Unifor addresses precarious work

Unifor is proposing sweeping changes to Ontario employment standards and labour laws to better reflect the reality of modern work in an era of precarious, low-paying part-time jobs, and to give more workers a fair chance to form a union.

“Work today is becoming increasingly precarious. For more and more Ontarians, particularly young workers, the prospect of a job with regular hours – or even enough hours to support a family – seems out of reach,” Unifor Ontario Regional Director Katha Fortier said.

Unifor has launched a new campaign pushing for updated employment standards and labour laws to deal with today’s reality of precarious work. See also today’s centrepread pullout poster on precarious work.

Unifor members of Local 414 have reached a tentative agreement with No Frills grocery stores. The unit includes 1,265 workers at 19 stores across Ontario.

“We continue to break new ground within the retail sector,” said Christine Connor, President of Unifor Local 414.

“Details of the deal will be made available once it is

Unifor optimistic about Bombardier’s future

The delay in delivery of streetcars should not put good jobs at risk, says Unifor.

In October, Bombardier Transportation advised the Toronto Transit Commission that the delivery schedule of the new streetcars will not be fully met.

The streetcars are built at Bombardier’s Thunder Bay facility, which is employs 1,200 people, 900 of whom are members of Unifor Local 1075.

“Unifor is optimistic that there are ways to improve productivity. We have some innovative ideas and are discussing those with the company,” said Andy Savela, Unifor National Representative.

The TTC voted October 29 to sue Bombardier for

No Frills deal reached

Unifor optimistic about Bombardier’s future

Race to the bottom?
There’s a solution

Unifor.org/WorkplaceChanges
Ratifications

Local 8300, Shepherds

About 140 members of Unifor Local 8300 working at the Shepherds of Good home homeless shelter in Ottawa have ratified a new contract providing wage increases of 1.5 percent in each of three years, and other improvements.

There is also a signing bonus of $300, plus 50-cent wage increases each year for case managers, and a 25-cent increase for maintenance employees.

The employer also agreed to pay $1,000 a year to provide for a Unifor Paid Education Leave program for the members. There is also a $125 annual boot allowance, and a uniforms provision for maintenance and cleaning staff.

There were also language changes dealing with such issues as temporary vacancies, classification changes and part-time employees.

A Unifor Social Justice Fund project to help protect journalists in Mexico, one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist, has already begun to revitalize their union.

The project began in the spring, and continues for three years. With funding from the SJF, the Sindicato Nacional de Redactores de la Prensa (SNRP), which represents journalists in the country, held meetings across Mexico over the summer to talk to members about the changes they need to stay safe.

Participants in those meetings will gather together in Mexico City in late November to compare notes, and come up with a handbook for union activists to enhance journalist safety.

The effort has pumped new energy and optimism the SNRP, a longstanding union in Mexico that has suffered in the face of repeated attacks on journalists, but now feels hopeful about the future, Peruvian journalist Zuliana Lainez reported to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

“This wouldn’t have been possible without the help of Unifor,” said Lainez.

The project is being administered by the IFJ. Lainez attended Unifor’s Media Council in June, where she participated in a panel discussion and gave the keynote address.

Nine journalists have been killed in Mexico this year. Since 1992, only one person has been convicted for killing a journalist, making Mexico one of the riskiest countries to be a journalist.

Unifor is participating in an IFJ campaign to fight such impunity with which journalists are killed. You can follow the campaign on Twitter at #endimpunity.

SJF Mexican journalist safety project already having a positive impact

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ratified by the members.”

Ratification meetings are ongoing all this week.

Retail is the largest and fastest growing sector in Canada’s economy. But it is also the industry that pays the lowest wages, has the highest turnover and provides the fewest hours of work.

“This agreement builds on the momentum Unifor members have created in the retail sector, and it demonstrates that we are the union that is changing the lives of our members in retail,” said Unifor National President Jerry Dias.

Unifor is one of the country’s largest retail worker unions, with more than 20,000 members working in supermarkets, pharmacies, appliance stores, and other retail shops across Canada.

“Our members are continually raising the floor in retail,” said Dias. “We have a lot to be proud of in this new agreement.”
Stanford took part in a panel on The Changing Nature of Work.

The submission focuses on Ontario laws because the province is conducting a review of its labour laws, but the ideas included in it could apply across the country.

In its 156-page submission to the Review, Unifor makes a total of 43 specific recommendations, reflecting input from Unifor locals across Ontario, many of which appeared before the commissions in public consultation meetings over the summer and fall.

Unifor’s full submission includes several proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act to protect workers in precarious and irregular jobs. Unifor’s proposals include: scheduling rules, more opportunity for full-time work, making employers responsible for temp agency actions, benefits for part-timers, and a pro-active approach to enforcing employment standards.

Labour Relations Act changes would modernize union certification and first contract negotiation, including electronic union voting, certification votes in neutral locations, first contract arbitration and successor union rights when contracted services are flipped.

Other recommendations include developing sector-wide work standards for both union and non-union workers so companies can’t compete on the basis to ever-lower pay and benefits.

“Too many workers today face a future of one bad, insecure job after another, often holding down more than one job at any one time as they try to make enough money. They are so dependent on those jobs that they are hesitant to speak out, as is their right, for fear they’ll lose what work they have,” Fortier said.

“The barriers to joining with co-workers to form a union thwart far too many workers. And a race to the bottom across whole sectors of our economy makes getting ahead all the more difficult.”

Unifor’s full submission is available at www.unifor.org/WorkplaceChanges.

Unpredictable work schedules make family life difficult for many workers today, particularly in the hospitality industry.

Alberta NDP budget invests in education, jobs

Strong education investments at all levels were among the highlights of the Alberta NDP’s first budget.

The spending announced in the budget will go towards hiring support staff and teachers who will translate into higher quality public education.


The Alberta budget also introduces a school nutritional program and a $45 million annual investment to reduce school fees for families.

Instead of deep cuts promised by the previous government, Notley has chosen instead to maintain strong front-line services during the economic downturn. Notley’s first budget also takes supports jobs with a new “Job Creation Incentive Program” that could lead to 27,000 new jobs each year through 2017.

“The government is taking the long view of economic prosperity,” said Joie Warnock, Unifor’s Western Director.
Federal election challenge

This is an abridged version of a blog by Unifor National President Jerry Dias. To read the full blog, go to unifor.org/en/blog.

The clearest outcome of this historic federal election was an overwhelming call from Canadians for a change in government, and a change in direction for our country. The Liberals have been tasked with delivering progressive change.

But achieving real, lasting change is never easy – and it cannot start and stop at a ballot box.

If we want to see real change, we will need to hold the Liberals to account for their promises and to rely on the NDP to not just hold the Liberals responsible, but to also offer their ideas for change, which will enrich and deepen the change we are able to accomplish.

The Liberals made important commitments during the election that will need to be fulfilled to create the change Canadians are so clearly craving.

Importantly, the Liberals and NDP agree on the need to address many issues, including: the Canada Pension Plan public infrastructure, tax reform, Medicare, child care, greenhouse gases, support for key industries, revoking the Harper government’s attacks on unions, labour rights, and nongovernmental organizations and a public inquiry into murdered and missing Aboriginal women.

That’s an ambitious to-do list. Getting it done will need the involvement and vigilance of the NDP.

Surely there is not just an opportunity for the Liberals and NDP to work together, there is a responsibility for Justin Trudeau and Tom Mulcair to act in the interests of Canadians – and that means working together.