

# Voice

Fall 2015



## The newsletter of CUPE Alberta



# Victories for working people

Since its election on May 5th, the Notley government has moved on two long standing issues of importance to working Albertans.

In June, Jobs, Skills Training and Labour Minister, Lori Sigurdson announced that Alberta would no longer have the lowest minimum wage in Canada. The NDP raised minimum wage from \$10.20 to \$11.20, and increased the rate for alcohol servers to \$10.70. The government also indicated it would fulfill its election promise to raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2018 and eliminate the separate wage rate for alcohol servers in 2016.

Prior to the increase, which took affect October 1st, Alberta had the lowest minimum wage in Canada. The Notley government is the first jurisdiction in Canada to announce a \$15 minimum wage, although several US Cities have already enacted it.

Following the minimum wage increase the NDP government introduced legislation in November to include farmworkers in labour law. Prior to the legislation – Alberta was the only remaining province where agricultural workers were not allowed to join unions, were not covered by WCB, and were not protected by Employment Standards or Health & Safety regulations. In fact, worker deaths on farms could not even be investigated by government officials to find ways of improving safety practices.

Eric Musekamp, President of the advocacy group



Farmworkers of Alberta, applauded the move, pointing out that since every other province had already made these changes, it was long overdue.

"We're the only jurisdiction in North America and the European Union that has no standards at all. That's what we have in Alberta and no WCB. Everyone else has child labour standards, employment standards, WCB safety standards," said Musekamp 🌸



# Fort McMurray Airport contracts out custodial work

The Fort McMurray Airport Authority (FMAA) has permanently laid off about 50 custodial and security staff, replacing them with contractors believed to be hiring temporary foreign workers.

Last spring, Airport management informed CUPE Local 1505 of their intentions to lay off custodial staff and contract out the cleaning duties to Bill's General Cleaning, an outside contractor known to employ temporary foreign workers.

Under the Collective Agreement between the Airport and CUPE 1505, contracting out is only permissible when work can be done at a substantially lower cost or

can be done more effectively. CUPE requested the supporting documentation justifying layoffs. The Airport claims to be saving \$3 million per year, or \$60,000 per job - a dubious claim not supported by math. CUPE requested a copy of the agreement with the contractors, but was denied and told the contract was confidential in nature and commercially sensitive.

CUPE filed a grievance in regard to the lack of necessary information, which has been denied in full by the Airport.

Bill's General Cleaning has a sister company called 'Bill's Recruiting' which specializes in the recruitment and training of temporary foreign workers. After getting the contract, Bill's advertised for cleaners at a wage of \$14.50 per hour, almost \$14 less than workers were earning under the CUPE contract, and

substantially lower than the cost of living in Fort McMurray, estimated at \$65,000.

CUPE's position is that temporary foreign workers should not displace working Canadians, as the program was intended to cover skill gaps when Canadians are unable to fill certain jobs - not create competition between Canadians and workers from other countries.

A poll conducted by the Alberta Federation

of Labour in April found that 89% of Wood Buffalo residents opposed the Airport's plan to outsource cleaning services to temporary foreign workers and 54% of residents would like to see Airport CEO, Scott Clements fired for destroying local jobs.

In late April, the Airport introduced a new level of senior management, including the addition of three new Associate Vice-President positions.

At the time of publication, the matter remains in arbitration. 🌸



## Voice

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Back issues are available at:  
[www.alberta.cupe.ca](http://www.alberta.cupe.ca)

### Do you have photos of CUPE members?

We are always looking for pictures of our members at work, in the community or at CUPE events.

Please send them to:

[pkintahan@cupe.ca](mailto:pkintahan@cupe.ca)



# Saving Face; Facebook wise or #foolish?

By Stephanie Lustig



All it takes is 140 characters to change the world. But by the same token, a hastily tweeted message can ruin lives, and end campaigns and careers.

As unionists, we are always looking for ways to make our message go viral, but more realistically, we are happy to just reach our members.

We use union notice boards, newsletters, emails and postal letters to tell the members important information that they need, and have a right, to know. By embracing technology, we can also engage a greater audience quickly and instantly through social media.

Facebook and Twitter are the most popular of social media. Other sites include LinkedIn, a social media platform for professionals; Tumblr, for blogs; YouTube for video sharing; and Instagram for photo sharing.

All forms of social media can be used for good or bad. For unions, union activists, members and locals it is important to know how to utilize them effectively.

Local leaders should measure their social media use, and keep it professional. Use it to encourage members to attend meetings, to let them know about upcoming events, and to share general information that can be made public. Before posting, it's useful to ask: Is it OK if our employer sees this?

Conversely, it's a bad idea to bargain through social media, or use it to air grievances or issues that have yet to go through the appropriate channels.

Social media can be used to garner membership support for the union during bargaining, but with caution and under the direction of the Local Executive, National Representative and the Communications Representative.

Posting about issues with the employer could prove disastrous for members and their locals. It can be construed as bargaining in bad faith.

Individual members can face serious consequences, including termination, for speaking badly about work, a co-worker, a supervisor or a manager on social media.

High privacy settings are important, but not reliable. Privacy settings are only somewhat secure. A mutual 'Facebook friend' can show your post to someone else who doesn't meet the requirements of your settings by simply showing them the face of their electronic device.

Arbitration rulings blur the distinction between the physical workplace and employee personal conduct on social media sites. Personal Facebook posts can implicate employees at work, particularly if co-workers see their posting. For example, the photo posted of an employee skiing in Banff the day they called in sick.

In one arbitration case in Ontario, a care worker was terminated for posting information and pictures on her blog about residents. Her posts were deemed to be derogatory in nature and the arbitrator upheld the termination, citing the public nature of her blog.

An Alberta case saw a worker terminated for Facebook posts mocking co-workers and supervisors. The posts were deemed as derogatory about the employer and the termination was upheld in arbitration.

CUPE members should check their workplace policies for social media or internet-use policies. It is prudent to be sure you know what your employer's policies are before posting anything about work, your employer, a co-worker, a client or patient, a supervisor, or any policy or procedure. If there is any doubt on whether it is OK to put that information on social media, it is best to not post it. 🚫



It can be difficult to know when to post or not when it comes to our jobs and union activity.

# Mental Help: Learning about mental health in the workplace

By Stephanie Lustig

CUPE has partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to develop two new courses that deal with mental health issues in the workplace and within locals.

The first module, Understanding Mental Health, provides an overview to help stewards understand mental health and provide basic information on how to identify when mental health or illness might be an issue with members. (Please note, that “diagnosis” of mental health or illness is not the intention of this course, as that is left for professionals and doctors.)

Exploring the continuum of mental health and mental illness, the first module explains how everyone has a level of mental health and wellness and how that level can change throughout the day, from day to day and beyond. It also provides tools to help stewards have difficult conversations around mental health with members, when there is a potential mental health issue, or when dealing with disclosure of mental illness or mental health issues.

The second module, Creating Psychologically Healthy and Safe Workplaces, talks about mental health and wellness as an Occupational Health and Safety issue. Stewards learn how to champion for change at their workplaces through their local and health and safety committees. The module explores the various categories of mental health safety in the workplace,

including:

- Workplace policies
- Pace of work (assignments, scheduling)
- Physical stressors (ergonomics, air quality, location)
- Harassment, bullying and intimidation
- Relationships and structures (formal and informal)
- Influence and input at work
- Accommodations and returning to work
- Nature of work
- Organizational culture

CUPE’s Union Development department was thorough and cautious in creating these courses for local stewards. In conjunction with the CMHA, the courses were created, piloted, and then brought to select facilitators throughout the country to learn and give feedback.

Four people from Alberta were selected to go to Winnipeg this spring to participate in the specialized facilitator training for these courses. They are now trained to deliver this material to locals here in Alberta.

The courses are part of the Steward Learning Series (SLS) and will be offered in Alberta starting this fall to members who have completed the Introduction to Stewarding workshop. Check out the [alberta.cupe.ca](http://alberta.cupe.ca) website for information on courses being held near you, or contact the Education Representative at the Calgary Area Office. 🌸



## Why is CUPE involved in literacy?

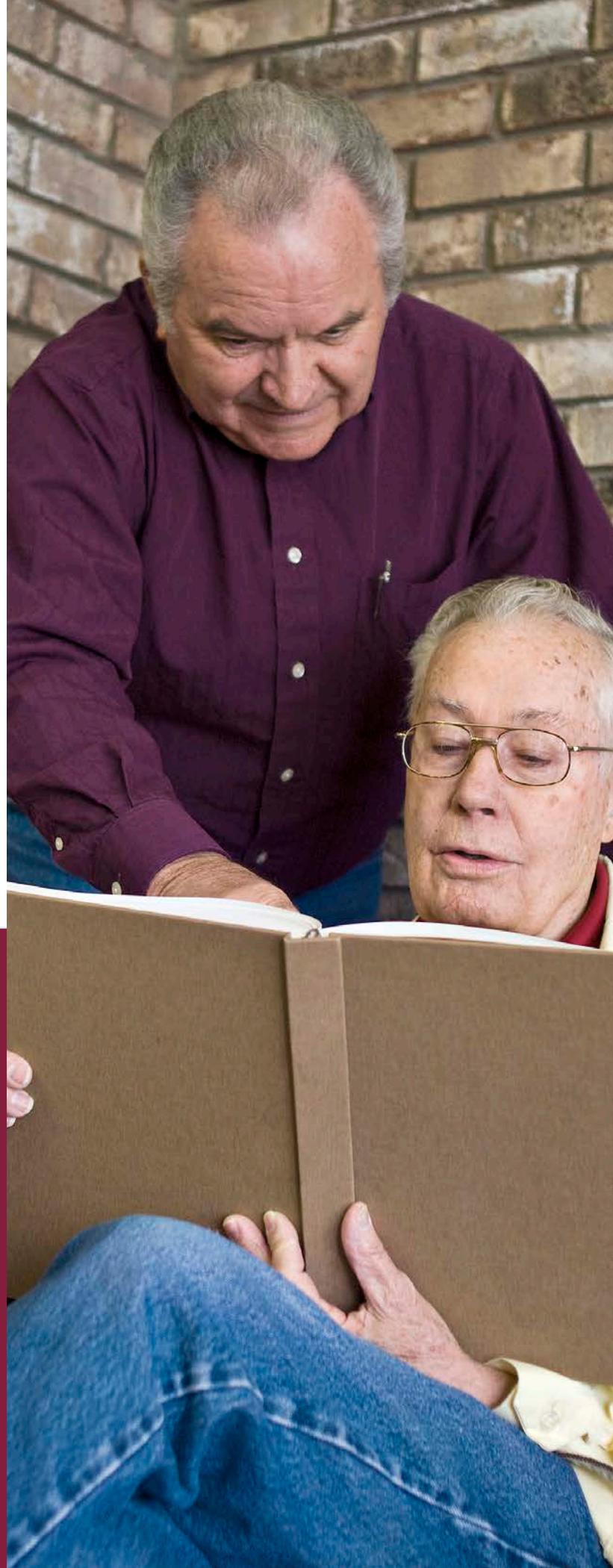
**Because: literacy is a right.**

**W**hat is literacy? Literacy is not just about reading and writing. While reading and writing provide the necessary foundation for learning, literacy is fundamentally about an individual's capacity to put his or her skills to work in shaping the course of his or her own life. Literacy involves "reading the word and the world" in a variety of contexts. Individuals need literacy skills to obtain and use information effectively, to act as informed players and to manage interactions in a variety of contexts whether the context is making decisions about health care, parenting, managing household finances, engaging in the political process or working.<sup>1</sup> Employees with higher literacy skills earn higher incomes.<sup>2</sup> Literacy skills are essential in all job-related training.<sup>3</sup> 🌸

<sup>1</sup>Living Literacy: A Literacy Framework for Alberta's Next Generation Economy, <http://eae.alberta.ca/media/219400/living%20literacy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, January 2012

<sup>3</sup>Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, January 2012



CUPE has a new  
Steward Learning Series module

“Literacy Awareness for Stewards”

Ask your National Representative  
about this if you are interested!

## LABOUR QUOTES

- If you ever saw a cat and a dog eating out of the same plate, you can bet your ass it was the cat's food.—Congressman William Clay
- Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will.—Frederick Douglass
- Our labor unions are not narrow, self-seeking groups. They have raised wages, shortened hours, and provided supplemental benefits. Through collective bargaining and grievance procedures, they have brought justice and democracy to the shop floor.—John F. Kennedy
- Union gives strength.—Aesop
- The superior person understands rightness; the inferior person understands profit.— Confucius
- When people ask me, “Why can't labor organize the way it did in the thirties?’ the answer is simple: everything we did then is now illegal.— Thomas Geoghegan
- Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves.—Abraham Lincoln
- The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few (born) to ride them.—Thomas Jefferson
- I'm not a humanitarian, I'm a hell-raiser.—Mother Jones
- A working class hero is something to be.—John Lennon



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### Health & Safety Award

Do you know a member who has made a significant contribution to the area of health and safety in Alberta? Nominate that member for the CUPE Alberta Health & Safety Award. Find more details and a nomination form at: <http://tinyurl.com/CUPEABOH-S>



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### Equality Award

The Equality Award recognizes CUPE members who have made a difference promoting equal opportunities and treatment of workers and all Albertans. Do you know a CUPE member who challenges discrimination and promotes equality in their workplace and community? Nominations are due February 12, 2016. Send your submission to:

CUPE Alberta Division  
c/o Calgary Area Office  
240N - 3015 - 5 Avenue NE  
Calgary, AB T2A 6T8

Attention: Kim Storebo



# OUR FUTURE TOGETHER

**CUPE ALBERTA  
2016 CONVENTION  
Edmonton, Alberta**

