

Mobilizing members to improve health and safety

Many members believe that mobilizing is only needed during negotiations. It is true that active members are key to dealing with the employer. In fact, a mobilized and organized membership can make the difference between successful or failed negotiations. But mobilizing can also be used to enforce and improve our rights when we're not negotiating. This is particularly true when dealing with health and safety issues. Over the years, workers' rights have not been won by chance. Hard-fought struggles and mobilizing were instrumental in improving the well-being of thousands of workers.

Why mobilize around health and safety?

The answer is simple: our objectives are completely opposed to those of our employers. The union's main objective is to defend and protect the rights and health of our members so they can retire healthy. The employer's main objective is minimizing costs and maximizing profits. This employer position has an impact on what members

CUPW members protest against Manulife's harassment of sick and injured members outside the Manulife Financial office.



experience on the work floor. Both internal and external Canada Post workers face numerous health and safety issues, clearly seen in our high rate of injury. What is the corporation doing to correct this situation? Canada Post takes the position that the worker is responsible for being injured at work. This is all the more

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Mobilizing around the Modern Post

evident when we review the questions asked by supervisors during investigations of work-related injuries. Most questions have to do with the workers' behaviour, as can be seen from the terms used in the corporation's investigation reports, e.g. lack of attention or improper practice. Canada Post even intends to implement a process for employees who are frequently injured. Finally, what can we say about the actions of Manulife representatives in dealing with sisters and brothers who are dealing with an illness or injury? It is clear that the employer has chosen to label workers as the main cause of accidents.

Fortunately, we have several tools at our disposal to help us enforce our rights. The most important is without a doubt Article 33 of the urban collective agreement, including the right to refuse. This right was inserted into our collective agreement in 1981 as a result of members mobilizing and a 42-day strike. We were one of the first unions in North America to win this fundamental right. Also in the 1980s, membership mobilization enabled us to add new rights, such as recovery leave for night workers, weight limits, improvement of casual sick leave to 10 days and protection for pregnant and nursing mothers. These rights didn't fall from the sky. They are the result of members taking control and demanding better working conditions, while enforcing existing ones.



That's what mobilization does. It unites members in the common cause of fighting for better working conditions. Active members are the only ones who have the power to change things.

Why mobilize now?

Whether it's called Modern Post or Postal Transformation, this multi-billion dollar project has gone into action at Canada Post, whether we like it or not. Based on the information the union has obtained so far, the workplace will undergo drastic changes over the next few years.

How will the modern post affect letter carriers and RSMCs?

With mail sequencing and the new delivery methods proposed by the employer, Group 2 workers and RSMCs will see the organization of their work and personal lives turned upside down. They will spend more time outside the office delivering the mail and, as a result, will be exposed to bad weather and other weather-related risks for longer periods. These workers can also expect to see an increase in the number of points of



call on their routes, and accordingly, have to travel longer in traffic each day. Finally, the method of letter carrier delivery proposed by the employer, which involves reading while walking with three mail bundles, will undoubtedly lead to an increase in work-related injuries.

The employer is also failing to give the union information about the health and safety effects of this new letter carrier delivery method.

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We need help to mobilize

The employer alleges there are no health and safety studies that show an increase in the number of disabling injuries from other post offices using this same delivery method.

How will the modern post affect inside workers?

The news isn't any better for Group 1 members. The employer has informed us that it intends to purchase new, better-performing mechanized sortation equipment that will require fewer employees. These new machines will have a major impact on the health and safety of these members. Just remember the impact the bar code sorters (BCS) had on the number of injuries. It was only thanks to the hard work of the members who mobilized that we were able to finally force Canada Post to conduct a study, which led to recommendations on improving this equipment.

Again, the employer is only providing a little information on the health and safety impacts of the new technology. This is not reassuring at all.

How will the modern post affect Group 3 and 4 members?

For Group 3 and 4 members, the introduction of new equipment and new vehicles should be an incentive to mobilize. We must mobilize not only to keep our jobs, but also to make the employer aware of the need for products that are safe for



In UPCE bargaining, Canada Post attacked sick leave benefits

workers and for the environment. We must mobilize to ensure any new equipment and any new vehicles are repaired in-house. We must insist on more ergonomically-designed tools, which would be safer for workers.

We will all be experiencing a real upheaval that will definitely have an impact on our health and safety. We are at a turning point and it's the ideal time to start mobilizing to enforce and protect our health and safety rights. The employer plans to use us as guinea-pigs for the new delivery methods they want to introduce. External members will have to assess these methods, and tell us what the adverse effects are. With the new equipment the employer plans to introduce, internal members will also have to test the machines and tell us about their adverse effects. Together, by mobilizing around health and safety issues, we'll give a

clear message to the employer that we want to maintain and improve our rights. In doing so, we will get ready to wage the real battle that's coming with the next round of negotiating of our collective agreements in 2011 and 2012.

Who can help us mobilize?

Increasingly, we note in the development of Canada Post's health and safety policies that the Local Joint Health and Safety Committee (LJHSC) and the Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) appear quite far down in the list of "stakeholders". And in some policies, they are totally removed from the process. Other policies found in the Corporate Manual System (CMS) don't indicate that a union representative must be present during the investigation of an injury on duty. This is a violation of our rights. With

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Staying informed is key

this approach, the employer is leading workers to believe that when it comes to health and safety issues, they can only turn to the employer's representative. The employer is also trying to isolate members who often get tired of reporting dangerous situations or fail to report an injury for fear of reprisals. Who can help members mobilize?

Many people can play this role, but the main resource remains the shop steward. First off, stewards know the work place and the members that work there. They are also recognized under the collective agreement, which gives them rights under clause 9.06. In addition, stewards can help members with any question they may have regarding their working conditions, or file a complaint or grievance on their behalf and be the liaison with the local. Stewards have the duty to transmit information on various aspects of the work, but also to educate members regarding their rights and obligations under the collective agreements and legislation.

Finally, they ensure that the employer meets its obligations and maintains a safe and healthy workplace. Shop stewards must be a catalyst for their workplace and a role model in terms of respecting workplace rules, since their credibility is at stake.

On the work floor, there are also activists, who can make demands and be of great assistance to the steward in mobilizing members in the workplace. Together, they can, through their actions, show managers the unfailing bond of solidarity.

Union members on the LJHSC and health and safety representatives are also resources in the workplace. These individuals are already active in helping other members. Finally, at the local, regional and national levels, brothers and sisters are working on health and safety issues. These members are constantly ready to enforce the rights of workers.

Why is information important?

Information remains the crux of the labour relations war. The employer



does not want you to know what your rights are. On the other hand, CUPW tries to make all members aware of what is happening in their workplace through work floor meetings, bulletins and health and safety training sessions. Accurate and timely information helps us mobilize more easily to face an employer as narrow-minded as ours. Members who are involved and well informed can only help improve everyone's well-being, close ranks and strengthen our power.

Mobilization remains an effective tool in improving our working conditions. Not only does it allow members to take part in developing actions, but it also allows them to benefit from the gains made. It also shows the employer our willingness to fight. Imagine if all members throughout the country were mobilized in support of health and safety. Imagine how much we could change.

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