

President's Message

by Wendy Despins

When I look back at the articles that I have written for the newsletter and the AGM reports a few of the titles include, "Union vs Non-union", "What You've Done for the Union", "Bargaining Unit Appropriateness", "Grievances Friend or Foe?", "Labour Day", "Just Another Tea Party", "Diversified Yes! Focused Absolutely!", "Bargaining What do You Want?", "Solidarity What does it Mean", and "CETA". Looking at the articles on their own and the content of the newsletter as a whole, a common thread may not be clearly evident, but a review of them will show consistent and reoccurring themes. But . . . as I wrote I could see that common thread. And that is . . . you the membership! Whether it is showcasing an award that you as a member have won, or one of your children have won, whether it is academic, professional or athletic there have been many reports on your achievements throughout the years. Another avenue has been my desire to showcase your occupations. Each of these were with the intention of raising awareness and a path of discovery, of learning about and getting to know our fellow members within MAHCP. The more we understand our respective roles and backgrounds the stronger we become together. "The Power of One the Strength of Many" was the theme for the 2008 and 2009 AGM's. Solidarity is the underpinning of any collection of individuals and certainly being a foundational value of the union movement. The more we understand each other and the more we can relate to each other the more we can embrace our solidarity.

Many of the ideas for articles and themes have arisen from questions, comments and ideas submitted by you. In the December of 2004 I looked at a questions posed to me by a fellow member "what has the union ever done for me." The following is the opening paragraph to that article and throughout the research of it I interview several different people to cover many different points of view.

About a year or so ago a comment made to me by a fellow union member gave me pause. This individual was frustrated and was questioning, "What has the Union ever done for me?" I was taken aback, realized that it was rhetorical and we moved on to other things. However, since that time I have given it much thought, as I was curious by the differences in our point of view. I began to look at our different life experiences, and realized that I have worked in both unionized and non-



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unionized environments. My work life has spanned a period of time that has seen many changes (changes in our society, changes in labour laws, changes in working conditions, changes in social funding and changes in expectancies). Whereas the individual who has worked in only one environment, an environment with an already longstanding union and with a negotiated collective agreement, where processes and systems are in place that appear to have no comprehensible relevance to someone beginning their career and where they do not perceive to have any input, would have an entirely different point of view. So I can understand how without something to compare to, or without some historical information someone might not appreciate the impact and the importance of unions. They might not understand the significant contribution that unions have made to work life in Canada, nor the impact the unions have had on social reform. Unions are an integral part of our culture and have helped to shape the society that we live in today. It has been shown that countries that are highly unionized have a higher standard of living.

There is a concept that unions are no longer relevant today and yet . . . the following is an excerpt from an article "Union vs Non-Union" September 2005.

"I have spoken to a number of individuals in the private sector who work in non-unionized environments. Some very key points began to emerge as we discussed salaries, benefits, pensions, overtime rates, compassionate leave and a number of other items we enjoy as unionized employees.

It soon became apparent to me that there are no standards of practice between employers or even within the same employer. I was often told that salaries and benefits are not discussed between co-workers. That type of information is between the employer and the employee. This of course varied from organization to organization; some had very clearly defined salaries and basic terms and conditions of employment, while others did not.

Vacation packages range anywhere from 2 weeks increasing to 3 weeks after a varied number of years. Some are capped at three weeks, some at four weeks after 20 years.

One individual I spoke with, after nineteen years with the same employer was required to use a vacation day to attend her Grandmother's funeral.

Salary increases again varied and are often linked to performance appraisals.

Income protection ranged from 10 days per year to 12 days per year and some employers have a cap of 90 days. Many employers only have unpaid sick time and no provisions for medical leave, such as doctor's or dentist appointments.

Many non-unionized employers are not paid either shift or weekend premiums and have forced overtime.

Most employers do not have pre-retirement leave or sick time pay out."

I believe these examples are as true today as they were in 2005 and are the very reason that unions continue to be relevant.

Unions in the modern era may look differently and may undertake different activities to further the union movement and to raise the profile of its members. The announcements of initiatives on behalf of the membership such as a marketing plan begun in 2006 to highlight and raise awareness of MAHCP, the members and our occupations. That initiative has included TV ads in 2006, 2008, and 2012, bus ads, billboard ads and an on-going radio campaign. In conjunction with some of these there have been radio and tv interviews, press conferences, press releases, and public forums. Many of you are aware that we contracted with Strategic Communications in March to assist us in further developing our marketing. At this point they have conducted focus group meetings of both members and the general public. They have also conducted an extensive on-line member and public surveys. And we are looking forward to their findings and what direction this may take us as we go forward.

So, all in all, it is always about you the membership. Every action, decision and thought is with improving your working conditions, raising your visibility and building a stronger informed membership.

In solidarity

Wendy Despins MLT
President MAHCP