



Labour Reporter

Saskatchewan's Voice of Labour

September 2010



Struggles span decades

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE stand up for their rights? For the unemployed men 75 years ago, it was relief camps that offered no 'relief'. No work, no wages, and little hope of turning around their own situation, the On to Ottawa Trekkers made their way across the country. It was an act borne of destitution, riding on the coattails of courage.

The state resorted to using force to beat back the Trek's progress, culminating in the Regina Riot. It is still awe-inspiring 75 years later to recall the deep roots of workers' uprising, right here in our province.


Because of workers' struggles in the past, we can celebrate that we have decent work, and unionized jobs. But does the work pay the bills? Listen to the voices of the workers from Casino Regina, whose strike story reminds us all that an anti-worker government is determined to keep wages low in our entertainment industry and across the public service.

Indeed, public sector workers in healthcare and in all of our Crown corporations are facing substandard wage offers and concessions at the negotiating table. What lessons can we draw from the past about how to turn this around?

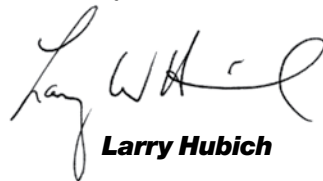
Let's also pay close attention to the

voices and experiences of our youth. Thanks to our government's erosion of labour standards, children as young as 14 and 15 can now work. The teenagers at the SFL summer camp have concerns about getting proper training and working in a place where the employer plays by the rules. As parents, are we confident that our children's health and safety rights are respected and enforced at work?

Can we count on employers to abide by labour standards, especially in the service industry where so many start out? The stories of our youth should renew our commitment to build the labour movement.

Past, present, future... the workers' movement continues on. Let's stand proudly on the shoulders of the workers who faced destitution and violence. Let's build solidarity between all of us who are fighting a government who puts profit before people. Let's empower our young workers to create safe workplaces and to advocate for fair and enforced labour standards and living wages for all. 

In Solidarity,


Larry Hubich

“Let's empower our young workers to create safe workplaces and to advocate for fair and enforced labour standards and living wages for all.”

Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. **And you cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.** — CÉSAR CHÁVEZ



It's a fact:

■ *Get Up, Stand Up* by Bob Marley and the Wailers has won *New Unionism Network's* reader's poll for best workers' song of the last 50 years. The next four choices were *There is Power in a Union* (Billy Bragg), *Between the Wars* (Billy Bragg), *Fight the Power* (Public Enemy), *None of Us are Free* (Solomon Burke and the Blind Boys of Alabama).

Source: New Unionism Network/CALM

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ARCHIVE IMAGES:
Trekksers in Market Square clash with police on July 1st, 1935, which came to be known as the Regina Riot.



ABOVE: Members of the Regina community enjoyed a walking tour of the Trekkers' march and skirmishes with police, with commentary from several local historians.

LEFT: On to Ottawa Trekkers make their way across the country, with demanding work and decent wages.

On to Ottawa & The

Regina Riot, 75 years later

IN THE EARLY 1930'S many young unemployed men were forced to leave home looking for employment. There were so many unemployed that the Conservative government of the day set up relief camps in remote locations across the country.

The men were paid 20 cents a day and working conditions, living conditions and food were mainly substandard. The camps were run in a military fashion and most human rights, including the right to vote, were nonexistent.

In 1935 workers in the British Columbia camps, after an organizing campaign, began to leave the camps and congregate in Vancouver where they demonstrated and lobbied for "Work and Wages".

Although they had strong support from Vancouver citizens, after two months it was decided that they had to take their demands to Ottawa. On June 3, 1935 over 1400 men loaded on to the tops of trains and in the boxcars and were "On to Ottawa".

The "Trekkers" stopped in many centres along the way, Kamloops, Golden, Calgary, Medicine Hat, arriving in Swift Current on June 12, Moose Jaw on June 13 and Regina on June 14. Many joined along the way and further East more were waiting to join.

The Federal Government ordered the Trek stopped in Regina and a delegation of eight was selected to go to Ottawa to meet with Prime Minister Bennett. The requests of the Trekkers were refused and the government ordered the men to return to the relief camps.

At 8:00 p.m. on July 1, 1935 some Trekkers, and a large number of Regina citizens, met at Market Square (site of Regina's current police station) to hear a report from the Ottawa delegation. At 8:15 the crowd was attacked by the RCMP and the Regina City Police. This police inspired "riot" waged through the streets of downtown Regina. The police used small baseball bats, officers mounted on horses and bullets to affect the arrest of the Trek leaders. The citizens and some Trekkers fought back with sticks and stones and fighting continued until midnight.

In the end one plain clothed police officer was killed and at least one Trekker died as a result of the police actions. The Trek was ended and the men were dispersed. A few months later the Bennett government would be defeated and the work camps abolished.

As part of the 75th anniversary of the On

to Ottawa Trek and the Regina riot, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and affiliates participated in a number of events to mark the occasion. A group called "The On To Ottawa Project" left Vancouver on June 6th retracing the Trekkers journey and providing a historical musical revue of the Trek. They stopped at places the Trekkers stopped and put on performances. They were in Swift Current on June 12, Moose Jaw on June 13 and Regina on June 14.

The Regina performance was well attended and included a new 15 minute documentary on the Regina Riot (CUPE and the SFL have copies to loan). The Regina and District Labour Council helped organize the event and put together a union choir for the evening. The events in Saskatchewan were filmed and will form part of a new one-hour documentary that will be finished this fall.

On July 1st a walking tour starting at the police station retraced the path of the downtown skirmishes with commentary from local historians. Over 150 participants took part.

Our history and our struggles should not be forgotten. We owe much to those who struggled for our rights and freedoms.

Solidarity forever! 🇺🇸



Janice Bernier from the Regina and District Labour Council led the 75th anniversary participants in a round of union songs.



Casino workers strike for

OLIVIA BIGSTONE HAS WORKED as a card dealer at Casino Regina for three and a half years. She's one of 425 Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) members who walked the picket line for seven weeks this summer to get a better contract. "Lots of our members are single mothers and young families. We were looking to make their lives a little better."

The PSAC members at the Casino fill many positions, including cashiers, security, slot attendants and dealers. Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation offered a 5.5 per

cent wage increase over three years, the unofficial government wage mandate across the public service. Casino Regina, as a Treasury Board Crown corporation, is included in that mandate.

"Many of us are living paycheque to paycheque. There's a lot of bills to pay. It's hard to make ends meet," says Bigstone. The workers had also hoped to improve the bonus system in place for learning more table games. "I've taken the training to learn an extra game and for that I got a small hourly bonus. It's an incentive for us to train and challenge ourselves. We wanted to see that expanded to more types of games."

Erin Savage has worked at Casino Regina for 14 years, and is currently a Table Game Supervisor. She supported the effort to improve nightshift premiums. "I work from 6:45 p.m. to 4:15 a.m., Wednesday to Saturday. I have to totally adjust my life, which is not always easy because I have three daughters. A lot of employees come here and don't last because of the night shifts." She was also concerned about the monetary offer. "Rent has gone up from \$600 to \$1000 in the last year. How do we keep up?"

The 220 members of Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union (RWDSU) at Casino Regina work as food and beverage handlers, bartenders and show lounge staff. RWDSU joined the picket line shortly after PSAC went out.

Erik Pepper from RWDSU has worked as a Red Seal cook in the cafeteria at Casino Regina for three years.

"We looked at the monetary offer and it didn't even cover the rise in the cost of living. And we wanted to see the nightshift premiums expanded. Shiftwork is hard on the body – humans aren't naturally nocturnal.

We felt it was only right to be paid more fairly for that, especially when the Casino makes just under one million dollars per week in profits."

Orisha Trombley organized the RWDSU workers in 1996 (and was actually fired for being a union organizer and had to fight to get her job back). She was also disappointed in management's wage offer. "Not many people realize Casino Regina is a Crown corporation and when you compare our contract with other Crowns, we have a long way to go. We're only making 12 to 16 dollars an hour."

"We also wanted to see our tradespeople like Erik recognized properly. He's a journeyman cook. That's an issue of retention. We wanted to see some incentive for the non tradespeople to get their ticket and get more education."

Having both unions on the line helped to keep the picket line strong. "When RWDSU went out, it made us feel like we weren't alone. There were moments on the picket line when people's spirits start to get down. I told them to stand strong – you'll be happy with how it turns out," says Bigstone.

After several weeks with no progress, the two unions took the picket line to the Legislature and rallied. They also made their presence known outside of MLA's offices. "Bargaining was made more difficult because the government sent a negotiating committee to the table who had no real authority to make a deal," says Robyn Benson, regional executive vice-president for the PSAC.

At about the seven week mark, RWDSU and the Casino reached an agreement, and a deal was struck shortly afterwards with PSAC.

RWDSU was able to achieve slightly better than the wage mandate, with full retroactive pay. "By our calculations, we got .72 per cent better than the mandate. Probably more importantly, we didn't give up anything in our contract in order to get the improvements we did. We agreed to a couple of changes that Casino management considered 'efficiencies' but were improvements for us," says Paul Guillet, staff representative assigned to RWDSU Casino workers.

a fair contract



TOP: Striking RWDSU members enjoy a hot July day at the Legislature rally.

BOTTOM: Erik Pepper, RWDSU member thanks unions at the rally for their support.

Pepper is happy with the settlement. "We knew in this really conservative climate and with an anti-union government, that it would be tough to make big strides. But we're happy with a number of changes to the contract where language really got cleaned up, especially around scheduling, where there's a ton of grievances. The improvements will make it much easier for new employees to understand their rights."

"I'm proud that we didn't give any concessions. We didn't sell out."

PSAC members achieved improvements in the night shift premium, benefits and mention of family leave in the collective agreement. Benson says she is in awe of the commitment and camaraderie of the members.

"Most have never been on strike before, and the solidarity, dedication and determination on the line was fantastic. Brad Wall's government made the nego-



tiations process very difficult, but we made major strides in this round of bargaining and we have a lot to be proud of," says Benson.

"Not many people realize Casino Regina is a Crown corporation and when you compare our contract with other Crowns, we have a long way to go. We're only making 12 to 16 dollars an hour." — Orisha Trombley



TOP: Olivia Bigstone, card dealer, and Erin Savage, table game supervisor, walk the PSAC picket line.

BOTTOM: SFL Recording Secretary Wanda Bartlett brings greetings at the Legislature to rallying Casino workers and their supporters.

Casino facts:

Guests served in 2009:

■ Casino Moose Jaw	699,371
■ Casino Regina	2,590,860

Average daily attendance

■ Casino Moose Jaw	1,916
■ Casino Regina	7,098

Operations:

- 995 slot machines
- 32 tables games
- 9 poker tables, plus 12 additional poker tables in the Casino Regina tournament room
- Casino Regina Show Lounge entertained over 60,000 people at 117 shows last year. Casino Moose Jaw Cultural Centre entertained over 10,400 people at 46 shows.
- Casino Regina manages the largest food and beverage operation in the province with total sales of \$9 million in the year. In the last five years, food and beverage sales have doubled.

Earnings:

- Casino income before transfer to the Province of Saskatchewan's General Revenue Fund (GRF): \$50.8M (up \$2.2M from 2008)
- Payment to the GRF to support the First Nations Trust, the Métis Development Fund and the Community Initiatives Fund: \$25.4M (up \$6.2M from 2008)
- Dividend to Crown Investments Corporation: \$20.3M
- Capital Expenditures: \$12.5M. Of that, \$9.9M was for the casino property refresh to be completed in 2010.
- Public sector contributions:
 - Municipal taxes \$1.7M;
 - Payroll, benefits, and other contributions to employees \$42.1M;
 - Purchases from Saskatchewan businesses \$32.9M

Community support :

- 300 donations totaling \$670,000 focused on community development, education and recruitment, health and medicine, social programs, education, arts and culture, and sports

Source: Gaming Corporation Annual Report 2009

Human rights, collective bargaining, international solidarity, racism, workplace health and safety, labour standards... the 53 campers at the 2010 SFL summer camp explored them all. Meet Kevin and Tayler, who agreed to share their workplace stories with the *Labour Reporter*.

SFL summer



Tayler, age 16, works at a fast food restaurant and has received no health and safety training.

HI, I'M TAYLER, and I've been working at a fast food restaurant since last June. We never got any training at the start. Last March when the restaurant got new owners, we were shown how to use one of the machines. We have never had health and safety training at work. Recently the boss started docking us fifteen minutes off of our cheques if we take a five minute break and forget to clock out. We are supposed to be paid six business days after cut off, but we aren't getting paid until eight days after.

CAMPERS ALSO PRODUCED a petition and letters to the government about the Minimum Wage Board's recommendation to create a training wage. New hires would be paid 90 per cent of the minimum wage for the first six months on the job.

Dear Members of the Legislative Assembly,

We, the undersigned, believe the

recommendation allowing 90 per cent of the minimum wage for the first six months of work violates workers' rights. This recommendation takes advantage of new workers, immigrants and low income families. These groups of people already live below the poverty line. If this recommendation were to pass, these groups would be further impoverished, leading to an increased separation between those who have money and those who do not.

Another problem with this recommendation is that it encourages employers to turn over their staff just before the 6 month period. The threat of being dismissed or laid off just before the six month period could be abused by the employer.

By putting this recommendation into place, what would our province be telling minimum wage earners? Is their labour less valuable than others? Are they second class citizens? Why do our leaders feel we can further exploit these groups?

By definition, the word minimum is as follows:

Minimum: the least quantity or amount possible, assignable, allowable, or the like.

By offering minimum wage earners less than the lowest possible amount, the government proposes, by definition, a conceptual impossibility. We have the word "minimum" in place in order to safeguard against lower wages. Please, as the Government of Saskatchewan, honour the standard you have put in place.

Sincerely, Avery and Darby, on behalf of the SFL Summer Campers

campers speak out

To download a copy of the petition against the training wage, visit www.sfl.sk.ca



Avery and Darby create a petition to the government to organize against a training wage for new hires.

Dear Mr. Minister of Labour,

My name is Shelby Zsombor. I am 14 years old and I do not agree with the recommendation to create a lower training wage. I honestly believe that this recommendation could potentially let employers take advantage of new young workers. For example, the employer could hire new workers, wait until just before the six months is over, fire them, and then hire a new group of kids.

Another problem I have with this is the fact that you are going below minimum wage. Last time I checked, minimum is the minimum. It's the bottom. Why is the government going backwards? This recommendation has the possibility of putting off young people from working. Who would work for less than minimum?

I know that I sure wouldn't.

It is hard enough to have to juggle working and having a child. It's even harder to do that with less than minimum wage for the first six months. You also have to consider people looking for just a summer job. Summer lasts three months. This also greatly affects new immigrants. As of right now, immigrants have a hard enough time living on minimum wage. Don't ask them to live even more poorly.

Please, sir. Consider the position of those whom this recommendation would affect. Don't tell them that the work they do is 10 percent less valuable than others.

Sincerely, Shelby Z.



Colette, Shelby and Tovah write letters to the Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Health and Safety, Don Morgan.

Dear Mr. Minister of Labour:

The SFL Summer Camp does not favour the recommendation of the Minimum Wage Board to create a

training wage that is 90 per cent of the minimum wage. Minimum wage is minimum and should not be compromised. The wage is called minimum for a reason. The minimum wage was increased in March to meet rising costs in the economy. It should be left alone.

It definitely seems like this recommendation targets young people and/or immigrants working for minimum wage. These people are the most vulnerable because it may be their first job or their lack of English. You're kicking them while they're down.

The recommendation would greatly benefit the employer, so what are the employers giving back to the employees? A lot of teenagers are only looking for a summer job and summer is not six months. The proposal may say to some people that they are second-class citizens. It may be an insult to immigrants and young people. I hope you honour these requests, opinions, and ideas from the SFL Summer Camp.

Taylor G.



Taylor G. and Nathan discuss how a training wage discriminates against young people and immigrant workers.

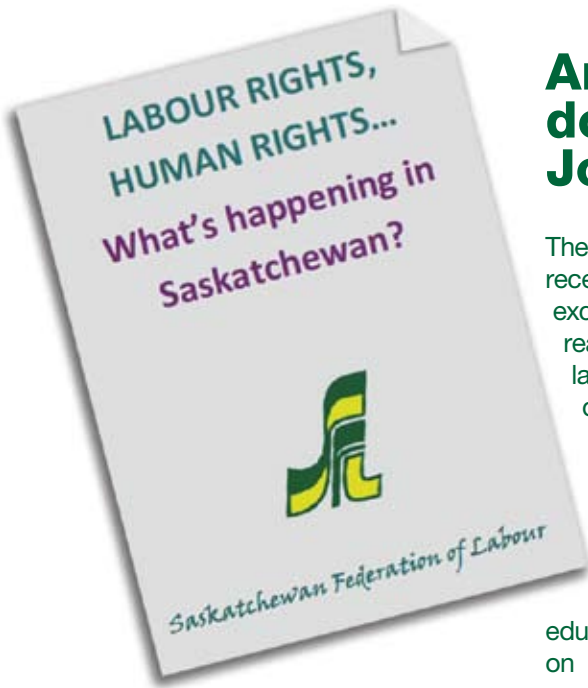
HI I'M KEVIN, and I worked at a lumber yard when I was about 14. My job was to move lumber to different locations in the yard with a bobcat. One day my boss came up and asked me to train a new guy, who was also 14 years old, and I accepted. It went good for the first couple days then the guy broke stuff while moving the lumber. He denied doing it and I ended up having to pay the hundreds of dollars to have it repaired.



Kevin worked at a lumberyard at age 14.

“Last time I checked, minimum is the minimum. It's the bottom. Why is the government going backwards?” — Shelby Z.

“The proposal may say to some people that they are second-class citizens. It may be an insult to immigrants and young people.” — Taylor G.



Angry about what the government is doing? Want to make a difference? Join the SFL Labour Issues campaign!

The SFL Political Strategy Committee recently launched the first stage of this exciting campaign to talk to workers about really important issues. Great news...the labour issues organizers have already distributed 20,000 Labour Rights, Human Rights booklets at presentations across the province. We invite more union members and community activists to join us for the next stage! This fall we'll focus on what's happening to healthcare and education in Saskatchewan, and the attack on our Crown corporations and public services.

Arm yourself with knowledge about the policies and laws of our provincial government, and their effects.

Empower your co-workers and members of your community with information.

Add your voice to the public campaign leading up to the 2011 election.

Be part of the movement for a democratic and accountable government.

It's easy to become a labour issues organizer. Just contact the SFL for more information on how you can get involved – c.banks@sfl.sk.ca or call (306) 525-0197.

Don't miss this opportunity to build solidarity and make a difference!

Mark your calendar

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
Sept. 6	Labour Day	
Sept. 8	International Literacy Day	
Sept. 12-14	SFL OH&S Conference	Regina
Sept. 21	International Day for Peace	
Oct. 27-30	SFL 55th annual convention	Regina

SFL annual convention reminders

- Early bird registration: Sept. 27
- Deadline for resolutions: noon, Sept. 27
- Childcare & special needs: Sept. 27
- Hotel block bookings expire Sept. 26

Farewell, brother Anderson

CONGRATULATIONS to Don Anderson, who retires September 30 after 21 years of service at the SFL. He filled the role of Executive Assistant to the SFL during the terms of former president Barb Byers, and during the terms of current president Larry Hubich. Prior to that Don worked at RWDSU as a staff rep, among many other positions. Don is a

strong defender of workers' rights and an advocate for injured workers, the unemployed and the disadvantaged. His contribution, in particular his commitment to striking workers, will be missed greatly by the labour movement. Thank you Don, for your dedication to the working class. Enjoy your retirement! 🇺🇸

