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STEEL CITY SOLIDARITY WINS AGAINST 'ROKBAR' WAGE THIEVES

By: Morine R.

Sarah was hired by Rokbar management to serve in their club on Hess St. in Hamilton's downtown. Sarah worked her shifts over late nights and often until early mornings. But Rokbar was experiencing some problems – it became apparent that management had some difficulties organizing their finances. And as is the case in many workplaces, the employees paid the price. In the end, Sarah was owed \$2700 by Rokbar.

Instead of forgetting about her stolen wages, Sarah decided to contact Steel City Solidarity, and together we launched a campaign against Rokbar demanding that her stolen wages be paid. Late on busy Saturday in Hess Village, we publicly delivered a demand letter to the Rokbar management. With the support of over 30 supporters of SCS, her parents, and the aid of a loud megaphone, Sarah read out the injustices Rokbar had committed against her and the deadline for the demands to be met. Once the deadline for payment had passed, we again planned to gather together and rally outside of Rokbar. We had our chants and signs saying "Hey Crokbar! Pay Sarah!" ready. Just as we were about to begin, one of the owners made a deal with Sarah to pay her wages back in weekly instalments. Not fully convinced that payments would be made, we marched by Rokbar cheering just for good measure – so that they knew that another crowd of supporters could be easily mobilized for Sarah should they be needed.

It seems we have had enough impact with just the two actions described, because Sarah has been paid out almost all of her wages, with only \$250 to go! And it gets better: another worker has also been paid the \$300 she was owed! I guess Rokbar didn't want to wait for more rallies outside the club before they started paying her too! Amazing how a little collective pressure goes a long way!

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[Info about Steel City Solidarity](#)

Steel City Solidarity is a workers solidarity network in Hamilton. Established as a working group of CUPE 3906, we are composed of precarious workers, labour and community activists from across the city. If you want to know more about how SCS organizes and why precarious workers are building a movement visit:

www.steelcitysolidarity.com

TAKE BACK THE BLOCK Toronto responds to sexual violence

By: Ann Beatty

On September 15, hundreds of women, trans people, kids and men supporters gathered in the Parkdale neighbourhood of Toronto for the 30th annual Take Back the Night (TBTN) community fair, rally and march. The march was loud and spirited, marching on both major streets and quieter residential ones. The chants and music brought some residents out on to the sidewalks and waves from balconies of the many apartment buildings in the neighbourhood. While TBTN is always an important, empowering event for women and people working against sexual violence, it seems to have particular relevance to Toronto this year. While the vast majority of sexual assaults take place in private settings, such as homes, this summer in Toronto has seen what appears to be multiple serial sexual assaults on the streets of different neighbourhoods. While the assaults in the Christie and Bloor area garnered more media attention and a public demonstration on Sept. 3 of this year, multiple assaults have also taken place in other neighbourhoods.

Sexual assaults like these, in public spaces and by strangers, provoke a specific response from police, media and politicians. Too often, the message to women is familiar: stay home, be careful and, in the words of Toronto mayor Rob Ford's niece, Krista Ford, "don't dress like a whore." These responses are incorrect and insulting, as there is no link between how women dress and assault. They are also limiting, as they put the focus on individual women, rather than on the men that perpetrate, and the potential and responsibility of communities to organize against them.

Public demonstrations like Take Back the Night and the demonstration in Christie Pitts park create a starting point to counteract these harmful responses, but are in no way sufficient. Anna Willats, of the Assaulted Women and Children Counsellor/Advocate program at George Brown College, addresses the serious limitations of focusing only on public assaults "lots of attention is given to stranger assaults, but most sexual assault is in the home. We could respond to public stuff, but it wouldn't address violence against women. The key is equality of women. Responses have to be systemic. Most women who are victimized are isolated, struggle with



poverty, with lack of housing or childcare, or fear of deportation. There is no quick fix response; it must be systemic and long-term."

Currently, the upcoming cut to the Community Start Up benefit – a benefit that assists people on OW/ODSP in accessing or maintaining housing, and is of particular relevance to women leaving abusive situations – is one important struggle to directly counter a policy that attacks poor women and puts them at greater risk of violence. Building these campaigns in our communities, as well as creating long-term organizations that can respond to various forms of violence and patriarchy in our communities and workplaces, are key steps in opposing violence.

Both in communities and in workplaces, on our own streets and in campaigns across the province and country, we have opportunities to develop strategies to prevent and respond to sexual assault, to fight patriarchy and violence in our daily lives. What is most infuriating about the recent street-level assaults in Toronto is that they are not a statistical high, but a tiny, better-publicized moment in the high number of women facing violence and abusive every day across the province. Our struggle, in response, must also be constant, multifaceted and ongoing, until all our streets and homes are places of safety, respect and equality.

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SOLIDARITY NETWORK FORMED IN SUPPORT OF ZELLERS WORKERS

By: Stefan

Solidarity Networks, organizations of mutual support that use collective action to win demands are on the rise. This article is about early organizing efforts in Waterloo Region around the closing of Zellers locations, specifically, the attempt to form a solidarity coalition to support those affected by the store closures. Although not a formal Solidarity Network, the coalition has taken on similar work and may ultimately contribute to the forming a Solidarity Network in Waterloo Region.

First, some background on the situation. In 2012, Target along with Walmart- two U.S. based mega-chains with track records of practices that hurt employees and communities, paid Zellers \$1.825 billion to lease all of its 220 stores across Canada. Most of these locations will be converted to Target stores, with 39 being resold to Walmart, and 15-25 sold to other retailers. Target has made it clear that it will not respect the current workers' wages, benefits or even their jobs. Zellers employees are now being forced to look for new work, and the jobs offered by Target will likely be of lower quality contributing to the growing trend towards poverty wages in Waterloo Region. Few current employees, particularly older workers, are likely to be rehired as they do not fit the branding of the Target stores.

Of the 35,000 Zellers workers across Canada who are now (or soon to be) looking for work, approximately 500 are in the Waterloo Region. This adds to the 1200 workers who will lose their jobs as the result of the recently announced closure by Maple Leaf Foods of the Schneider's plant in Kitchener, and the ongoing layoffs at Waterloo's Research in Motion that ranges into the 1000s. These are not isolated occurrences; there are many other examples in the region. With these mounting job losses, it is no surprise that community members decided to take action, and draw attention to the situation workers are and will be facing in the coming years in Kitchener-Waterloo. Although these efforts have only begun, they have demonstrated the willingness of community members to enter into workplace struggle, and to understand that wherever we may find ourselves, our struggles are connected.

Following some initial outreach to employees at the stores facing imminent closure, the local anti-poverty group Poverty Makes Us Sick (PMUS) called a meeting to discuss how the broader Kitchener-Waterloo community could respond and support the Zellers workers. After meeting with various union organizers, hosting a community info night and conducting research, a newly founded coalition, the 'Tri-Cities Zellers Employee Solidarity Coalition', agreed on two crucial points. One, coalition efforts needed to be worker-led, and two, they

needed to be specific to the Zellers situation. This commitment placed a high importance on reaching out to Zellers workers, as no coalition members were current employees. It also meant that taking on this project would be a long-term, multi-phase struggle that would not fit the typical Solidarity Network model, which tends to carefully pick winnable cases, such as getting wages for a worker or ensuring a tenant is not evicted. Knowing how stacked the odds were against the initiative, members of the coalition quickly focused on efforts that would build the skills needed for this type of work. This was of crucial importance to keeping morale up in the group, and provided a space for members to develop as activists and organizers in the hope that these skills and experiences will better position us to fight back and support each other in future struggles.

Working with a UFCW union organizer, the coalition began to meet and discuss how to engage Zellers workers. Without some Zellers employees in the mix, the coalition knew that it could not know how to best support the workers. Prepared and ready to hit the stores, new coalition members began approaching Zellers workers about gathering to talk about what sort of response could come from the workers and community members. Unfortunately, this is where things got challenging. Although individual coalition members had many valuable conversations, and much was learned, responses from workers were mixed. We quickly became aware of the deceitful bullying tactics that Zellers and its parent company HBC, were using in order to ensure that employees didn't 'make trouble' during the transition. In the face of this corporate pressure, the coalition has struggled to get Zellers workers to commit to participating in ongoing organizing efforts. This reality forced the coalition to take a step back and reflect collectively on tactics and local goals, while remaining connected to the larger national campaign.

Despite obstacles, many positives have come out of the work of the coalition to date. The insistence that the campaign be worker-led to make sure its efforts are meaningful to those most affected is an important one. It

has avoided the temptation to take up a struggle on behalf of the workers instead of along with them, and has helped the group focus its work early on. Members of the coalition have gained direct experience in approaching workers around organizing efforts- a valuable and often overlooked component of struggle. The coalition is continuing to gather information- surveying employees and coordinating with the UFCW to ensure that local actions contribute to the larger national fight for Zellers employee rights. Furthermore, as the coalition now re-engages in the campaign with renewed commitment, solid groundwork has been laid that will inform how we move forward on this, and on similar efforts in the region.

**For more information,
contact tczesc@gmail.com**



COMMON CAUSE // anarchist organization

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Toronto:

commoncausetoronto@gmail.com

Kitchener-Waterloo

commoncausekw@gmail.com

Hamilton

commoncausehamilton@gmail.com

London

commoncauselondon@gmail.com