

Strike Alert!:

Union Applies for Mediation ... Superstore Responds

At recent meetings held with Union activists, UFCW Local 401 Union negotiators received a unanimous and overwhelming mandate to apply to the Alberta government for mediation to take place in Superstore and Liquorstore Union contract negotiations. Activists appointed to a Union “advisory committee” endorsed the process to ensure that a strike vote against Superstore comes as soon as possible.

The Union and its legal counsel quickly prepared and submitted an application for mediation for the Edmonton area. While the Union was still reviewing documents and consulting with Union members from Calgary, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lloydminster, Camrose, Red Deer, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, the Company applied for mediation in these areas itself!

Its “game on” as the saying goes!

The Company’s response is not surprising. Just as the Union can push the issue when they feel it is time, the Company can push back.

But interestingly, the Company had no desire to force the issue before this. It was the Union’s actions that got them finally interested in negotiations...

...And, it was the actions of Superstore and Liquorstore employees themselves! Hundreds and hundreds of Superstore employees have begun wearing purple Union buttons with “I’m on strike alert” boldly printed in white. They are entirely legal, and the Company has reluctantly admitted that they are, instructing supervisors and managers to let employees display them while working. The Company, in fact, must do, as the law strongly supports the wearing of the buttons through certain legal precedents involving “freedom of expression” won by Unions.

We’ve got Superstore’s attention!

There could, unfortunately, be a dark side to the Company’s actions. When the Union tried to explore alternative resolution measures with the Company, that is, tried to find a way to avoid a potential dispute, the Company advised that it would not give up its right to lock out its own employees! No surprise here, they have threatened to lock out their own employees before! Does the word “bully” hit home?

That is, in fact, one of the reasons a strike vote is so important. If the Company moves to lock you out you must have voted to go on strike already to avoid total exploitation by the Company! A lockout without a strike vote means being pushed into employment without a Union contract. Vote to strike and defend yourself with a picket line, strike pay, and the protected legal right to return to work after the strike is over with solid Union representation!

What Next?

Mediated bargaining will take place this summer. Unless the Company is forthcoming with a fair offer of settlement for its employees that would meet your reasonable expectations the process will be pushed by your Union. The law, in Alberta, however, says that such mediation is mandatory before strike votes or an actual strike can occur. After mediation concludes, the Alberta Labour Code also requires that “a cooling off” period expires before a strike vote is taken. The law, candidly, is written to slow down Unions, and to drain their momentum.

Nothing however, will cause Superstore and Liquorstore employees from being committed to making their stores a better place to shop and to work. Fairness will not be defeated by corporate greed and indifference, or anti – worker labour laws. History has shown that fairness can be achieved by hardworking people who stand together and demand that fairness!