukemia fundraising event that he missed,” Corporon says. He even managed to squeeze in time for another passion as a youth baseball coach, not surprising for a man who deeply believed in the vision and teamwork of solidarity.

“All his life, Wayne stood up for people around him,” says UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley. “Those who worked with Wayne were fortunate, and so were UFCW Canada members to have had a champion who was so committed. We have lost a member of our family.”



Canada must sign Declaration

On September 13, 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) overwhelmingly adopted the *UN Declaration*

on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This landmark document sets out the individual and collective rights of the world’s 370-million indigenous people, calls for the maintenance and strengthening of their cultural identities, and emphasizes their right to pursue development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.

Yet the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper voted against it, making Canada one of only four nations – of 147 nations globally – to refuse these basic rights and freedoms. The other three nations are Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

“UFCW Canada stands in solidarity with all First Nations peoples in demanding the government live up to the standards set out in the *Declaration* and reverse its position immediately,” UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley says. “The dignity and respect we demand as trade unionists and social justice activists for our members in their workplaces is the same dignity and respect demanded and deserved by all indigenous peoples in the *Declaration*.”



Alberta Safeway workers win contract

A strong strike mandate, a hot Alberta economy, and a coordinated effort has paid off for more than 11,000 UFCW Canada members at 82 Canada Safeway locations across Alberta. A tentative agreement was ratified late last month almost a year after the old contracts had expired.

The new collective agreements had been recommended by the respective collective bargaining committees of UFCW Canada Local 401, UFCW Canada Local 1118, and bakery workers union (BCT) Local 252. Local 401 represents clerks, front-of-store, and meat and deli staff at stores in Calgary and all points south. The BCT local represents in-store bakery workers in Calgary. From Red Deer north, meat and deli workers are represented by Local 1118, while clerks and front-of-store staff are represented by Local 401.

UFCW Canada Local 401 secretary-treasurer and chief negotiator Theresa McLaren describes the contract as one of the best since Canada Safeway insisted on major cuts in the province in 1993, noting that the rollbacks have been recouped, and then some.

All three locals coordinated their bargaining and, with some minor differences, concluded similar agreements for their members. The three-year contracts were ratified by more than 84%, and expire in March 2010.

The terms of the new contract came into effect last week, including top rate raises of 75-80¢ an hour effective March 2 (reflecting a retroactive rate increase since the old contracts expired), a 90¢ increase on March 16, and a 95¢ increase in

March 2009. The agreements also provide full retroactivity on paid hours dating back to March 2007. Other gains include increases in shift premiums and vision care coverage, family leave, and a weekly scheduling cap for part-timers increased from 24 to 28 hours.

An overwhelming strike mandate by all three locals and a labour shortage in Alberta were major factors in the gains achieved, including a reduction in hours required to reach the top of the payscale from 7,500 to 4,500 hours.

"We are proud of the strong stance our members took and the patience and solidarity they showed in achieving this deal," says Albert Johnson, president of UFCW Canada Local 1118. "The drop from 7,500 to 4,500 hours means our members will get to the top rate that much sooner. Members should be proud of what they have achieved, and with this momentum we feel positive about going back to the table two years from now."

As Safeway negotiations concluded successfully in Alberta, they began in British Columbia with UFCW Canada Local 1518. As in Alberta, Safeway's opening proposals in B.C., presented February 25, were full of concessionary demands. For up-to-the-minute information on Local 1518's ongoing negotiations, visit www.ufcw1518.com.



Federal budget simply doesn't work

All in all, the latest federal budget handed down on February 26 seems to be just more of the same from a Stephen Harper Conservative government that does not understand or concern itself with what ordinary Canadians need and expect from it.

"For example, as far as Prime Minister Harper and his government are concerned, the best way to deal with the Canadian job crisis is to pump up the use of temporary foreign workers," says UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley. For years, UFCW Canada has worked with migrant workers, especially those in the agricultural sector as well as the recent influx of workers in industries such as Canada's packinghouses.

"We are in touch with the problems and abuses these temporary workers face," Brother Hanley says, "and we continue to fight to win them the same rights that Canadian workers doing the same jobs deserve." The new federal budget adds to the \$98-million set aside to expand and speed up the flow of foreign workers into Canada. But it sets aside no money to fund a desperately-needed monitoring system to ensure abusive employers and unsafe living and working conditions are not part of the experience for the tens of thousands of temporary workers Canada recruits.

Meanwhile, the lineup of unemployed Canadians in need of training continues to grow. "Perhaps such training could come from the huge \$57-billion surplus that the Employment Insurance (EI) fund had amassed in recent years," Hanley says. "Harper has siphoned off that money in establishing EI as a crown corporation, leaving it with just \$2-billion. That might still sound like a lot, but it won't be if a recession digs in its heels. There would be a much greater

need than that could ever address."

As for the new investment tax exemption on up to \$5,000 a year put into a special registered savings account, most ordinary working Canadians do not have even \$1,000 a year to spare. "It's yet another tax break for those with high incomes," Hanley says. "It does nothing for the majority of Canadians – working people whose real incomes and purchasing power continue to fall."

While many Canadians looked favourably on some reductions to personal taxes promised in the budget, many real issues were not addressed. As the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) pointed out, "The word 'poverty' in the Canadian context is mentioned once in the budget. Contrast that with dozens and dozens of references to 'tax burden' and 'tax relief'. It is as if the Harper Conservatives believe that poverty is non-existent in this country."

NAPO points out that individuals earning \$15,000 per year can expect \$215 in reduced taxes in 2008-09, while those earning \$150,000 will pay \$3,265 less in taxes. "The biggest burden remains on the shoulders of low-income earners," Hanley says. "Canada deserves a government that will respect the needs of all people, not just the privileged."

The federal budget is a cynical and manipulative move by the Harper Tories to either force an election, or, better yet from its point of view, create a no-win scenario for the Stéphane Dion Liberals. "In order to avoid forcing an election they know they can't win, they can't vote down a budget that supports big business at the cost of Canadian working families," Hanley says. "The Harper government simply does not work for working Canadians. It doesn't care, either. That has to change, and come the next election it can."



Upcoming dates

March 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

April 22: Earth Day

April 28: Day of Mourning for Workers Killed and Injured on the Job; UN World Day for Safety and Health at Work

May 1: International Workers' Day (May Day)

May 3: UN World Press Freedom Day

May 5-6: UFCW Canada national engineered standards conference

June 12: UN World Day Against Child Labour

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

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