

October 5, 2007

Strike Vote Coming at Superstores!!!

Union negotiations continued for Superstore employees during the week of September 24, 2007.

Bargaining took place in Fort McMurray, and many Fort McMurray employees attended, observed, and directly participated in the bargaining process. The Company originally opposed conducting any bargaining sessions in places outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Union Representatives would not agree and demanded that bargaining "travel" to other areas where Superstore employees work.

The Company has continued to refuse to propose any wage and benefits improvements, and Fort McMurray employees expressed their outrage at the bargaining table. At one point, the Union's chief negotiator handed the spokesperson's role to a Fort McMurray Superstore employee he had just met. She made it clear to the Vice President of the Company that Fort McMurray employees would strike in -40° temperatures if it was necessary to get a fair deal!

The Company calls Fort McMurray "unique". Many argue that it is a very, very magnified version of the high living costs that working people face in Alberta. The Company has introduced a \$6000 per year northern living allowance for supervisors there!

There is truth to the assertion that Fort McMurray is unique. And after 13 months of impossible negotiations with an apparently indifferent Company, the use of Union power must start somewhere. Fort McMurray Superstore employees believe in Union solidarity, but they are anxious, and are prepared to flex their muscle and go first! They share an overall perspective with other Union members but they feel they have the right to launch their own fight back campaign.

The Union has applied for a government appointed mediator to become involved in this process. Under Alberta Law, mediation must occur before a strike vote is taken. Actual strike votes are conducted by the Labour Relations Board through a secret ballot process.

Remember, employees can take strike votes but Companies can also take lockout votes and lock out their employees. For 13 months the Company has pursued take-aways and has refused to waive its right to lock out employees when asked to do so by your Union. The Company has openly threatened lockouts in the past. If the Company tried to lock you out, you must have already voted to go on strike to legally fight back and to receive strike pay.

Things are about to heat up. Will poor Alberta labour laws respect workers' democratic rights to strike? Will the Company get the message?

The process will start with Fort McMurray, but it likely won't be long until the whole province is affected. Get ready for a strike vote in your workplace!

Bargaining sessions are scheduled during the week of October 15th, 2007 in Edmonton. Contact your Union Representative if you would like to attend!