

In Brief On work and struggle at Canada Post

By MIKE PALECEK

• Three **Occupy** activists settled with the city of Fredericton in December over a lawsuit the activists had filed pertaining to the dismantling of their camp at Fredericton City Hall in 2011. The out-of-court settlement package included \$14,350 in damages and an apology from Mayor Brad Woodside. Julian Renaud, Dana Hartt, and Alex Davenport filed a small claims suit against the city, Mayor Woodside and the city's director of engineering and public works Murray Jamer in April 2012.

• BWS Manufacturing of Centreville, New Brunswick, stands accused of **union busting**. Twenty-six skilled workers who make parts for heavy-duty trailers were laid off just before Christmas. According to union organizers, 24 of the 26 laid off workers had just signed union cards. BWS Manufacturing, owned by Premier David Alward's cousin, received \$1.5 million from the government in 2013 to expand its operations. Their plan was to hire 30 more workers. Mario Fortunato, an organizer with the United Steelworkers, told the New Brunswick Labour and Employment Board in early December that BWS workers started a union drive in September after complaining of low wages and poor working conditions. The Board will take months to make a decision on whether BSW had grounds to lay off the workers.

• At least **4,000 children died in Canada's residential schools**, according to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) investigation. Over 150,000 indigenous children in Canada were taken from their families from the 1860s to the 1990s and "educated" with the goal of "killing the Indian in the child." The records indicated the children suffered and died from fires, abuse, disease and suicide. Children were buried in unmarked graves near the schools because the Canadian government refused to pay for their trip home. Many parents were never told what happened to their children.

• For the first time in the history of the University of New Brunswick, its **professors are on strike**. On January 13, professors and teaching and library staff at UNB, members of the Association of UNB Teachers (AUNBT), set up picket lines around the Fredericton and Saint John campuses. The professors are fighting for comparability with wages of their counterparts at 14 similar sized universities across the country. "Some of us profs, but certainly not all, and I don't think the number is as high as management indicates, earn \$100,000+. It is a lot of money, but at UNB that is only after years of service and includes the many standard promotions someone would get at any company. To earn this salary takes at minimum 9 additional years of education beyond high school (often closer to 10 or 12) - that's 9 years of tuition and books and 9 years of not earning a full-time salary and getting promoted," wrote Rob Moir, an economics professor at UNB Saint John on January 16. Moir noted that nearly 50 teaching and librarian positions have been cut in the last eight years at UNB while 80 positions have been added to the university's management.



UNB students brought cookies and sandwich wraps to their striking professors on January 15. "We totally appreciate the support-and the treats! The snowman cookies have picket signs! Aw," posted AUNBT on their Facebook page. Photo from AUNBT's Facebook page.

I remember my first day at Canada Post. I stepped into an elevator with an elderly letter carrier who proudly proclaimed that he had the highest seniority in the country. I have no idea if it was true. I told him it was my first day. He laughed and said, "Don't worry. It'll be rough at first, but they say the first forty years are the hardest."

He was still laughing when I stepped out of the elevator and watched him disappear as the doors closed.

Rough? I didn't think so. After all, I had just finished a two-week letter carrier training course where the first words they said to us were, "Welcome to easy street." I had been working construction before this. Surely this would be easier than hanging vinyl siding while standing on a plank suspended between two ladders three stories up with no harness.

When I told the crew at work that I had landed a job at Canada Post, everyone shook my hand. Congratulations all around. They all believed I had just landed the best paying, easiest job on the planet. I had won the lottery. I remember one carpenter told me about a letter carrier that he knew who delivered the odd side of the streets one day and the even side of the streets the next, so he never had to work more than four hours. Of course, it didn't take me long to realize that these stories were just urban legends. I delivered to a lot of streets, but not Easy Street.

I had actually taken a pay-cut to come work at Canada Post. I made more working construction. But I knew Canada Post was stable, whereas the construction business goes up and down. I knew they had benefits, and paid vacation, things that don't exist in the construction industry in BC. It would be nice to work these famous short hours. Turns out those didn't exist either.

The next two years as a term letter carrier, I worked long hours. Never less than fifty hours a week. I worked eighteen hours straight my first Christmas Eve at Canada Post. I volunteered for pre-shift overtime, which meant I started at four a.m. Then I got sent to a different station to cover one of the worst routes in the city for the day. I didn't finish until ten o'clock at night. I didn't mind. The overtime was nice. I could have turned back when it got dark, but I felt it was my duty to get the mail out. I knew I was carrying lots of Christmas presents. I was wearing a Santa Claus hat.

The truth is I was proud of my job. I was proud to be a letter carrier. I was a mailman: an iconic part of Canadian society. I would walk into the elementary schools on my route and I would always see a young child pointing at "the mailman." I cared about my customers. My job was important. And that was the culture that they tried to instil in us. We had it drilled into our heads in letter carrier training that our number one priority was customer service. But letter carrier training was a fantasyland.

The supervisors were assholes and they treated us like the enemy. Upper management was too busy fighting the class

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Cinema Politica believes in the power of art, not only to entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica is the largest volunteer-run, community and campus-based documentary-screening network in the world. In Fredericton, films are screened on Fridays during the fall and winter at 7pm at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. In Sackville, films are screened monthly at Mount Allison University. Check out film schedules and venues, or start your own chapter at: cinemapolitica.org.



Protests against cuts to the postal service were held across Canada on January 25-27, prior to the opening of the Canadian Parliament. Photo from Tony Seed's weblog.

war to worry about anything else. It was surreal. I had organized unions before. I was an activist. I became a shop steward the day I passed my probation period, even without a permanent position. Still, this environment was unlike anything I had ever encountered. They had lost all sense of perspective. It was like getting the mail out was a secondary task - something they had to do so they could get back to the real work: sticking it to those union guys.

Really, "those union guys" were one of the reasons I kept applying at Canada Post. I was proud to be a letter carrier. And I was proud to be a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). I knew their history. They shook the Canadian government to its very foundations. Many of the rights workers have today are a result of struggles led by the posties. I knew that without CUPW we probably wouldn't have maternity leave and the public sector wouldn't have the right to strike among other things. They had the reputation of being the toughest union in the country and I knew that's where I belonged.

That was eight years ago. I'm still one of the "new guys" by most people's standards. Yet so much has changed since then—so much and so little. The focus on customer service has disappeared completely. Management is entirely focused on crushing the union. They don't care if they destroy themselves in the process—in fact, that is the goal. We're working for a corporation whose leadership is trying to destroy itself. They want to gut Canada Post and hand over the infrastructure to the private sector. Prime real estate in every city, thousands of delivery vehicles, the largest retail network in the country, the list goes on. Canada Post is a tempting target for these neoliberal vultures intent on looting the public sector.

And they can't accomplish that without first destroying that iconic public image of the smiling letter carrier going door to door, without destroying the public service we provide.

Two years ago, members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers saw it fit to elect me as a National Union Representative. To me, this is a great honour, of course. But it is also a great challenge. It is once again up to us to defend the public post office. The past struggles of CUPW are legendary in the Canadian labour movement. We must now rise again to the challenge posed by history. It is time for CUPW to lead the fight in turning the tide against the right-wing austerity drive. We will defend our postal service and we will run these crooks out of office.

Mike Palecek is a National Union Representative with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

Struggle for sex worker rights not over

(continued from page 1) ... that affect the lives and working conditions of sex workers outside of federal laws. "Much will depend on whether provinces open up occupational health and safety and labour protections and on whether municipalities make reasonable zoning decision that strike an appropriate balance between the interests of sex workers and others," says Hughes.

The Bedford decision has the opportunity to provide the country with a more meaningful conversation about the oldest profession in Western society. "The absence of sex worker voices in the media is a huge loss, not only because they could counter the public stigma that makes their lives so difficult but because they could teach us so much about the way the world really works," writes Gayle MacDonald and Leslie Ann Jeffrey, authors of the 2011 book, *Sex Workers in the Maritimes Talk Back*.

"It's important to stress that Bedford is not a panacea for sex workers' rights in Canada. Criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers do not exist in a vacuum: they are deeply rooted in misogyny, racism, and poverty—social conditions that are legislated as well as encultured," writes Fannie Hustle in a blog post for the *Toronto Media Co-op* that argues for a grassroots sex worker movement. "We don't need the state, or anyone, to legitimize our dignity: we affirm it ourselves, in our communities, with our families, friends and lovers."

Nicole Saulnier is a third year political science student at the University of New Brunswick. She is doing an internship with the NB Media Co-op through the UNB Arts 3000 program.

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