



Labour Reporter

Saskatchewan's Voice of Labour

DECEMBER 2009



Public perception of unions is misguided

GARY ENGLER, vice-president of CEP local 2000, recently blew the lid off the situation at Canwest Global, Canada's largest media conglomerate. The corporation is filing for court protection against creditors.

What he revealed at rabble.ca is a startling picture of corporate greed.

Workers at Canwest are being 're-structured', meaning laid off, with no severance pay, as previously promised. Eighty retirees will lose medical, dental and life insurance benefits. One hundred and twenty retirees face reduced pensions. Stock has plummeted from \$20 a few years ago to about \$0.25 per share. Shareholders will be getting just a few cents on the dollar.

But what about the three directors, four top executives and 13 other senior managers at Canwest? They're walking away with over \$9.8 million in bonuses, and retirement benefits for life. Yes, bonuses, on top of already exorbitant salaries.

Canada's legal system allows for this to happen.

So what does this have to do with unions? Well we've all heard the accusations that unions are greedy, ei-

ther in the media or from people in our lives. Unions have even been blamed for the recent economic meltdown.

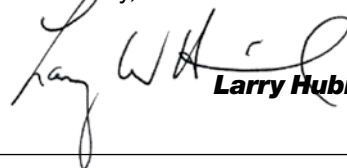
The reality is something totally different. The people who run the large corporations, the executives, and their friends in government who make the rules, are those ultimately responsible for the meltdown. They wanted to get richer, and they did.

Unions advocate for those without much power or wealth. And we believe workers deserve to share in the wealth that they help to create. Every time union members receive a raise, they pay more taxes, and they spend their money locally, supporting Saskatchewan's economy.

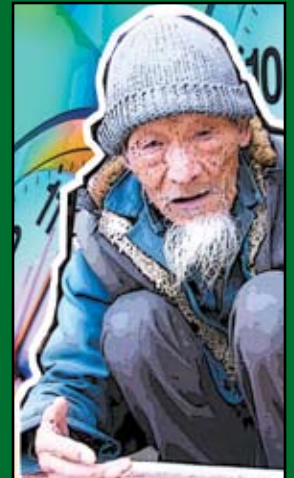
Unions push for fair laws, for public services like rural post offices, and for industry regulations to keep products and services safe.

Let's respond to those falsehoods. The answer is found in our trade union principles: "An Injury to One is an Injury to All." Be proud to be union.

In Solidarity,


Larry Hubich

“Every time union members receive a raise, they pay more taxes, and they spend their money locally, supporting Saskatchewan's economy.”



It's a fact:

■ A Bangladesh garment worker would have to work 118,000 years to earn the annual bonus of a Merrill Lynch CEO.

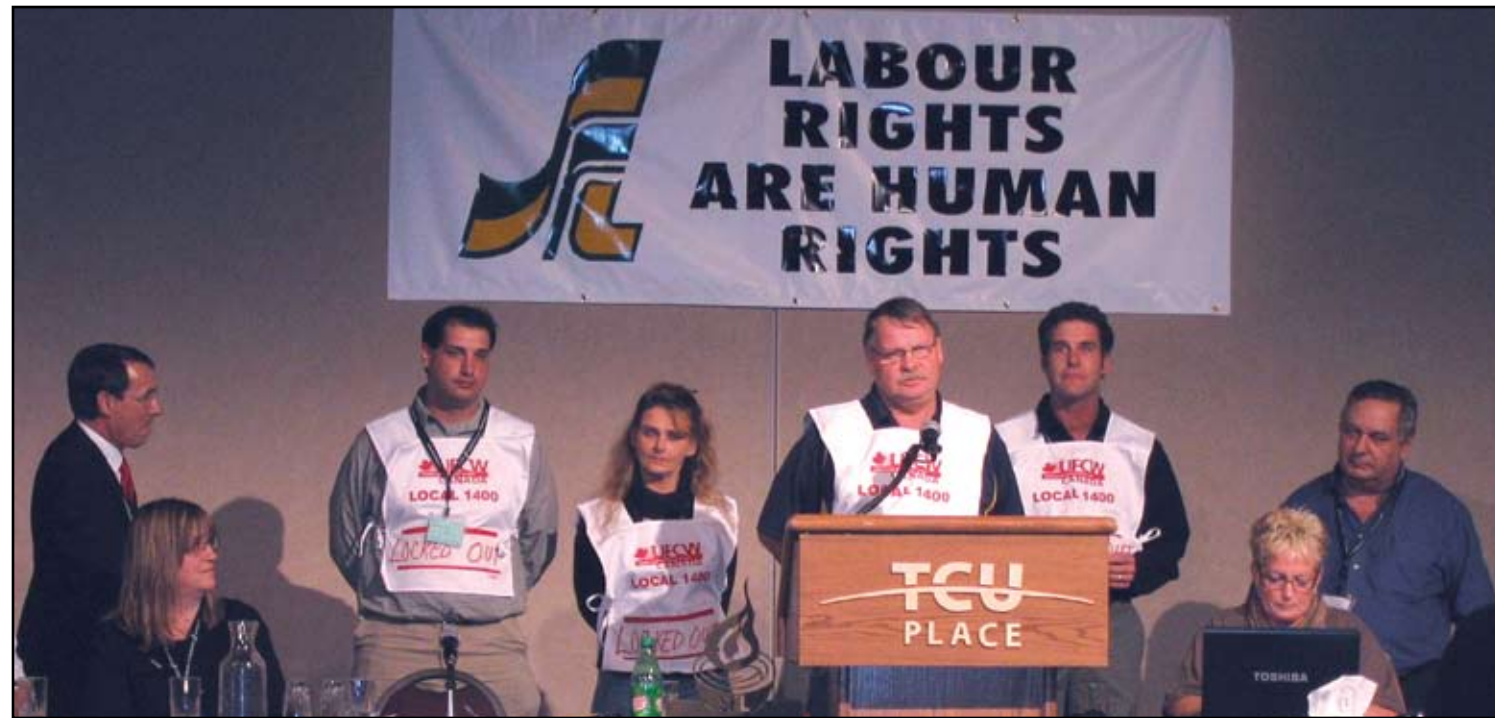
Source: Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation.

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“Although it is true that only about 20 percent of American workers are in unions, that 20 percent sets the standards across the board in salaries, benefits and working conditions. If you are making a decent salary in a non-union company, you owe that to the unions.”

Molly Ivins, American political commentator, journalist & author



UFCW on the line at XL Beef



APPROXIMATELY 200 MEMBERS of United Food and Commercial Workers local 1400 in Moose Jaw have been locked out since September 18th.

The situation for workers at XL Beef has gone from bad to worse. First the workers were laid off in April; then the employer insisted on bargaining throughout the layoff, tabling several offers with an ever-escalating number of concessions.

The workers are particularly opposed to an increase in mandatory overtime hours. Unlimited mandatory overtime would be a violation of Saskatchewan's Labour Standards Act, which limits hours of work to 44 per week.

"XL Beef says that collectively a group of individual workers can agree to a standard lower than that provision of the Act. Our research shows that unions cannot contract out of the Labour Standards Act. But the employer will not drop the issue," said Norm Neault, president of local 1400.

The union is also disconcerted that XL Beef mailed offers to individual members' homes, rather than communicating through the union as the certified bargaining agent.

The workers have now rejected two offers, the latest by 93.5 per cent. "We were not surprised by that number because the last offer we got from the employer contains

several more concessions that hadn't even previously been on the table. They tabled a lower wage package over four years and extended it from a four-year deal to a six-year deal. They wanted to remove the fifth week of vacation for members hired after 1966, and to remove a clause that lays out a formula for separation pay if the plant closes. And they want to increase the mandatory overtime provision except for weeks that statutory holidays occur. This employer is acting like a bully," said Neault.

Just prior to the previous rejected offer, the company locked the workers out.

"The support from the rest of the labour movement has been fantastic. Unions at the SFL Convention recently raised over \$25,000 towards the lockout fund. Our members need these donations to get by, especially because they were cut off of their employment insurance benefits when they were locked out," said Neault.

"We're looking at leafletting the stores XL Beef supplies, and we may be looking at a boycott of the product. In the meantime, we've been offering training to the members on the line, such as computer classes, and CPR/First Aid training. We invite folks to come out to our picket line half a mile west of Moose Jaw off Caribou Street," added Neault.



SFL convention highlights

THE 54TH ANNUAL SFL convention saw 550 workers come together in Saskatoon at the end of October. Delegates spent a good deal of time on the issue of the Wall government's anti-labour, privatization agenda.

Delegates heard presentations from the Save our Saskatchewan Crowns Coalition and from retail workers campaigning against private liquor stores.

Workers passed resolutions to continue to oppose public-private partnerships (P3s) and to oppose essential services legislation. Delegates threw their support behind the Building Trades who are campaigning against Bill 80, changes to the Construction Industry Labour Relations Act.

As always, the Convention directed its attention to the issue of occupational health and safety, lighting candles for those who died on the job in the last year. The Convention presented Brother Roy Howell from the United Steelworkers with the first annual Bob Sass Safe Worker Award. The award was designed to honour long-time health and safety activists in the movement.

Guest speaker Murray Dobbin described how the powerful corporate sector is undermining democracy.. "The latest series of corporate tax cuts means even less revenue for governments, which is badly needed to provide core public services. It's time we demand that corporations pay their fair share," said Dobbin.

Armine Yalnizyan, senior economist for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives brought a message of praise to the Convention. "Saskatchewan citizens are unique.

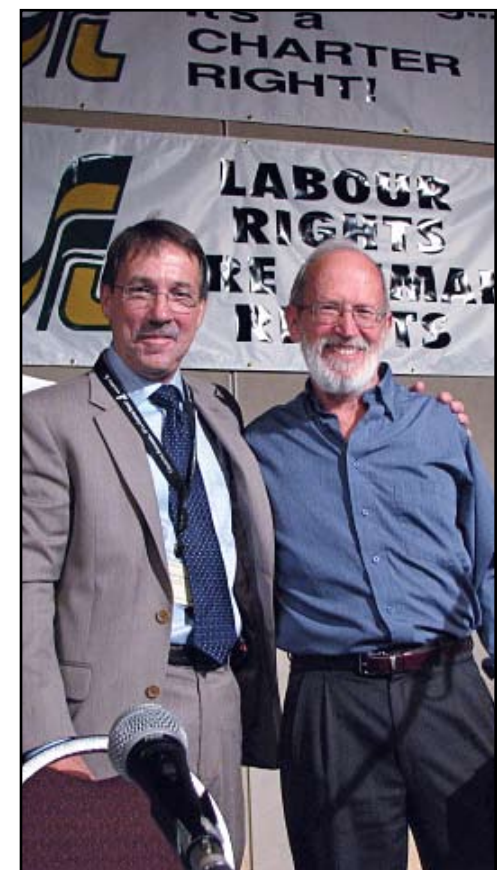
Dating back to the 1930s with the Regina Manifesto, they have a long history of building a movement of movements to demand progressive social change. And the country is watching you do that now as you organize to fight for labour rights and a more equal society," she said.

One guest was missing from the Convention this year. The SFL Executive Council made a decision earlier in the week to "uninvite" Minister of Labour Rob Norris.

"Marvin (SFL Treasurer) and I had met with the Minister the previous week and the topic of his speech came up. We suggested that he might want to run past us the thrust of his comments so that we could raise any red flags for him. It was felt that last year's speech was not as productive as it could be," said SFL President Larry Hubich.

In 2008, delegates disrupted the Minister's speech when he began to praise Bills 5 and 6, by singing 'Solidarity Forever' and moving to the back of the room to stand with striking Steelworkers.

Hubich explained to delegates that the Minister did not seem open to sharing his plans for this year's presentation. "Unions are fed up with the fact that the Minister has never properly consulted with the labour movement on so many of the government's legislative changes. Ultimately, we felt our time together as a movement was better spent building an action plan for the coming year, rather than entertaining a Minister who has such little respect for the valuable contributions of labour in our province," added Hubich.



TOP LEFT: SFL delegates joined hundreds of Saskatoon residents for an anti-Bush demonstration. Former U.S. President George Bush spoke at a fundraising luncheon at TCU Place.

TOP RIGHT: Lori Johb, SFL OH&S Committee chair, presents Roy Howell with the first annual Bob Sass Safe Worker award.

BOTTOM: Larry Hubich welcomes journalist and political commentator Murray Dobbin to Convention.

Top: Delegates at SFL Annual Convention raised \$25,000 for locked out UFCW workers.
Middle: XL Beef workers on the picketline in Moose Jaw.
Above: UFCW member John Soika supports his co-workers from hospital, where he recently underwent hip surgery.

SEIU-West members

get all fired up

“It’s exciting to see our union really mobilizing our grassroots membership, not only about workplace issues, but about politics. We need more than ever to be involved in the political process, as workers, but as constituents and voters too.”

— Sandy Weyland,
SEIU-West political action
committee

EXCITING CHANGES ARE UNDERWAY at one of Saskatchewan’s largest unions. The Service Employees’ International Union (SEIU) recently revamped its structure and is working to build a more politically active membership.

“We knew the landscape would change with a Saskatchewan Party government in power, and that we would need to build a stronger union in the face of attacks on our rights,” says Barbara Cape, President of SEIU-West.

Cape was made President of the newly-named organization SEIU-West, in June 2008 when the three major locals of SEIU merged into one. SEIU-West now totals approximately 12,000 members, and represents members primarily in healthcare and education services.

The change in structure led to the creation of a new department dedicated to political action, and a newly-energized political action committee co-chaired by Sandy Weyland and Connie Jattansingh.

“Our committee is getting active in two ways,” says Weyland. “The first is getting rank and file members involved in political

action around elections. We’re talking to our members as constituents, encouraging them to ask candidates questions on the doorstep, and to really hold their politicians accountable. We’ve also got a political action strategy around collective bargaining.”

Contract negotiations for our healthcare workers have been dragging out under the new essential services legislation. SEIU-West is lobbying, writing letters to politicians and holding several rallies to protest the legislation.

The campaign involves lobbying, writing letters to politicians, and holding several rallies.

The most recent demonstration took place at the Legislature in conjunction with CUPE and SGEU, their partners in the tri-union healthcare coalition. SEIU-West’s healthcare workers have been without a contract since March 2008.

So far, between 75 and 95 per cent of SEIU-West members have been designated ‘essential’ and will not legally be allowed to participate in strike activity in order to leverage a collective agreement.

“Our right to strike has effectively been taken away. And the employer’s current offer of 9.25 per cent over four years is not acceptable - neither are the concessions on the table. The members are angry and frustrated,” says Cape.

SEIU-West members have filled out over 2,200 forms and thousands of letters, and submitted them to the government over the last several months.

“The forms document each time our members work with less staff than the levels at which they’ve been designated ‘essential’ during a strike. The government clearly cares more about taking away union rights than about dealing with the urgent shortage of healthcare workers in this province,” says Cape.

The issue of healthcare shortages is also resonating with the membership, who routinely work understaffed. During Special Care Homes Week, normally a non-political event, Cape wrote letters to politicians asking them to ensure safe and appropriate staffing levels in Saskatchewan’s special care homes.

“It all starts with membership educa-

tion. This fall we held a provincial unit chairs meeting to provide education to as many shopfloor leaders as possible on the legislation this government has enacted. We talked about essential services legislation, changes to the Trade Union Act, and CLAC,” says Jattansingh.

CLAC is the Christian Labour Association of Canada, known to be an employer-dominated union that signs substandard collective agreements.

Many of CLAC’s new members are raids on legitimate trade unions and CLAC recently opened up office in Saskatchewan.

SEIU-West has also hired John Benoit, a full-time organizing director. “Part of building a strong union is reaching out to the thousands of workers who don’t have the benefits of a union,” says Cape.

“It’s exciting to see our union really mobilizing our grassroots membership, not only about workplace issues, but about politics. We need more than ever to be involved in the political process, as workers, but as constituents and voters too,” says Weyland.

“Part of building a strong union is reaching out to the thousands of workers who don’t have the benefits of a union.”

— Barbara Cape, SEIU-West
president



OPPOSITE PAGE, FAR LEFT: Thousands of protest letters are delivered to the provincial government at a June 8 rally in Kinsmen Park, Saskatoon.

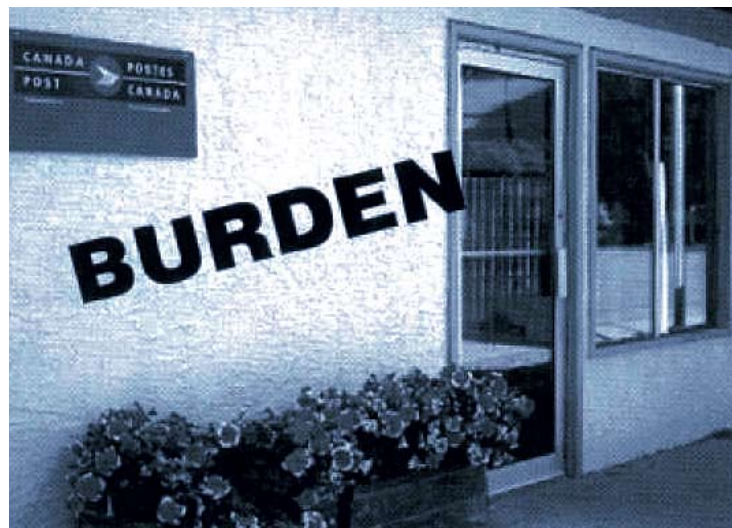
LEFT: SEIU-West co-hosts the tri-union healthcare coalition rally at the Legislature in October.

THIS PAGE, FAR LEFT: President Barbara Cape talks to reporters about essential services legislation and stalled healthcare bargaining.

LEFT: Members ‘Blow the Whistle’ on healthcare provider shortages at a rally at Parkridge Centre in July.

CPAA campaigns to save

The *Labour Reporter* sat down with the Canadian Postmasters' and Assistants Association (CPAA). Darwin Hoimyr is the president of the CPAA Saskatchewan branch. Trudy Labarowski is a director on the CPAA Saskatchewan board and works in the Kyle post office.



The Postmasters ran their "My Community is NOT a Burden" campaign in 2004, in response to Canada Post's position on rural services. Political action to save rural post office continues in 2009.

LR: Tell me about the Postmasters.

TL: We are the approximately 700 members union members who work at the 425 rural post offices across Saskatchewan. We are almost all women, about 96 per cent of our membership is female. Our working conditions are a little different than most - most of us work alone, and some of us work out of our own homes.

That's a pretty big commitment, especially since the leasing allowance we receive from Canada Post doesn't always cover our basic utilities. We've had to push the employer to supply us with things as basic as telephones.

DH: A major focus for the Postmasters is keeping our rural post offices open. Back in 1986, the first time we heard of plans to shut down rural post offices, one of our members was disciplined for speaking publicly about it. We won that battle at arbitration, and ever since we've been running campaigns to keep our communities informed about rural post office closures.

We took part in public meetings, we lobbied Members of Parliament (MPs) in person and in writing, and we developed petitions and resolutions for village and town councils to pass. We set up booths at SUMA and SARM conventions. And we did up flyers and postcards for mass distribution.

TL: We talked to the people in our communities about how a rural post office closure would affect their town. It's a loss of core services - people would have to travel many kilometres to get parcels, for example. But it's also a loss of identity - mail is no longer date stamped locally. During a time when many rural communities are shrinking and

rural post offices



CPAA Board members recently sent out over two thousand political action packages to community members in Cutknife, Battleford, and Stoughton. From left: Trudy Labarowski, Sue Verhelst, Pat Killian, Darwin Hoimyr

bers in 2009. These manager salaries cost over one million dollars per year. We have examples from Kinistino, to La Loche, to Battleford where services are being cut and workers' rights violated, so managers can achieve cost reductions and in doing so earn bonuses. We've become so top heavy.

LR: Just this year Canada Post did a strategic review of all of its services. How do those recommendations affect rural post offices?

DH: Our biggest concern is that Canada Post announced a new 'Service Charter' which basically means that when a vacancy comes up in a rural post office, Canada Post no longer has to give communities the option to maintain the status quo and hire a replacement postmaster.

LR: How can the rest of the labour movement help the Postmasters?

TL: We are asking workers from every community in the province to support our rural post offices by contacting their MP. Tell them that it looks like the government has re-opened the door to allow Canada Post to close rural post offices. Ask your MP to close that door and maintain the moratorium on closures.

LR: What's the best part of being a Postmaster?

TL: I've worked for Canada Post for coming on 25 years. I've worked in Pennant, and now Kyle. I love the relationship I have with the customers - we get to know our customers on a first-name basis. Our rural post offices help keep rural Saskatchewan strong and we aim to keep it that way. 🇺🇸

How would a post office closure affect you?

- » Customers will have to travel to another town to retrieve or send large parcels, registers, COD's, etc.
- » Government forms (passports, bird permits, income tax forms) will no longer be available in your community.
- » Mail is not postmarked locally.
- » Mailings where the date of mailing can have a significant impact on the mailer will be delayed (i.e. hail insurance claims)
- » Mail delivery will now be outdoors.
- » A job and the resulting wage is taken out of the community.
- » In most towns across Canada, your post office is the only federal presence, and with the loss of your post office, your community also loses a part of its national identity.

Council and resident action can make a difference. As a federal Crown corporation, Canada Post takes direction from, and is accountable to, the government of Canada.

Brief history of Canada Post

■ **1982:** Canada Post becomes a Crown corporation, with a mandate to provide postal service to all Canadians.

■ **1986 TO 1994:** 214 rural Saskatchewan communities lose their post office.

■ **1994:** Following over a dozen years of political action campaigns across the country by the Postmasters, the federal government declares a moratorium on rural post office closures.

■ **2004:** Michael Diotte, a vice-president of Canada Post, calls rural post offices a "burden on the corporation's bottom line".

■ **1989 - 2009:** Canada Post increases the ratio of Postmaster managers to workers in Saskatchewan, from two managers in 1989, to 28 in 2009.

■ **1995 - 2009:** Canada Post pays hundreds of millions of dollars in dividends and income tax to the federal coffers, and nets 1.2 billion dollars in profits of its own.

■ **2009:** Federal government announces that Canada Post no longer has to give communities the option of keeping their post office when a postmaster job vacancy arises.

The workers' wish list

IN THIS BUSY HOLIDAY SEASON, we wish for:

- The will and desire to fight for workers, the impoverished and the marginalized.
- The courage to stand up for what is right.
- The ability and opportunity to learn and grow through the labour movement.
- The continuing support of our workshops, schools and conferences.
- Our hearts and minds to be open to change.
- An end to those things that divide us, such as discrimination, racism, harassment, sexism and homophobia.
- Dignity and respect for all.
- Support from family members whose

loved one is an activist and is away from home a lot. Please help them understand the importance of the work we do.

● Joy, prosperity and good health for you and your family today and everyday.

● Safety as you travel on life's road.

● And most of all – we wish for peace in our lives, communities and throughout the world.

Season's greetings from
your SFL executive council



HONOUR & GIVE

A TRIBUTE TO THE
100TH ANNIVERSARY
OF INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY

March 6, 2010
Queensbury Downs,
Exhibition Park, Regina

5:00 Cocktails
6:00 Dinner

Tickets: \$50
Corporate Tables: \$500

Tickets are available at
Book & Brier Patch,
4065 Albert St.
or
University of Regina
Women's Centre
(call 584-1255)
or
Regina Early
Learning Centre
(757-3744)

Silent Auction
A portion of the proceeds will be donated
to the Regina Early Learning Centre

Featuring Keynote Speaker
Buffy Sainte-Marie

Proudly brought to you by:

Canadian Union
of Postal Workers
local 820

Ron's retirement

CONGRATULATIONS TO Ron Torgerson, who retired this summer from the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, after 17 years of service. Ron was instrumental in overseeing the Workers' Education and Skills Training program, a literacy program for workers.

His efforts helped many workers acquire transferable skills in areas such as basic numeracy and literacy.

Just prior to his retirement, Ron was on a two-year secondment to the Saskatchewan Labour Market Commission as a project manager. His primary area of work was the development of a skills toolkit for workers in the construction sector.

Enjoy your retirement, Ron!

mark your calendar

DATE	EVENT
Dec. 1	World AIDS Day
Dec. 3	Int'l. Day for Persons with Disabilities
Dec. 6	National Day of Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women
Dec. 10	International Human Rights Day
Feb. 11-12	SFL Equity Conference (Saskatoon)
March 6	Prairie Lily Feminist Society – Honour & Give: 100th Anniversary of IWD (Regina)
March 8	International Women's Day (IWD)
March 21	International Day for Elimination of Racism
March 22-23	SFL Shiftwork Conference (Regina)
April 28	International Day of Mourning