When the first edition of this magazine launched at Canadian Council, those of us who had spent months preparing for that day were more than a little nervous. We wanted the magazine to be informative, to look good and to give voice to regional concerns in ways that the union had not been able to do with the former biweekly newsletter the magazine was replacing.

Then we heard back from readers, and they loved the new magazine. Some even took to Twitter to say how much they liked it.

It was somehow appropriate that social media became a way for people to tell us that they liked the magazine. This magazine, after all, is part of a much wider strategy to combine, print, online and social media messaging to improve how we communicate with members, local leadership and our allies.

The purpose of the magazine is to provide a deeper look at some of the issues Unifor, and our country, are facing. In the first edition, this included trade, health care and labour law reform. In this issue, we look at the rise of the conservative right, equity issues, helping refugees settle in Canada, and more.

As with each issue, we also have columns from each of our national officers and our regional directors, as well as updates from some of the national departments working so hard on behalf of members.

With the magazine coming out quarterly, we have boosted our daily online coverage of ongoing Unifor events and campaigns, and introduced a new online newsletter UniLink that comes out weekly.

Combined with regular Facebook and Twitter posts, your union is increasing the ways we communicate. It has never been easier to stay informed about the issues and up to date on what your union is doing.

Please show this magazine to others, and encourage them to subscribe by going to unifor.org/subscribe.

This is your magazine. Help us spread the word.

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✓ Subscribe to this free magazine by emailing communications@unifor.org with your name, address and Local number

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Plus: Our national website, unifor.org, has regular updates on news and events, plus information on political campaigns, bargaining, and all the work being done by your union to help members and their communities. However you prefer to stay in touch, Unifor has something for you!
NAFTA Talks Showcase Unifor’s Political Strength

The last few months, our union has set an exhausting pace to make sure the voices of working people are heard loud and clear at the North American Free Trade Agreement renegotiations.

These might be the most important trade talks for Canada since the Free Trade Agreement—the precursor to NAFTA—was negotiated in the late 1980s. There is no question Unifor had to be involved—and we have been, in a big way.

I have had the incredible honor to be an advisor to the Canadian negotiators at these talks. This is recognition of the hard work of Unifor activists and staff from across the country who made our union into the political force we envisioned during our founding convention four years ago.

It is vital that the needs of working people are heard at these talks. For too long, trade deals have held workers back by giving too much power to big corporations and investors.

The needs of workers do not stop at the door to the workplace, however. Unifor members, just like all workers across Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, go to work each day to provide a decent life for their families. Beyond that, we all want safe and clean places to raise families, and to live in an equitable society that recognizes the importance of gender equity and justice for Indigenous peoples.

None of this can be resolved by a special clause here or a chapter there, whether it’s matters of labour rights, gender equity, the environment or Indigenous rights. This commitment to make trade work for people instead of corporations needs to be part of the very fibre of modern trade deals.

Through each round of the talks so far, and for the rounds to come, this has been our message.
In my role as a top officer of Unifor, I have the honor to attend functions supporting initiatives of the Social Justice Fund, of which I am a board member.

I recently had an opportunity to join Jerry Dias and other Unifor representatives in support of Journalists for Human Rights, whose mandate is to “help put human rights on the front page.”

As I listened to the stories reporters told of atrocities around the world and the dangers journalists face, it reinforced my belief that freedom of the press is one of the most important aspects of a free and democratic society. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expressions; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through media regardless of frontiers.”

Freedom of the press does not exist everywhere, as shown by the Reporters Without Borders annual index. There remain parts of the world where people disappear or are murdered or jailed and tortured because they courageously exercise this fundamental right.

There are organizations around the world protecting and promoting freedom of the press and journalists.

These include the Committee to Protect Journalists, Freedom House, International Freedom of Expression Exchange and Reporters Without Borders and the International Federation of Journalists, of which Unifor is a member.

During his keynote address at the Journalists for Human Rights event, General Romeo Dallaire said freedom of the press is the “most productive and essential element of a free and democratic society.”

It is often only after the press tells the story and builds up political pressure on governments through its citizens that major conflicts end.

Even in North America, freedom of the press is increasingly under attack. The Trump administration wants to supplant the truth with fake news and “alternative facts” and threatens the licenses of media that don’t paint a rosy picture of the U.S. government. Press briefings stopped until reporters told the story of what this meant to democracy.

I am proud of the work our union does through the SJF to support organizations championing freedom of the press. Freedom of expression and freedom of speech are the vehicles by which we can create change, improve society and influence governments to do what’s right.

Please take a look at the organizations listed above and consider the people who put their lives on the line to tell the truth, so that the world will listen, change will come, and lives are saved.
Mobilization and Determination Are the Order of the Day

Telecommunications sector
Subcontracting and outsourcing: Key priorities
Whether it’s the Bell Canada clerical negotiations affecting thousands of workers in Quebec and Ontario or the negotiations at Télébec, the problem is the same. For too long, workers have been feeling the strains of the steady erosion of jobs and the dramatic shrinking of the workforce on the quality of their life at work.

The bargaining slogan says it all: “It’s time!” It’s time for things to change. Another telecom group—the members at Bell Technical Solutions (BTS)—is also heading into early bargaining.

Aerospace sector — exemplary mobilization
The saga of the C-Series has been making headlines in Quebec recently, with Boeing once again attacking Bombardier and successfully petitioning the U.S. government to impose a 300 per cent countervailing duty on sales of its aircraft in the United States.

The outcome, which saw Airbus take control of Bombardier’s C-Series program, surprised many observers. And while this deal may have been essential to securing the plane’s future, it is nonetheless a shame to cede this engineering intellectual property to a foreign company. Despite Airbus’s medium- and long-term commitments, we can’t help but fear that jobs may ultimately be lost.

I’d like to highlight Unifor’s outstanding work in mobilizing political actors in Quebec against American attacks on the C-Series and on our jobs.

I’d like to highlight Unifor’s outstanding work in mobilizing political actors in Quebec against American attacks on the C-Series and on our jobs. We can be proud of the fact that we were at the forefront of the fight, playing a proactive role in convincing stakeholders of the need for a united front on this issue.

Pulp and paper sector
Pattern bargaining under way east of Manitoba
 Talks are under way to prepare for the start of negotiations in this sector. Unifor will hold its Wage Policy Conference for the industry in February to select a target company, set union demands and establish bargaining priorities.

Unfortunately, conditions in this sector are once again unstable due to ongoing trade disputes with the U.S. on softwood lumber, super-calendered paper and newsprint. It should be noted that local unions in the mills and forest operations will be invited to participate in these talks alongside the paper locals, since they will also be negotiating in their respective sectors based on this pattern agreement afterwards.

2018 – election year in Quebec
We have started our mobilization efforts in anticipation of the Quebec elections to be held in October 2018. We are currently preparing our election platform, which will be widely distributed over the coming months to challenge all the political parties and their candidates. We are counting on all our members to make a difference—the Unifor difference—in this important democratic exercise.

In solidarity.
In western democracies, it’s easy to be fooled into thinking that your “voice” is only heard once every four years during the turbulent writ period of elections. At times, activism between elections can feel like tilting against windmills, with little chance of short-term success.

Of course, that’s not true. The only constant is change.

Right-wing governments are fond of trying to appear invincible and permanent as a tactic for undermining the opposition’s will to fight. But the truth is that they are fraught with doubt and sensitive to public opinion.

Take for example the news out of Saskatchewan, where a conservative government was recently forced to back away from unprecedented privatization and repeal legislation it only introduced a year ago.

Here is a government that won a third consecutive mandate last year and increased its number of seats in the legislature—including the defeat of the opposition leader in his own riding.

If there was a government that should feel bulletproof, it was Brad Wall’s Saskatchewan Party government. But that didn’t protect it from the public backlash over privatizing Crown corporations.

In fall 2016 after it introduced legislation enabling privatization of half of any Crown (Bill 40), Unifor and our allies mobilized a highly visible grassroots campaign to fight it. And we won!

On October 24, Wall announced that his government would repeal Bill 40 as a result of intense public pressure. The government has since softened the “repeal” promise but the privatization provisions are expected to go.

Of course, much of the credit goes to our local activists and the “air war” Unifor has been waging for over a year. We didn’t let Wall’s majority government be an excuse to fight for what we believe is right for Saskatchewan.

As several contract negotiations involving Ontario members were prominent in the news this fall, I was struck by how the bargaining of these individual collective agreements connect to the union’s work to effect change on a provincial, national, and even global basis.

In Ingersoll, Ontario 2,800 Local 88 members at the GM CAMI plant took strike action, bringing the loss of manufacturing jobs to Mexico to the forefront. The migration of jobs, both out of country and out of bargaining units, was also a key bargaining issue for
Bell Clerical members, who have seen their numbers eroded from 11,000 down to 4,800 in recent years.

These workers, our sisters and brothers, clearly illustrate why our union must fight for fair international trade deals. Unifor will continue to lead the call to end the exploitation of Mexican workers and the exodus of good paying Canadian jobs as renegotiations for a new NAFTA take place.

In Windsor, Medical Lab Assistants and Medical Lab Technologists, represented by Local 2458, also took to the picket line, highlighting the disparity between medical workers in the public and private sectors. Their demand for high-quality publicly funded health care is one that we all must carry forward into the upcoming Ontario election campaign.

While each agreement is designed to achieve the best possible deal for Unifor members, the power of collective bargaining extends beyond each workplace, with the ability to raise standards both across industries and across the map. Every bargaining gain of our union is a victory for workers as we use our success to build and support each other. I look forward to building a better future together—one collective agreement at a time.

New Brunswickers. That dialogue is paying off with labour and government sharing a number of common goals. The government just announced that it will introduce anti-workplace violence legislation and first contract legislation.

Unifor is also pushing for pay equity in the private sector, improvements to upskilling and training, and paid gender-based violence leave.

This doesn’t mean we agree on everything, but our job as a union is to improve our members’ working conditions—and if a government is listening, we must take advantage of that.

In October’s Throne Speech, the NB government said “a strong partnership with the labour movement is a key component of a successful economic growth strategy.”

That “partnership” in New Brunswick proves that a modern, collaborative relationship with unions benefits all.

It’s encouraging.

The Gallant government could teach a thing or two to the McNeil government just a few kilometers down the Trans-Canada highway.

No one is holding their breath waiting for the McNeil Liberals in Nova Scotia to make a Gallant move.
Building Justice In The Face Of Neo-Fascism

Donald Trump’s election was a shock to many Canadians. But he easily won the nomination in a deep and experienced field of Republican leaders, and his rallies sometimes rivaled those of Barack Obama.

The fact that we were shocked should be a signal that leaders and organizers on the Left have work to do, and much to learn.

Trump’s slim victory wasn’t just a failure to mobilize a pre-existing Democrat voting base. It was also a failure to unite workers around economic justice, especially white workers.

Racialized workers in the U.S. have always experienced greater economic exclusion, and their voting patterns have more often than not rejected America’s conservative movement (Trump and his predecessors regularly garner only 10 per cent of the vote from Black Americans). It was the Left’s failure to win over millions of white workers that should be a source of concern for social movements in Canada and around the world.

The modern neoliberal economy has not provided the financial security for working people that was enjoyed by previous generations. Under “free trade,” good jobs have taken flight to low-wage jurisdictions. Consumer debt and student debt are at historic highs. Social services and education systems are deeply compromised or have begun to collapse.

This is exactly where progressive alternatives to the status quo should have carried the day. Instead, race-baiting and nonsensical economic “solutions” prevailed.

The challenge to Unifor and the Left is to determine the “why” and the “how” to get back on course and build a just and equitable society.

Trump’s far-right supporters are not just an American phenomenon. Far-right movements have gained considerable momentum in recent years, from Western Europe to Asia.

Within Canada, brash and aggressive personalities such as Rob Ford, Ezra Levant, Kellie Leitch, and Kevin O’Leary have pushed the envelope with success and varying degrees of support. Canadian anti-Islamic groups have been emboldened by the rhetoric south of the border.

No one should be under the illusion that Trump-style populism won’t be a model for desperate conservatives in Canada.

So while he may be a clownish and easy target for our anger and outrage, the Left’s path to victory (and longevity) can’t get stalled in the ridicule of a single foreign leader. We must be inclusive, solutions-focused, and international.

We can organize and learn effective ways to assert more strongly the values we hold most dear. It is important to not be silent but rather to push back against the politics of sexism, racism, xenophobia and fear that got Trump into the White House.

This resistance can take many forms. Every day activism involves challenging racism and having conversations with (not lecturing) our friends, family, and neighbours.

In the labour movement, we can be bold and clear about our goals for equity and justice. Some electoral failures are the result of chasing a non-existent “middle ground” between Left and Right, which only serves to frustrate and confuse working people who are eager for clear alternatives to the economic system that is failing them so badly.

Rejecting tepid incrementalism and embracing progressive platforms has been key to the grassroots success of leaders such as Jeremy Corbyn in the U.K. and Bernie Sanders in the...
Of Neo-Fascism

U.S. Corbyn and Sanders are real-world experiments in the flip side of populism in which unabashedly progressive ideas captured the imagination and optimism of working people. Similar stories of Left movement successes are found in France, Spain, and Greece.

The cautious liberal establishments that refused to question the status quo were left to react with desperation and suspicion.

In this regard, the labour movement has a critical role to play in both community organizing and electoral politics. Unions can use local networks to build support for broad reform such as childcare, pharmacare, and democratic reform—policies that could dramatically reduce social inequality.

Conversely, organized labour must beware traps set by the right-wing populists. For example, if there is no clear distinction between the Right’s anti-immigration rhetoric and our caution about the exploitation of temporary foreign workers, the labour movement’s momentum can be turned against us.

Finally, labour’s response to the rise of fascist elements of the right-wing must be international. In a world figuratively shrinking every day thanks to global trade and growing digital connectivity, social justice cannot truly take root if it is limited to small pockets of wealthy western nations. Our union can work in respectful and meaningful partnership with a global movement to amplify and support the struggles of workers in the global south.

The fact that we were shocked should be a signal that leaders and organizers on the Left have work to do, and much to learn.

Equity Update

Breaking Down Barriers, From Audit to Action

Unifor members have won gains for equity and are united in their drive to build inclusive communities. Many Unifor collective agreements include strong anti-discrimination language and provisions for the Women’s Advocate program.

Members have lobbied to have domestic violence leave enshrined in provincial labour law across the country. At days of action, celebration and resistance across the country, Unifor members fight for equity in their communities and workplaces.

Even as this work continues, barriers still exist within the union that prevent full inclusion for many people. Unifor is not immune to the systems of oppression that operate in Canada and around the world.

The recently completed Equity Audit shows a commitment to fight this internal inequality.

“We focus on equity because we care about fairness and justice,” said Jerry Dias, Unifor National President. “By choosing to address these issues in our own union, Unifor will be stronger than ever.”

The Equity Audit was a year-long project that surveyed nearly 470 local unions, representing 80 per cent of Unifor’s 315,000 members. Equity Coordinators Kesang Kashi and Christine Maclin carried out the interviews.

The results, presented at Canadian Council in August, 2017, took note of representation for equity-seeking groups in union leadership and staff, as well as the status of active committees dedicated to human rights issues.

The data collected shows large gaps in representation for workers of colour, for indigenous workers, for workers with disabilities, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) workers and for young workers.

On local executive committees, at the bargaining table, and as stewards, equity-seeking groups are consistently left behind. Download the final report at unifor.org/equity.

The Equity Audit set a baseline from which the union can improve. When members of equity-seeking groups have representation and when members engage with human rights issues, Unifor’s collective voice becomes stronger.

Mohamad Alsadi, Unifor Human Rights and International Director, encouraged all members to take action to remove barriers.

“The work of building a more equitable world starts at home, with human rights campaigns and committees and through inviting the most oppressed workers to be a part of union activism and governance.”

Canadian Council delegates voted to establish a national Equity Advisory Panel to build on the audit findings and begin the work to close the gaps.

Unifor’s equity calendar, available in this issue of Uniforum and at unifor.org/equitydays, identifies events every month that local unions can organize around.
As we look ahead to next year, one of the biggest issues Unifor faced in 2017 is likely to continue to be a concern in 2018.

With Donald Trump in the White House, trade suddenly became an even bigger issue for Canada—and for Unifor—in 2017.

The year began with Trump, just days after being sworn in as president, signing an executive order to remove the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It ends with the federal government looking for ways to revive the TPP without the United States.

Between the TPP and NAFTA, and the ongoing talks towards a new softwood lumber deal with the United States, we can expect trade to continue to be a top issue and a major priority for our union.

Meanwhile, the North American Free Trade renegotiations that should have wrapped up by the end of December are now extending into 2018.

Between the TPP and NAFTA, and the ongoing talks towards a new softwood lumber deal with the United States, we can expect trade to continue to be a top issue and a major priority for our union.

We are ready for it. At Canadian Council last August, Unifor launched its biggest campaign yet—People’s Trade: A New Agenda for Trade Agreements—to change the way trade deals are negotiated in Canada.

For too long, trade deals have put the wishes of corporations and wealthy investors ahead of the needs of working people, their communities, equity-seeking groups and the environment. That must change.

The centrepiece of the campaign will be a series of town hall meetings across Canada looking at what trade deals mean to the local community and residents. Information and ideas will be gathered at these town halls, to form the basis of the campaign’s final report.

The People’s Trade campaign will bring all of Unifor’s trade efforts together by setting out a broad agenda to fundamentally change the way trade deals are negotiated in Canada.

Besides trade, Unifor will also be active in provincial elections.

There will be an election in Ontario on June 7. This is an important election in a province where Unifor was part of a wider struggle by progressive groups to keep the right-wing Conservatives, led at the time by Tim Hudak, out of power in 2014.

Hudak has since been replaced by Patrick Brown, who is trying to portray himself as a kinder and more compassionate Conservative, despite a record from his days as a federal MP of voting against same sex marriage and a woman’s right to reproductive choice.

Unifor will work hard to make sure that voters know the true face of Brown and the Conservative Party in Ontario.

An election is also expected in New Brunswick next September, where the Liberals under Brian Gallant defeated the previous Conservative government in 2014.

Unifor will be active in that election, too, fighting for a provincial government that will continue to work with unions to improve workers’ rights and workplace conditions.

Minority governments in Nova Scotia and British Columbia could also face unexpected elections.

Next August 17-19, Unifor delegates from across Canada will gather in Halifax for the 2018 Canadian Council to be held in that city. Watch for more details, but for now mark the date in your calendar.
Since the start of 2017, customs agents and RCMP officers stationed at the Lacolle border south of Montreal have been dealing with a dramatic rise in illegal border crossings. These migrants have resolved to enter Canada illegally because it is the only way for them to be accepted as refugee claimants here in Canada. Under the Safe Third Country Agreement (U.S. is the only country recognized as such by Canada), a person must apply for refugee status in the first safe country they arrive in, whether it’s Canada or the United States.

Since the people crossing arrived in the United States first, they are no longer eligible to apply for refugee status here in Canada. The only option available to them is to enter the country illegally. A number of migrants have nearly died in their attempts to pass through the woods on icy cold nights without proper attire.

As a result of this situation, thousands of migrants, the majority of them of Haitian origin, have landed in Canada, quickly overwhelming authorities, who have had to scramble to install tents and toilets. The Olympic stadium in Montreal was even commandeered to shelter the newcomers.

This sudden and massive influx, numbering in the hundreds on certain days, is largely the result of threats made by U.S. President Donald Trump to cancel the temporary visas granted by former president Barak Obama to people of Haitian origin following the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010.

But it should be mentioned that the wave of migrants has also included people of African and Middle Eastern origin worried about Trump’s policies regarding migrants, especially Muslims.

It takes extraordinary courage and determination to leave one’s life and possessions behind, in many cases for the second time. Often, it’s a desperate decision driven by one concern: to improve their chances of a better life for themselves and their loved ones. Giving up everything with no idea of what lies ahead is an excruciating decision that reflects just how worried these people are.

Today, the wave of immigration has slowed down, and the situation appears to have returned to normal, but we now face the enormous challenge of integrating the thousands of immigrants and their children.

The Island of Montreal’s school network has been called on to act quickly to take charge of the thousands of scared, uprooted children, many of whom do not speak French.

Unifor has contributed to a campaign to provide school supplies to these refugees by making a $25,000 donation to the organization Regroupement Partage.

It takes extraordinary courage and determination to leave one’s life and possessions behind, in many cases for the second time.
Learn About the Industries Where Unifor Members Work

For the first time since the formation of the union, Unifor’s Research Department has produced sector profiles in both official languages, providing a helpful resource for leaders and members.

“Researchers worked with directors, local and national leadership and with members to develop these profiles,” said Research Director Bill Murnighan.

“These are not static documents. Information will be updated regularly with input from those in each sector.”

These documents, 19 in total, are full of interesting economic facts about some of the largest industries where Unifor has members, as well as a general profile of the Canadian economy, including: aerospace, aviation, major auto, casinos and gaming, education and the broader public sector, energy, food and beverage processing, forestry, health care, hospitality, independent auto parts, marine transportation, media, mining, metals and minerals, rail, retail and wholesale, road transportation, and telecommunications.

The profiles also include Unifor’s public policy priorities in these sectors, major developments and a profile of Unifor’s representation in the sector.

The purpose of the profiles is to have a centralized, convenient and reliable source of information available to members, allies and those who want to learn more about our union.

These profiles can be used in a variety of settings, including supporting collective bargaining, supporting our efforts to organize new members, lobbying federal and provincial governments, membership education and as a resource for media, among other uses.

The sector profiles are available on our website at unifor.org/resources
Taking on Occupational Cancer

The Unifor Health, Safety and Environment Department is once again asking members to be actively involved in the union’s Prevent Cancer campaign.

Cancer is now the leading cause of death in Canada. It is estimated that one in every two Canadians will develop some form of cancer in their lifetime.

Of those statistics, occupational exposures are responsible for approximately two to 10 per cent of all newly diagnosed cancer cases. Millions of Canadians are exposed to a wide range of known and suspected carcinogens in the workplace. These include industrial chemicals, metals, engine exhaust, fibres and dusts, solar UV radiation and nightshift work. Toxins workers are exposed to on the job also often make their way into workers’ homes and surrounding communities.

The Occupational Cancer Research Centre (OCRC) is nearing completion of a four-year study, using historical data collected as part of the CAREX Canada project and the Canadian Workplace Exposure Database funded by the Canadian Partnership against Cancer.

In addition to raising awareness among physicians about the occupational causes of cancer, which could lead to earlier diagnoses of the disease, this national study is also expected to help guide workplace prevention practices and programs.

Our Prevent Cancer campaign provides suggestions and petitions to members to raise awareness of occupational and environmental exposures to cancer-causing chemicals, explore safer alternatives in the workplace and take political action. Unifor also advocates for all provinces to conduct studies of occupational cancers.

As we await the results of this important new study, we encourage you to read the recent report on burden of occupational cancer in Ontario at: occupationalcancer.ca

Contact us for more information at healthandsafety@unifor.org, or visit unifor.org/preventcancer.
Working people deserve better