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OUR TIMES

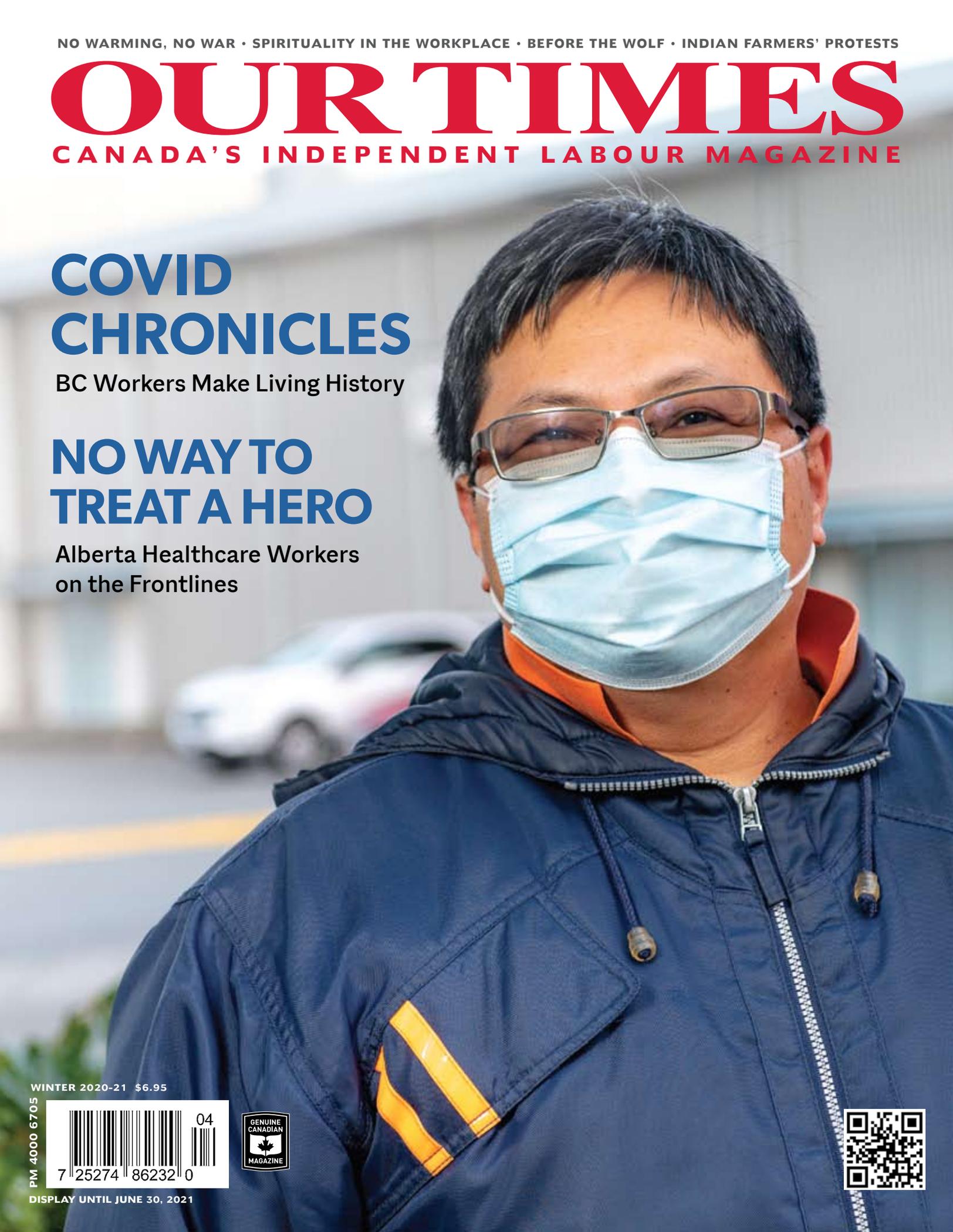
CANADA'S INDEPENDENT LABOUR MAGAZINE

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A GIFT FOR US ALL

BACK IN MARCH 2020, MY DAUGHTER BROUGHT OUT AN old shoebox and declared she was making a pandemic time capsule. In it, she carefully placed, among other things, a stack of newspaper clippings — the early ones whispering about the possibility of a pandemic, the later ones shouting the certainty of it. Week by week, she added things to the box — the first mask she ever wore, a deflated balloon from her virtual birthday party, her list of “every single thing I’m going to do fresh outta Coronatown.” A few months in, she painted the box with the brightest colours she could find, because, she said, “Things might be bleak for a while.” Then she started adding friends’ quotes and stories to it, and the photos they would send her. The box became a measure of sorts, and fortified her heart. Now its contents are spilling out and the lid no longer fits. Already, her at-home history project is reminding us of what we’ve already forgotten — of how we move on and forget what we’ve lived through, in the absence of evidence.

In this issue of *Our Times*, writer Janet Nicol brings us the story of the BC Labour Heritage Centre’s living history project “COVID Chronicles” and the workers who are filling the project’s “time capsule” with their stories. The brainchild of the centre’s Marie Decaire, whose mother lived through the Spanish flu outbreak but never talked about it, the project is, as Decaire says, “a gift for historians a hundred years from now.” And it’s a gift for all of us, now. For those in the future, it will uncover their past. For us in the present, it will fortify our hearts.

In this issue, you’ll hear some of those voices contributing to the project — healthcare workers, maritime workers, mechanics, grocery workers, paramedics and theatre workers, to name a few. Maybe their stories will remind you of your own, or of the stories of people close to you.

When you’re enraged, or just utterly exhausted, by all the politicians and profiteers who are using the pandemic as cover

to push destructive legislation or to siphon obscene profits off the backs of working people, these voices — our own — are a balm. They’re the voices of people who keep everything humming, and this issue of *Our Times* is filled with them. May their stories remind us of what relentless injustice sometimes makes us already forget — that we are stronger together, and that there is beauty to our lives. And may they fortify your heart.

In Solidarity,
Antje Meyer-Erlach

HELLO THERE, DEAREST READERS AND SUPPORTERS. I’M worried. Why? Because some of you may not have signed up for our brand new e-newsletter yet. Please visit *Our Times*’ website and sign up now! That way you’ll get a sneak peek at upcoming issues, receive special announcements, and catch online-only stories that we publish between issues. Plus, at times, you’ll hear from some wonderful guest contributors. It’s a great way for us all to stay in touch between issues of your beloved print magazine. We hope you agree.

In the meantime, here are three special announcements: We are proud to announce that Shobna Radons, president of the Regina & District Labour Council, has joined *Our Times*’ advisory board, as has UFCW Canada national representative Enver Harbans. Welcome, Shobna and Enver! And we are very pleased that labour journalist and communications expert Haseena Manek has joined our ranks as *Our Times*’ online community and outreach coordinator. Welcome, Haseena!

Here’s to everyone’s good health, to staying safe, and to building a new, green world based on justice for all.

In Solidarity,
Lorraine Endicott



PHOTOGRAPH: BARBARA BAILEY

OUR TIMES

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Gianni Carparelli, Jim Holland, Helen Krayenhoff, Frank Lento, Katie Pellizzari

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I stand here with my flashlight and my baton. As the sun goes down, my duty begins.

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Who owns land, who gets to decide what to grow or extract from it — these are existential questions for every social justice movement.

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COVID CHRONICLES EVERYWHERE!

Great minds think alike! The BC Labour Heritage Centre has a project called "COVID Chronicles" (see this issue's cover story), and so does the Workers' Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, Ontario. WAHC's "Workers' City" is a digital project dedicated to documenting and sharing Hamilton-and-area workers' stories and histories. Their latest Workers' City series, called — you guessed it! — "COVID Chronicles," is dedicated to sharing the experiences of Hamilton-area essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Check it out!

You'll meet, among others, firefighter Pike Krpan and bus driver Felecia Goulbourne. Krpan, a member of International Association of Firefighters Local 288, has noticed the negative impact of social isolation on people's health during the pandemic, noting an increase in overdoses and suicide calls. "Everything is so emotionally heightened during the pandemic, and so suffering seems worse somehow, and it's hard to see that."

Felecia Goulbourne is a member of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)

Local 107. "I love the social interactions with the regulars, seeing people pick up their kids during rush hours, and the positive community connection," she says. Still, COVID-19 has muted the usual good cheer. "The demeanour of the bus has changed a lot," says Goulbourne. "People don't chat — it's so quiet, there's silence."

Check out this great and growing series on WAHC's website.

WAHC / Our Times

WINTER WEBWORK ONLINE •

Heads-up, dear *Our Times* magazine subscribers: visit our website to read Derek Blackadder's latest WebWork commentary. While you're there, don't forget to sign up to receive our monthly e-newsletter! Derek's always-witty WebWork commentary will return to print in our next issue.

Our Times

PAID SICK DAYS FOR ALL •

When the Ontario legislature resumed sitting on February 16, MPPs were greeted by frontline workers, healthcare providers, educators, parents, small business owners and others demanding permanent legislated paid sick days. Representing



PHOTOGRAPH: JARED WEI-YANG ONG

Debbie McGuinness is president of Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) Local 5110, the Liquor Board Employees Division.



PHOTOGRAPH: JARED WEI-YANG ONG

Left to right: Beixi Liu, Workers' Action Centre (WAC); Deena Ladd, WAC; Dr. Gaibrie Stephen.

healthcare workers, the Decent Work and Health Network delivered a petition of 30,000 signatures in favour of paid sick days for all, while a car caravan of supporters circled Queen's Park.

Still, Ontario's Conservative government refused to support the NDP's call for all-party consent to pass Peggy Sattler's proposed Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, Bill 239, which calls for seven permanent paid sick days for all workers, plus 14 additional days during

PHOTOGRAPH: SONALI MENEZES



Felecia Goulbourne is a bus driver with Hamilton Street Railway (HSR), in Hamilton, Ontario. "As a person of colour I've always had a heightened sense of social situations," she says in her interview for Workers' City's COVID Chronicles. While she loves her job, her workplace isn't exempt from racism or misogyny, which she experiences most often from disgruntled passengers. "These things have always been prominent in my life whether it's COVID or not."

a pandemic like the COVID-19 crisis. The Ontario Federation of Labour and others are outraged by the Ford government's refusal to immediately pass this critical legislation.

"Legislating paid sick days is a common-sense action that public health officials, mayors and workers' advocates all agree is essential to curbing the spread of COVID-19," says OFL president Patty Coates. "PC MPPs' decision to continue to ignore expert advice will result in preventable illnesses and deaths. This government's refusal to protect Ontarians is infuriating and heartbreaking."

Workplace outbreaks continue to be a preventable hazard contributing to the spread of COVID-19. Guaranteed employer-provided paid sick days would ensure that workers don't have to choose between going to work sick or staying home and not having enough money to pay the rent or put food on the table.

"Paid sick days ensure no income disruption and are available to every worker who needs them," says Coates. "The federal sickness benefit is temporary, restricted, and requires an application. Guaranteed paid sick days are the only way to ensure that workers can stay



PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY THE GRITTY NURSE PODCAST

Nurses Amie Varley (left) and Sara Fung (right) present their Gritty Nurse Podcast once a week.

home to keep their communities safe."

The campaign for paid sick days for all continues. For more information, contact the OFL, the Decent Work and Health Network or the Workers' Action Centre.

OFL / Our Times

THE GRITTY NURSE PODCAST • Two nurses, Amie Varley and Sara Fung, have launched an exciting weekly podcast on health and healthcare called "The Gritty Nurse Podcast." "We shy away from nothing, discussing topics such as mental health, social justice, women's health and women's rights," they say



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on their website. "We are storytellers and love hearing how healthcare has impacted individuals' lives. We want to discuss the good, bad and ugly.

"We also provide a platform for empowerment and shared experiences, where we represent voices that have been silenced, under-represented and marginalized — so they can share their stories of hope, change and inspiration."

Amie Varley received her Bachelor of Nursing from the University of New Brunswick and her Master of Nursing from the University of Toronto. Sara Fung received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Western University and her Master of Nursing from the University of Toronto.

"Issues such as harassment, bullying and gender discrimination have no place in healthcare," writes Varley. "We must hold organizations to higher standards — and hold them accountable for creating spaces where this misogyny, fear and inequity is rampant. It's time to fight for change and speak out our truths."

Podcasts to date have included subjects like "Our Mental Health Matters: Calling Out an Inadequate Mental Health System" and "The Most Important Voice

in Healthcare: Learning What Patient Experience Truly Means." There's a new podcast every Thursday.

The Gritty Nurse Podcast / Our Times

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

We read with deep interest your article, "Building an Anti-Racist Labour Movement," by Navjeet Sidhu. Is there a way to find a version of the article that is print-friendly so we can put it up on our union board at work? It is an excellent article that we feel would contribute to the shopfloor conversation. It would also be perfectly timed for Black History Month, bringing the connection between labour and anti-racist struggle into one idea.

Thanks so much for your excellent publication. It's important to have a voice for labour in these confusing times.

In Solidarity,
Jonathan Prins
Community Connections Committee
Unifor333bc

ONLINE OUR TIMES



PENNI RICHMOND

Visit *Our Times'* website to read between-issue articles such as "A Tragedy That Didn't Need to Happen: The Pandemic in Long-term Care," by Mary Catherine McCarthy and Margot Young; and John Baglow's moving tribute to beloved labour and community activist Penni Richmond (1947-2020).

While you're there, be sure to sign up for *Our Times'* monthly e-newsletter so you don't miss out on any of these online-only articles.

PHOTOGRAPH: SUE GENGE



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Percentage of self-identified Conservative Party voters who believe COVID-19 was engineered in a laboratory in China: 42
 Percentage of self-identified New Democratic Party voters who do: 10
 Percentage of Americans who do: 29
 Percentage of Canadians who believe governments and health officials are “exaggerating the threat posed by COVID-19”: 23
 Percentage of Americans who believe the same: 41
 Number of Americans who died from COVID-19 during the month of December 2020: 77,124
 Number of American soldiers and military personnel who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001: 5,669
 Additional income that unionized workers in Canada under 25 receive compared to non-unionized workers, in per cent: 26
 Number of laws passed since 1982 that have restricted, suspended or denied bargaining rights to Canadian workers: 230
 Number of laws that have been amended to restrict union organizing and bargaining during the same period: 82
 Number of back-to-work laws passed by provincial and federal governments in Canada during the same period: 94
 Total amount that governments worldwide have spent responding to the COVID-19 pandemic: \$11.7 trillion
 Estimated number of people who will fall into extreme poverty due to COVID-19 over the next year: 150 million
 Amount of additional wealth attained by the world’s top 10 billionaires since the beginning of the pandemic: \$400 billion
 Number of COVID-19 vaccine doses per capita that Canada has already ordered: 8.9
 Estimated chance someone in a poor country won’t have access to a vaccine due to “dose hoarding” by rich countries: 9 in 10
 Percentage of all cars sold in Norway last year that were fully electric: 54.3
 Percentage in Canada: 2.2
 Percentage of all passenger cars sold in Canada last year that were SUVs: 43
 Chance that a British electric-car owner wants to return to a gas-powered car: 1 in 100
 Percentage of British workers who believe their job is “making a meaningful contribution to the world”: 37
 Percentage of American workers who say the quality of their job is either mediocre or bad: 60
 Percentage of American workers who define their workplace as a “dictatorship”: 25
 Percentage of Amazon workers in Britain who report avoiding going to the bathroom for fear of missing their quotas: 74
 Percentage who report suffering from depression since starting their jobs with Amazon: 55
 Percentage of Canadian workers who currently belong to a union: 31.3
 Percentage in 1954: 33.8
 Percentage increase in labour productivity in Canada during the last 20 years: 20
 Number of hours the average workweek has been reduced by in Canada during the same period: 1
 Number of Americans killed in mass shootings during the last five years: 392
 Number killed by police officers during the same period: 6,571
 Percentage of total killings by police since 2013 that have not resulted in officers being charged with a crime: 98.3
 Correlation found between police killings of suspects and reduced violent crime rates: 0
 Number of arrests made on January 6 from the U.S. Capitol Building riot and insurrection: 62
 Number of arrests made on June 1 in Washington DC from the Black Lives Matter protests: 316
 Number of arrests made in the U.S. throughout the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020: 17,000
 Average number of hours Canadians will spend working during their entire lives: 90,000
 Number of hours a top CEO will have to work to attain the total income of an average Canadian during their entire life: 396
 Rank of U.S. Department of Defense as the world’s largest employer: 1
 Rank of Walmart: 3
 Rank of the 250-million-strong strike by Indian farmers in November 2020 as the largest strike in human history: 1
 Year in which the first recorded labour strike took place, against Pharaoh Ramesses III: 1156 BC

Our Times Tally is written by union communications and media consultant Sean Cain (www.labourmedia.org).

SOURCES: 42, 10 – Vox Pop Labs COVID-19 Monitor; 29 – Pew Research Center Poll; 23, 41 – Leger’s Weekly Survey (September 2020); 77,124 – U.S. State and County Health Officials; 5,669 – United States Department of Defense; 26 – Canadian Labour Congress; 230, 82, 94 – Canadian Foundation for Labour Rights; \$11.7 trillion – International Monetary Fund; 150 million – World Bank; \$400 billion – **Forbes Magazine**; 8.9 – Deutsche Bank; 9 in 10 – Amnesty International, Oxfam International; 54.3 – Opplysningsradet for Veitrafikken (Information Council for Road Traffic); 2.2 – EV Sales; 43 – JATO Dynamics; 1 in 100 – Zap-Map Survey (November 2020); 37 – YouGov Lifestyle Survey; 60 – Gallup Poll (October 2019); 25 – Elizabeth Anderson (Princeton’s University Center for Human Values); 74, 55 – Organise Amazon Warehouse Staff Survey (January 2018); 31.3, 33.8, 20, 1 – Statistics Canada; 392 – **Mother Jones** (Mass Shooting Database); 6,571, 98.3, 0 – Mapping Police Violence Database (2020); 62, 316 – DC Metropolitan Police Department; 17,000 – **Washington Post**, October 2020; 90,000, 396 – Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; 1, 3 – Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski (**People’s Republic of Walmart**, 2018); 1 – Thomas Crowley (**Jacobin**, December 1, 2020); 1156 BC – **Business Insider** (May 1, 2020).

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No Warming, No War

By James Hutt

ON JANUARY 25TH, LABOUR ACTIVISTS and allies sat down at the entrance to Paddock Transport International in Hamilton, Ontario, to block trucks from leaving. The trucks were transporting Light Armoured Vehicles (LAVs) destined for Saudi Arabia, to be used in their war in Yemen. The activists' direct action offers an important strategy for both the labour and climate movements — especially as war and militarism are some of the largest drivers of climate change.

The Hamilton protest, organized by Labour Against the Arms Trade, and World Beyond War, was part of an international day of action against the Saudi-led and U.S.-backed war in Yemen. The United Nations has called the civil war in Yemen the worst humanitarian disaster in the world, with almost a quarter of a million people dead and 80 per cent of the country's population in need of humanitarian assistance. It warns that unless things change, Yemenis will soon face the worst famine anyone has seen in decades. Last September, a UN subgroup named Canada as one of the countries responsible for perpetuating the conflict because it continues to sell arms to Saudi Arabia.

The fact that Canada is aiding in and profiting from the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people has led many to take bold actions like the one taken by the activists in Hamilton. Last year, dockworkers in Italy, France and Spain all refused to load ships carrying arms for Saudi Arabia. In 2018, members of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) Local 273 in Saint John, New Brunswick, did the same when they courageously joined a picket line set up by peace activists.

These actions, in addition to promoting peace, show what effective climate action can look like: war and militarism are quickly becoming some of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Recent research has

exposed the enormous carbon footprint of the U.S. military; a 2019 report from Brown University's Costs of War Project showed that if the U.S. Department of Defense were considered a country, it would rank as the 55th worst polluter in the world, far worse than many industrialized nations.

Obviously, Canada, with only a fraction of the United States' population and military spending, would emit far less, globally. In terms of Canadians' emissions though, our military is likely one of the largest sources. The Department of National Defence is responsible for the lion's share of the federal government's emissions, producing almost five times more CO₂ than the next department.

It's impossible to know the true cost of our military's emissions though, because Canada doesn't count greenhouse gas emissions for any of its overseas military operations. All navy, air force and army operations abroad are excluded. And Canada certainly doesn't include the emissions caused by manufacturing the weapons it sells on the international market, often to the worst violators of human rights and international laws.

Canada is the second largest exporter of arms to the Middle East. In 2019, Canada sold \$3.75 billion in weapons exports, 76 per cent of which went to Saudi Arabia. On top of the LAVs, Canada also manufactures and sells rifles, artillery systems and heavy machine guns. Canadian politicians would likely argue that emissions from those munitions should be attributed to the countries that buy them (oil companies often use a similar argument, as if extracting and exporting fossil fuels does not cause pollution).

But it's not just abstract numbers and gigatonnes. Canada's carbon emissions, much like our arms exports, are directly responsible for suffering around the world.

Just as war has brought Yemen to the precipice of the worst famine of the 21st century, climate change has decreased the region's rainfall, shrunk the size of its arable land, and changed its growing seasons, thereby making it difficult for people to grow food. At the same time, competition for diminishing water supplies is further fueling the war. Yemen is one of the poorest and least industrially developed countries in the Arab region, and therefore one of the nations least responsible for climate change — yet it is facing the worst of its impacts. The same is true across the Global South.

The Pentagon has long predicted that climate change will contribute to greater conflicts and wars around the world, which will, in turn, lead to an increased need for military intervention and arms production. Militarism fuels climate change, which fuels even more militarism. And of course, increases in military spending mean there will be less funding for other things, like social programs.

In 2020, Canada's Department of National Defence had a budget of \$21.8 billion (although Trudeau has pledged to increase that to \$33 billion by 2027). Indigenous Services Canada, the next department in order of funding, had a budget of \$12.7 billion.

Groups like Labour Against the Arms Trade and World Beyond War are organizing to stop Canada from profiting from war, and to reject the Pentagon's vision for the future, where runaway climate change means expanding military forces, bases and borders the world over. Instead, these groups propose that any jobs in weapons manufacturing be converted into well-paid, permanent, unionized jobs producing things we actually need. The fight against militarism is the fight against climate change.

James Hutt is senior manager for programming at **The Leap**.

This Is What We Do

UNION SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANT FARM WORKERS: UFCW CANADA'S EXPERIENCE

ON DECEMBER 18, 2020, INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS Day, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW Canada) launched a petition calling for Canadian governments to protect the labour rights of migrant agricultural workers. "Without agricultural workers," it reads, "much of Canada's food supply would collapse."

UFCW Canada is one among several unions and labour bodies taking action on behalf of migrant farm workers in Canada.

In June of 2020, for instance, leaders of the Ontario Federation of Labour joined the Solidarity Caravan for Migrant Workers, organized by the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. Unifor, in collaboration with the Migrant Rights Network, recently released an anti-racist fact sheet tackling myths and mis-

By Haseena Manek

information about migrant workers in Canada. In September, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) organized the Rally Against Racism Towards Migrant Workers, in Leamington, Ontario. This year, over 50 unions, labour councils and federations across Canada have signed on to the Migrant Rights Network's petition calling for full immigration status for all. These are just some of the more recent acts of solidarity.

"The right thing to do, the human thing to do, is direct solidarity among workers," says Santiago Escobar, a national representative with UFCW Canada. "Solidarity, coming from unionized workers, to protect the most vulnerable workers. Every General Assembly, our members [have] voted to keep supporting and providing funding to support this work. I think it's our social responsibility, our political commitment, to protect workers. This is what we do."

On August 10, 2020, UFCW Canada released a report called "The Status of Migrant Farm Workers in Canada, 2020." It details some of the key issues that migrant agricultural workers have been facing for decades in Canada. The report was launched in the midst of a media spotlight on the heightened vulnerability of these workers in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"Canada's migrant agricultural workers work in conditions where exploitation and abuse are common," it reads. And, according to UFCW Canada, seasonal workers make up half of Canada's agricultural workforce. In 2019, Employment and Services Development Canada issued 72,000 permits to migrant farm workers.

"We don't want to exclude anyone," says Escobar. "We want to improve the industry for all workers. Because it doesn't matter if you're local, or if you're a foreign worker — at the end of the day, we are all workers and we deserve to be treated with dignity and respect."

Escobar is part of a team of UFCW national representatives who support workers who are not unionized, including migrant workers.

Over the past 30 years, UFCW Canada has worked on a number of initiatives to defend the rights of migrant agricultural workers, including establishing migrant worker support centres across the country; working with community organizations; taking legal action at the provincial, federal and international levels; and working with governments and labour organizations in countries sending migrant workers to Canada, promoting education and facilitating training.

"We think that this issue is a labour issue," Escobar tells *Our Times* via phone. "I think [it] goes beyond immigration, because we are claiming that the core issues of what migrant and agricultural workers are experiencing across Canada is the lack of labour rights. Because it doesn't matter if you are a Canadian national, or if you're a foreign national, if you work in agriculture, you know, your labour standards and wages are very low."

Escobar calls migrant farm workers "the most precarious workers among precarious workers." "They're in an industry with very low labour standards," he says. "And on top of that, with precarious status."

UFCW Canada's report, which describes migrant farm workers as "Canada's most exploited workforce," details how back in 1994, agricultural workers in Ontario won bargaining rights based on recommendations from the union. These were eventually appealed by former Premier Mike Harris's Conservative government, but UFCW Canada challenged the appeal and eventually won when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in their favour six years later.

However, the Supreme Court of Canada has since

IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'RE LOCAL,
OR IF YOU'RE A FOREIGN WORKER —
ALL WORKERS DESERVE TO BE
TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT



Migrant farm workers have been fighting for decades for proper housing and access to healthcare services.

sided with the Ontario government to deny Ontario farm workers the same rights as other workers in Ontario to join unions and to bargain collectively. That 2011 decision by the Supreme Court was the latest chapter in a decades-long battle to provide statutory labour rights protection and collective bargaining rights for Ontario's 80,000 domestic and migrant agricultural workers.

In 2001, the Agriculture Workers Alliance (AWA) was established under the leadership of the late Stan Raper, a longtime activist and advocate for the rights of farm workers.

The AWA is a membership association that advocates for and supports migrant workers. It opened its first UFCW/AWA Migrant Workers Support Centre about 20 years ago in Leamington, Ontario, and now runs support centres across Canada.

Today, the AWA has over 13,000 card-carrying members. But since the AWA doesn't require workers to be members in order for them to receive support, Escobar estimates that the AWA has actually supported

over 40,000 workers across Canada.

For instance, he explains, the union supports workers

in the process of claiming various employment benefits like Employment Insurance, CPP and workers' compensation benefits. In 2020, UFCW Canada also supported over 100 migrant workers in receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

"In terms of numbers, I think we have made a difference," says Escobar, since, while taxes are deducted from the workers' paycheques, "they can barely get [the] benefits. So we have assisted workers to obtain financial support that they pay into, and they deserve to get. That's the least they can get, right?"

On top of that, migrant workers outside of

agriculture have reached out to the AWA for support. "So we have assisted workers from the fish industry, meat industry, agriculture workers, wood workers, you name it," says Escobar.

In 2003, UFCW Canada launched three legal challenges addressing the exclusion of migrant workers from the labour rights and standards enjoyed by other workers in Canada: one against the Agricultural Employees' Protection Act, 2002 (AEPA) in Fraser v. Ontario; one regarding the exclusion of farm workers from the Occupational Health and Safety Act; and a third, regarding deductions seasonal workers pay into the Canadian EI program (which they do not receive benefits from).

In 2006, the union won health-and-safety coverage for Ontario farm workers, with the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) being extended to agricultural workers, including migrant agricultural workers, for the first time since the act was passed in 1990.

In 2010, the International Labour Organization (ILO) upheld a UFCW Canada complaint, finding Canada guilty of a discriminatory attack on the rights of migrant agricultural workers. In 2018, the union facilitated the first-ever in-person consultations with workers and federal representatives as part of the federal primary agriculture review.

In 2019, UFCW Canada began assisting workers in submitting applications for open work permits as part of a new federal program which allows workers tied to one employer, whose applications are approved, to leave an abusive employer without having to leave Canada. Escobar estimates the union has worked on over 100 applications so far, at no cost to the applicants.

Last year, UFCW Canada made a number of recommendations at the provincial and federal level to address the heightened risks migrant workers face in

MIGRANT FARM WORKERS ARE THE MOST PRECARIOUS WORKERS AMONG PRECARIOUS WORKERS

the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The alarming violations that migrant workers have faced for decades (for example, overcrowded and unsafe housing, a lack of access to health services, and fear of reprisals for speaking out), were put in the spotlight by the pandemic. In many cases, farm workers had no access to PPE (personal protective equipment) and

LABOUR RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS SHOULD TRANSCEND BORDERS, MUCH LIKE THE PEOPLE THAT COME HERE TO HARVEST OUR FOOD

weren't able to maintain social distance, making them, once again, one of the

most vulnerable groups of workers in Canada. Hundreds of workers contracted the virus, and three workers from Mexico died.

On December 10 (International Human Rights Day), UFCW Canada launched a Spanish-language version of their report. Many migrant farm workers in Canada are Spanish speakers and come from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to Statistics Canada, 51 per cent of migrant agricultural workers that came to Canada in 2018 were from Mexico.

"There is much work to do," said UFCW Canada president Paul Meinema via videoconference at a press event at the Mexican State Legislature, accompanying the launch of the report. "We feel our 30 years of work has demonstrated the need for change."

In attendance were state officials from the Mexican government, including representatives from the

Foreign Affairs Ministry, and UFCW Canada's representative in Mexico, Octavio Nava Manrique. Virtual speakers also included Alvaro Gutierrez, a TFWP (Temporary Foreign Worker Program) worker and Pablo Godoy, UFCW regional director for the western provinces.

"We pledge to continue our commitment to migrant workers," said Meinema at the event. "Together UFCW and the Mexican government can make fairness a reality for Mexican workers in Canada. Together let's call on the Canadian government to make representation a fundamental right for migrant workers."

UFCW Canada hopes this initiative will put pressure on the Canadian government to make the necessary reforms to stop the exploitation of migrant workers and protect their rights, Godoy told *Our Times*. Godoy is also UFCW Canada's liaison for Mexico, and one of the organizers behind the launch of the Spanish-language version of the report.

"If in Canada we exhaust all our energy and the answers aren't there, we think that it's important that we go to wherever we can, to try to better these circumstances," says Godoy. "We know that labour rights and human rights shouldn't be alienable. They should transcend borders, much like the people that come here to harvest our food, and often are neglected their basic human rights."

Haseena Manek is an Ottawa-based labour journalist, and *Our Times'* online community and outreach coordinator.





A Worker's Champion

GARY STEEVES (1950-2020)

GARY WAS LISTENING. AND WHO wouldn't listen, if you found Tommy Douglas, David Lewis or Ed Broadbent sitting at your kitchen table. As a kid, Gary was all ears while these federal leaders of the CCF, and later the NDP, talked with his mom and dad about unions, co-ops, credit unions, and about building the party.

Gary was born in Moncton, New Brunswick, in 1950. His father, Winston Steeves, was a leader of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) in the Maritimes. His mother, Joan (Matthews) Steeves, worked for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW Canada) and was provincial secretary of the NDP. Both were pillars of the NDP in the province. Tableside talks in the kitchen of their family home on West Street in Moncton formed the basis of a system of beliefs that motivated Gary for the rest of his life.

There could be no better place to pay tribute to Gary than in *Our Times*. He embodied the beliefs of the magazine, including that everyone deserves a safe job with decent pay, on a healthy planet. Gary's adherence to the fight for workers' rights and social justice caused one union activist in BC to say, "Gary was one of us. A worker's champion."

West Street was filled with children, and the doors of every home were always left unlocked. Gary's elementary school was just a block away from where he lived and right across the street from his grandparents' house. In the words of his sister, Shelly, "The Old West End was made for children and the school was a centre for learning and playing and making friends. Winter was skating and hockey at the rink, and a warming 'hut.' Summer brought swimming at the outdoor pool and a basketball court. A block away was Jones Lake, where Gary skated and tobogganed with his sister Bonnie and me."

In his youth Gary delivered newspapers to earn pocket money. As a teen he worked summers for the City of Moncton. After graduation from high school Gary held several jobs as he worked his way through his Political Science and Economics studies at Mount Allison University, in nearby Sackville.

But, as it did to so many young Atlantic Canadians in the '70s, the West beckoned. While studying, Gary worked in the mines in Thompson, Manitoba; in the pulp and paper industry in Campbell River, BC; and for Granduc copper mine just north of Stewart, BC, where he became a steward for Local 168 of the

By Bill Howes

Tunnel and Rock Workers. After leaving university Gary spent five years working on Parliament Hill as a researcher for NDP MP Cyril Symes and later as a researcher for the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).



In 1979 Gary was hired by the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) and it was in BC that Gary married Marina Horvath — also a dedicated union activist — who worked as a CLC staff representative. Marina recalls how, as she and Gary went through life together, each would serve as a sounding board for the other. They both loved fun and they loved people. Their door was always open to their many friends, from both inside and outside of the labour movement.

At the BCGEU, Gary served as a research officer, arbitration representative, assistant director of membership services, coordinator of technical support services, and as a regional coordinator. He was the director of field services and organizing from May 1993 until his retirement in June 2004. He also sat on numerous government boards and agencies, including the BC Labour Force Development Board and the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission.

In July 1983, emboldened by the Reagan and

Thatcher governments, BC's right-wing Social Credit government planned a massive program of cutbacks — some 26 bills — that would have devastated the province's labour movement. The BC Federation of Labour (BCFL) launched a fight-back campaign under the banner of "Operation Solidarity." On July 19 that year Gary happened to be one of the union staff who weren't on summer vacation and so it fell to him to meet with the Minister of Human Resources. There he learned that, among other major cutbacks, the government intended to phase out Tranquille, a large residential complex in Kamloops for people living with developmental disabilities.

Gary flew directly to Kamloops and, in an unprecedented 11 p.m. meeting with 300 members of the local union at Tranquille, he gave his description of the government plans and finished with the question, "Do you want to fight back?" When one member replied, "We have no choice!" the meeting erupted in a standing ovation. Immediately the members began to plan the takeover and occupation of Tranquille.

The occupation lasted three weeks and served as a rallying point for Operation Solidarity. It ended when the government finally accepted key union demands. Ninety-six per cent of the members voted to accept a hard-negotiated agreement and then marched off to an Operation Solidarity meeting to be welcomed in triumph.

Stephanie Smith, today's president of the BCGEU,

proudly says that "the lessons learned from the collective action at Tranquille are baked into our DNA."

Gary documented the lessons of the occupation with his book, *Tranquility Lost: The Occupation of Tranquille and Battle for Community Care in BC* (Nightwood Editions, 2020).

Indeed, Gary wasn't idle after he retired in 2004. In 1990, Gary and Marina had moved to Pender Island. In 2004, Gary was elected to the Islands Trust Council where he served for 10 years, during six of which he served as vice-chair. He was also a founding member of the BC Labour Heritage Centre.

Brother Gary Steeves passed away in Victoria on December 8, 2020 — shortly after his book was published.

Speaking in the BC Legislature, Bruce Ralston, Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, observed that "Gary was always quick with an anecdote, which often stretched into a longer story. He was an engaged and engaging loyal friend of working people everywhere. He devoted his life to creating a better world for everyone."

Gary summed up his own philosophy perfectly when, in a workshop for union activists, he concluded, "The status quo is never good enough."

Bill Howes is a union retiree living in Toronto. He'd like to thank Gary Steeves' friends, co-workers and family for their input into this tribute.



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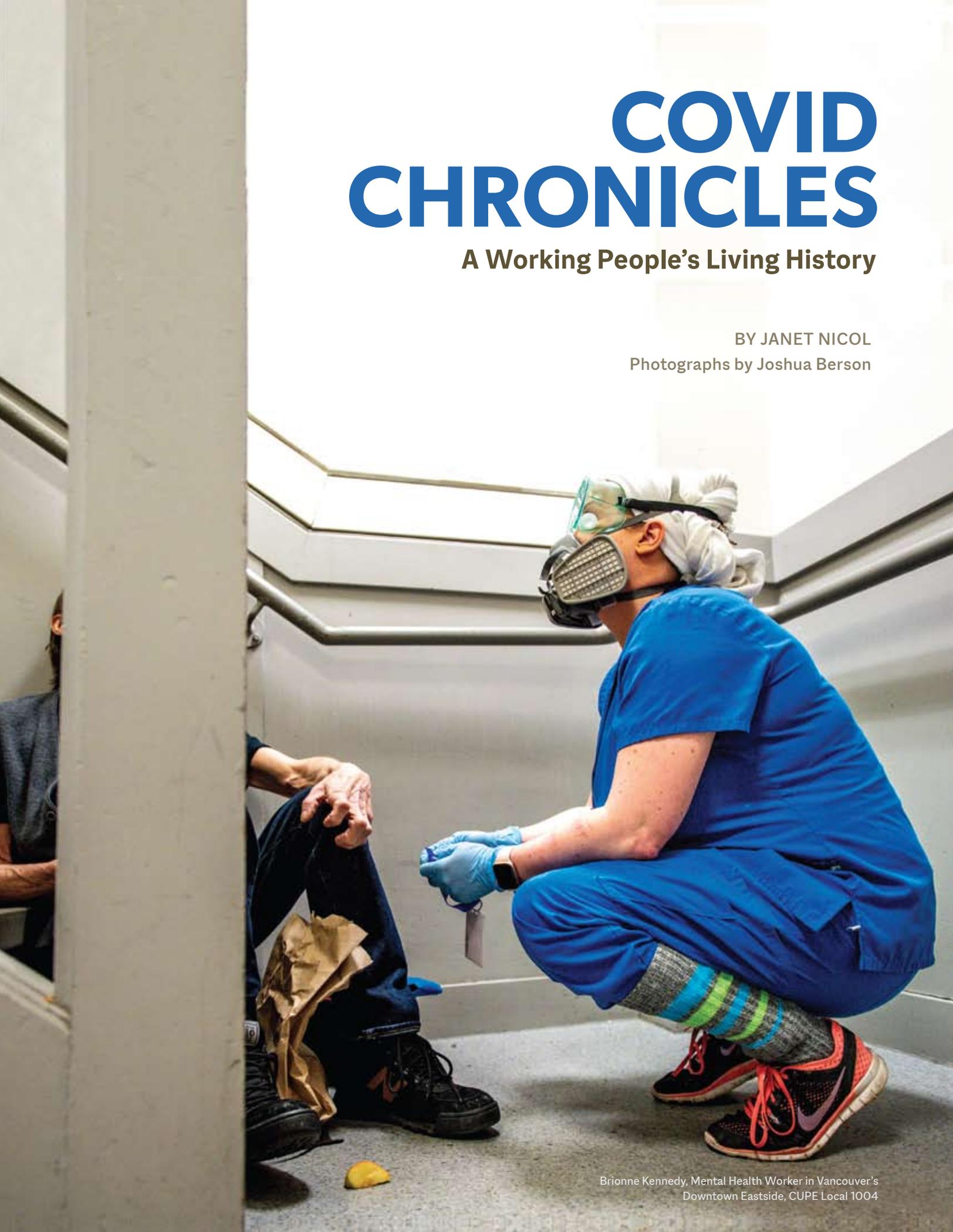
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COVID CHRONICLES

A Working People's Living History

BY JANET NICOL

Photographs by Joshua Berson



Brionne Kennedy, Mental Health Worker in Vancouver's
Downtown Eastside, CUPE Local 1004

COVID CHRONICLES

A Working People's Living History

As I have a compromised immune issue, the realization of the pandemic hit home hard. I stayed home and isolated until it was time to get essential supplies. It was eerily quiet in town and unusual to see no stores open or cars on the road.

C.M., Social Worker, British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)

Canadians on the job during the COVID-19 pandemic are facing risks that workers faced a century ago when the Spanish flu swept the globe — but this time working people are telling their stories and people are listening, including volunteers at the BC Labour Heritage Centre (BCLHC) in Vancouver.

"It sets you to thinking about your own history," says Marie Decaire, a member of the centre's board who recently retired from her job at the Community Savings Credit Union. "My mother was born in the Kootenays around the time of the flu outbreak. She never mentioned the Spanish flu when I was growing up. And I never asked."

Lasting from February 1918 to April 1920, the 1918 flu pandemic infected 500 million people, about a third of the world's population at the time. Last year, Decaire researched Vancouver newspapers published in 1918 and she noticed how workers' lives were rarely mentioned. She didn't want the

same thing to happen to workers and their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and so she proposed an oral history project called "COVID Chronicles: Labour's Story."

"Workers' voices need to be heard," she says. "When I proposed the idea of collecting COVID stories, everyone loved it."

Decaire heads the COVID Chronicles project committee, set up a month after the provincial government instigated a lockdown on March 17, 2020. By July, committee members were busy recording video interviews with trade union leaders and collecting online surveys filled out by frontline workers in union and non-union jobs. Since then, they have also been gathering photographs, union newsletters, newspaper clippings and artifacts, including signage and masks with union logos. The digitized collection will be archived at Simon Fraser University.

"It's a gift for historians a hundred years from now," Decaire says.

My mother was born in the Kootenays around the time of the flu outbreak. She never mentioned the Spanish flu when I was growing up. And I never asked. Workers' voices need to be heard. When I proposed the idea of collecting COVID stories, everyone loved it. It's a gift for historians a hundred years from now.

MARIE DECAIRE, board member, BC Labour Heritage Centre, Vancouver

Eighty per cent of the residents have hoarding issues. We have to go into the rooms and clean them out. There are open syringes and bugs, too. We shovel it all out. One room took 13 hours to clean, and we filled 40 garbage bags. We put in a new mattress and clean sheets. And then the hoarding starts up again. It's really about damage control with people who don't know how to take care of themselves. We make sure they are eating, they're safe and seeing the right doctors and nurses. The hotel is the end of the line for them.

At the beginning of the COVID pandemic we couldn't use narcan (a prescription drug to counter the effects of opioid overdose) because of the risk of the airborne virus. This was a crazy position because it meant we weren't able to do anything and people were dying and workers were traumatized. People are dying in the community every day. Kids as young as 14 are using fentanyl.

BRIONNE KENNEDY
Mental Health Worker in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside
CUPE Local 1004



When I start my shift, I always do a round. I have one resident that I sing with. We sing gospel songs and go back and forth to see if one of us knows the song. If I don't know it, I'll follow her. It's pretty magical and really fills me spiritually. When I sing, I can see the residents smiling. I used to sing at church, but there's no singing in groups right now, so it's so nice to have this connection with this senior.

TES ESTILO, Care Aide, Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)

So what are BC's workers saying?

"The right to refuse unsafe work has never been emphasized more," Decaire observes, based on her interviews with construction workers. "There isn't time to butt heads. Workers need to be safe and the industry needs to be saved. The pandemic has been the glue that keeps us together."

Employees in all occupations can contact the WorkSafeBC Prevention Information Line if they are at risk, Decaire points out. About 300 inspectors are available to visit work sites across the province.

Just being careful. Sanitize, washing hands, socially distancing. Crew meetings in the open air, time machine disabled, masks for everyone, respirators given to all employees.

J.L., Forestry Worker, United Steelworkers Local 1-1937/
BCLHC survey

Al Phillips, president of the BC Building Trades Council, appreciates the centre's efforts to capture pandemic stories, especially since construction workers were declared an essential service when the lockdown began. "The reaction from our members was mixed," he says about the designation, which affected 35,000 workers in 25 local unions. "Some were glad to have the work, others not so much," because of the extra risk involved.

A few mega-projects were shut down or scaled back, but the majority of BC construction workers remained on the job. So far, few outbreaks have occurred at work sites. "We're all on the same page," Phillips says. "There's a COVID plan."

Workers entering a site must fill out the usual COVID checklist of four questions: do you have any symptoms; have you been in contact with anyone with COVID-19; have you contracted COVID-19; have you been out of the country? Unclean portable toilets and the absence of hand-washing stations



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have always been problems, especially at non-union construction sites. Almost overnight, Phillips says, these issues became much more serious. By the third week of March, about a third of WorkSafeBC officers were assigned to construction sites.

By November only two claims had been received from construction workers diagnosed with COVID-19: an employee at the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project site in Kitimat, and another at a building site in downtown Vancouver. As of the second week of January 2021, WorkSafeBC had received 26 COVID-related claims from workers in the construction sector (both union and non-union).

In the meantime, Phillips finds himself working in front of a computer screen most of the time, conducting virtual meetings, many of which are connected to bargaining and grievance handling. He credits his

staff for implementing tech changes that allow members to have online access to services. Phillips also commends rank-and-file members. "I have to emphasize how much credit the people on the job should have for facing the fear of getting the infection."

Working in long-term care, the mental stress is affecting everyone — residents, family and staff. [I am] dealing with staff shortage and staff feeling overwhelmed and mentally drained with daily changes and restrictions. Residents' behaviours increasing [because of] not being able to see family and being segregated from other residents.

D.G., Healthcare Worker, Hospital Employees Union (HEU)/BCLHC survey



COVID has been tough on the marine industry in general. We have seen the loss of an entire cruise ship season, which has affected a lot of our members. We are in the middle of several contract negotiations and, due to COVID, we have been unable to complete our traditional way of bargaining. We have now gone online and have had success in meeting with employers and our committees. One of the most significant losses is the in-person, one-on-one time with members. COVID has severely affected our ability to board vessels and meet crews and give them a renewed sense of support.

ZIGGY MANGAT, secretary-treasurer, ILWU Local 400
International Longshore & Warehouse Union Canada

Prior to the pandemic, Aliya Griffin held two part-time jobs in the performing arts: Front of House Manager at Vancouver Civic Theatres, and Tour Manager at Green Thumb Theatre. When Vancouver Civic Theatres closed due to the lockdown, Griffin was laid off after 17 years of employment, as were other auxiliary employees, all members of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 15. As Front of House Manager, Griffin handled patron services and concerns, and liaised with other staff.

"Thankfully, my other part-time job, at a not-for-profit theatre company, was able to continue," Griffin wrote in the Labour Heritage Centre's survey. "I'm doing all right for now, and I know I'm luckier than many people, but the uncertainty is stressful."

"I'm on the administrative side," says Griffin in a follow-up interview with *Our Times* about the part-time work she retained as Tour Manager at Green Thumb Theatre. "I have friends on the performance side and their gigs are all gone. There is a pivot to the virtual world, but even then there are issues like [competing with] Netflix and TV. There is a power in live performance. How do you make it work in the virtual world?"

Griffin says she and other office employees stayed on salary at Green Thumb Theatre despite the cancellation of the theatre season and school tours. The

theatre has adapted, offering virtual events and small, outdoor productions at which people can follow the health protocols and keep their distance.

"I'm able to make ends meet," says Griffin about her part-time work. "I am making more than I would on CERB, but not enough to have savings." The Canada Emergency Response Benefit was a lifesaver for many of her colleagues. She says those unable to collect unemployment insurance after the CERB payments ended have found service and retail jobs to make ends meet.

I'm on the administrative side. I have friends on the performance side and their gigs are all gone. There is a pivot to the virtual world, but even then there are issues like competing with Netflix and TV. There is a power in live performance. How do you make it work in the virtual world?

I hope when it is over, audiences will come back in full force to support us. I would ask people to keep the performing arts in mind, whether it is the symphony or theatre. Keep in touch and support their digital efforts.

ALIYA GRIFFIN, Front of House Manager, Vancouver Civic Theatres, CUPE Local 15; Tour Manager, Green Thumb Theatre



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I heard through the control room the other day that transit police want to reduce their [in-person] contacts and, so, if homeless people aren't bothering anybody on the train and they're just sleeping, let's let people sleep. The same principles apply now that applied before COVID: if someone is sleeping on the train in a way that distresses the other passengers — for example, if they're lying on the floor, or if they're slumped over in a way that they look like they might be dead — we'll try to encourage people to sit up, or to sit in a seat. For the most part it goes pretty well. Usually, the people who can't comply have a few other issues.

When the weather warmed up, we stopped seeing the homeless on the trains. Now that they're coming back, I feel there is a strong compassion for people.

STEPHEN RAYSON

1st vice-chair, BCGEU Local 1003 (Canada Line)/BCLHC survey

Griffin is also the founder and artistic director of The Troika Collective — a local troupe on hold since the pandemic began. In pre-pandemic times, the artists created and performed stories with Eastern European themes. In 2018, they provided live entertainment for the BC Labour Heritage Centre's walking tour on the 35th anniversary of Operation Solidarity, the largest political protest in BC's history.

Live theatre performances are happening around the city with limited audiences, coupled with live streaming, but, says Griffin, "it's just not working. I can understand people are scared to come out."

As for Griffin's former job at Vancouver Civic Theatres, CUPE Local 15 was able to negotiate a letter of agreement ensuring that auxiliary employee lay-offs were considered temporary, and not permanent. "I

hope when it is over, audiences will come back in full force to support us," she says. Meanwhile, pandemic conditions in Vancouver continue through the winter months. "I would ask people to keep the performing arts in mind, whether it is the symphony or theatre," Griffin says. "Keep in touch and support their digital efforts."

Once we were back [at school] on June 1, it was [about] learning the shortfalls at the different high schools I was called out to daily. Some were good in following guidelines. Some not so much.

V.W., Teacher on call, BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF)/BCLHC survey



From left to right: MIKE DAWE, SARAH RAMSEY, GURPREET JOHAL, Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE Local 873.

MIKE DAWE: We respond to out-of-hospital medical emergencies across BC. I do quite like my job, most days. I have a great partner, which makes the long shifts that we do enjoyable. A good partner makes most days not really feel like work at all.

This profession is quite varied from day to day, with all manner of emergencies, which certainly keeps the day from being monotonous. Really, the only thing I dislike about this job is the calls that aren't a medical emergency at all, things like sore toes and toothaches. You think I'm kidding, but people actually call 911 for these things and it's honestly infuriating.

Work during the initial phase of the pandemic was fairly stressful. We didn't know a lot about this virus and, combined with the uncertainties about the quantity and effectiveness of our PPE supply, this made for some nerve-racking days. The area I work in is one of the hardest hit by the opioid crisis, so that, combined with the COVID stress, had us all fairly miserable for quite a while. When summer hit, we were all working in the heat, wrapped head to toe in plastic and rubber. We were all pretty frazzled and burnt out. However, once fall arrived and things cooled off, we seemed to settle into a routine, and while I hate to say it, this is unfortunately the new normal. We know it's not forever, but we have to just focus on keeping our head in the game until we're done with the new normal, and go back to the old normal.

It's the people I work with that make my job bearable, interesting and fun. My partner, the other crews at the station, all the hospital staff, and other emergency services we work alongside day after day, make me happy I am in this profession.

MIKE DAWE, Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE Local 873

My day can range from helping an elderly person out of a chair to taking someone to the hospital who has cut their hand off with a chainsaw.

I like the fact that most people can't do what I do every day. And it's a job where I don't know what each hour will bring. I see people at their worst, at their most helpless. I hold their hand. I help them. I also like the teamwork involved. You have to rely on your partner.

What don't I like about the work? Some of the things you see, as much as you rationalize it as part of the job, stay with you. Not being able to get to a family birthday party when there's 10 minutes left in your shift and you are called out and it takes much longer.

You see human nature, the entire spectrum. You see people who are grateful and others who feel entitled and can't cope.

At the beginning of the pandemic there was lots of anxiety. It was a stressful time and there wasn't much information. There was a shortage of PPE and no real guidelines. The policies kept changing. I remember a neighbour across the street came over on my way to work and thanked me for what I was doing. That meant a lot.

The vaccine is coming but COVID will be around for a few more years. I hope six months down the road there will be no infections.

What keeps me going? About eight years ago, my father's neighbour was lying on his front lawn, moaning. I went out. I wasn't on duty. I rendered First Aid to him, checking his vitals and calling an ambulance. He had a stroke. My two-year-old son was watching. That night he wanted me to put him to sleep, not his mother. I was a hero to him. That image keeps me going — and the neighbour who thanked me for what I was doing.

GURPREET JOHAL, Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE Local 873

"I appreciate the time taken by the Labour Heritage Centre to record this living history so we don't see it as a blur," says Kim Novak, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1518 (UFCW 1518). More than half the local's 20,000 members are grocery-chain employees. "When the province went into lockdown," Novak says, "protocols for food-processing workers and store clerks were changing hourly."

Grocery clerks were designated essential and began receiving an extra \$2 an hour "pandemic pay." "Customers are telling our members they are grateful for their work," Novak says. "There's been a new recognition." But this "hero" status hasn't held up, with employers dropping the pandemic pay in May 2020. UFCW 1518 has joined other unions, demanding the \$2 bonus be restored. To date, this demand has not been met. However, UFCW 1518 was able to negotiate an additional \$2 an hour "hazard pay" until January 1, 2021, in their first contract at Clarity Cannabis, a Vancouver dispensary organized during the pandemic.

Early on, the union also ensured plexiglass was installed between the clerks and customers, overcrowding was prevented and social distancing enforced. Unfortunately, these vital protocols have

also led to increased abuse from customers, Novak says. "A trust is violated when people come through the doors and don't wear a mask. And this has an impact. Wearing a mask, social distancing and shopping in small groups potentially saves lives."

Only 17 per cent of BC's private sector employees — retail clerks included — are unionized, compared to 77 per cent in the public sector. "When workers don't have advocates, there is additional stress," Novak points out. "The weight is all on the workers to enforce the protocols."

The pandemic has been a wake-up call for some of these non-union workers. "We can't do face-to-face organizing," Novak says, "but we are finding new methods to reach out." In 2020, UFCW 1518 organized employees at five coffee shops and at Clarity Cannabis, in Vancouver. Despite the uncertain future of movie houses, Cineplex Cinemas employees in Coquitlam are negotiating a first contract and, at the time of this writing, were in mediation.

Forty per cent of UFCW 1518 members are under 30 years of age, Novak says, and many don't stay at the job for long. "We want our values as an organization to be in line with theirs, whether it is climate change, the increase in forest fires or COVID."

Stewards have gained a greater appreciation from

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Farhaan Shaikh, member of UFCW 1518.

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There's some scary stuff out there! And tomorrow isn't promised. I think the pandemic also made us realize that we need to be sure of what we're doing. I'm a lot more thoughtful now. I put my mask on when I go out. I'm pre-meditative when I do things because I don't want to hurt somebody else! I don't want to hurt myself. I put my mask on. I wash my hands extra. I do all these things. I take more time to be aware of the things that I'm doing, and how they actually affect others.

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SOLIDARITY ON THE SEVEN SEAS

The pandemic has played havoc with the working lives of seafarers on foreign-flagged ships, according to Peter Lahay, Canadian Coordinator of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF).

"Crew members are contacting us here in Canada and saying 'help us get off the ships because we're trapped,'" he says, in an interview with the BC Labour Heritage Centre's COVID Chronicles project. "They haven't even come ashore because they're afraid to catch COVID."

Crew members typically sign nine-month work contracts, going ashore for breaks at ports of call. But the global pandemic has dramatically changed their working life.

"Some haven't been ashore in six or seven months," Lahay says. "What do you think that will be doing to the psychology, the fatigue, the willingness to live, of these people?"

Lahay, with 27 years of union experience under his belt, works out of the Labour Maritime Centre in Vancouver. Thanks to his efforts during the pandemic, seafarers in Canada have been declared essential workers and are exempt from the two-

week quarantine rule — if they can get off a vessel.

Lahay says the public can be assured seafarers are tested prior to boarding a ship and, once on-board, they follow strict protocols. Ships entering Canada must send a pre-arrival report to Transport Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). According to Lahay, "Out of the many thousands of ships into BC since the pandemic, there have been five reported cases. These crew are taken off and put into government-monitored isolation and should they require medical assistance, that is provided."

Lahay has also ensured replacement crews from other countries have online access to visa applications. But he says much more needs to be done to help the many seafarers who can't get home.

"I'm starting to think about what's going to happen to this generation, to seafarers that are caught out on these ships now," Lahay says. "They're going to be like our grandfathers that came home from the war. And they won't talk about it . . . because the things that they must be going through on board in terms of their mental wellness are just absolutely overwhelming." — J.N.

their fellow workers during the pandemic, Novak reports, and online steward-training workshops are popular. "The workshops bring people together. They can support each other and network. It's the workers themselves who have the solutions and can build support."

Novak predicts that when UFCW 1518 members look back on the pandemic, a positive view will prevail. "Frontline workers stood up and stuck together, and we got through it."

I worked around the clock for the first several weeks helping members and employers. [I was] close to burn-out and then not allowed to socialize to ease the work pressures. Felt very isolated at the beginning and realized how I need to be around people.

S.C., Municipal Employee, CUPE/ BCLHC survey

The Labour Heritage Centre has truly seized the moment with its COVID Chronicles project, collecting first-hand accounts from BC's working people about what it has been like to work through a pandemic. Their words will go down in history.

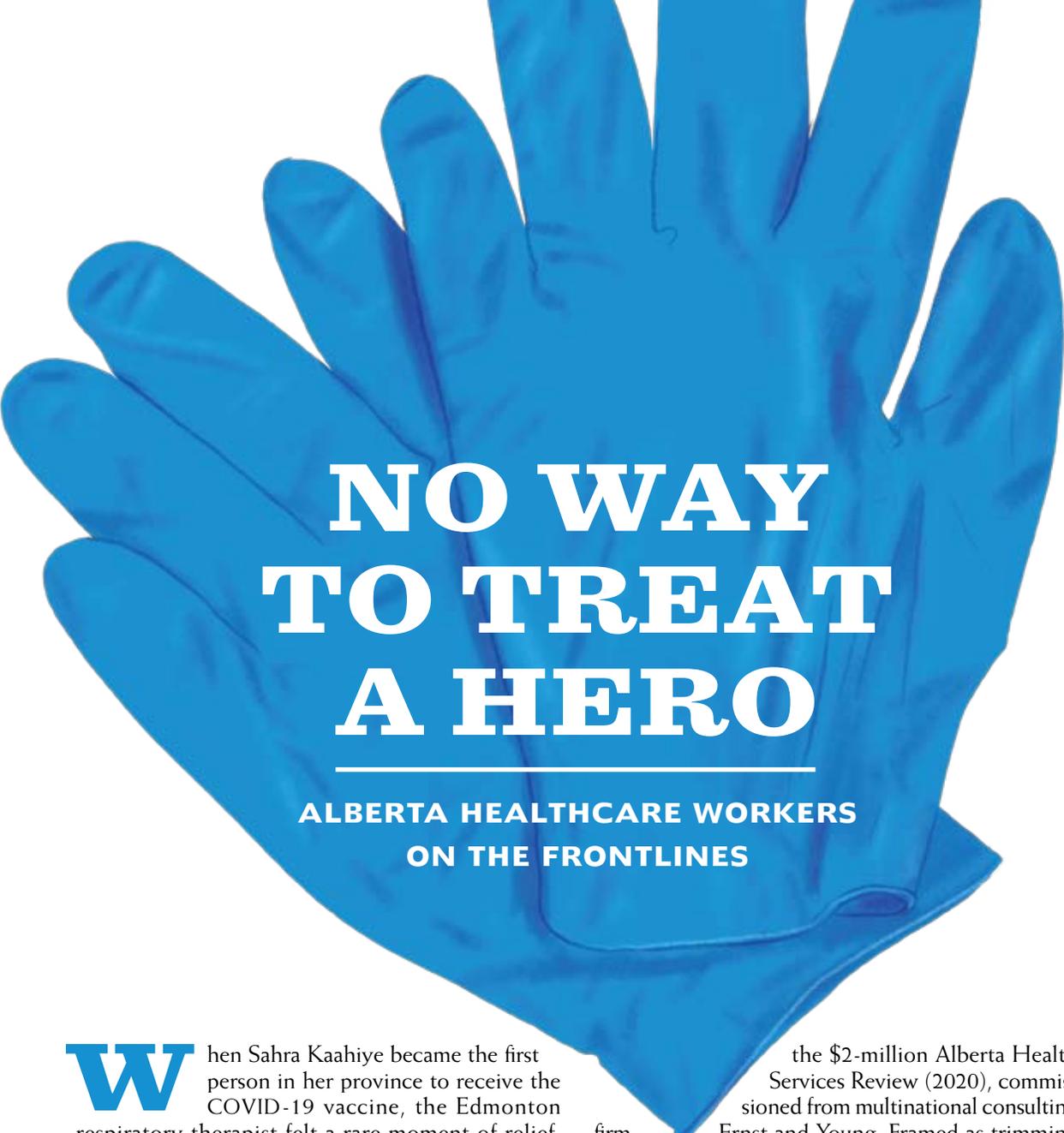
"The stories show what it takes for lab technicians to continually test a large population," Decaire says of the project she helped start, "and the risks [facing] grocery store clerks and the workers who keep the transportation routes going. It's an encouraging tale of what people can do when we work together."

Janet Nicol is a freelance writer and retired high school teacher in Vancouver. She has written labour histories and lesson aids for the BC Labour Heritage Centre, the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) online museum, and TeachBC website.

For more information and stories about the COVID Chronicles, visit the BC Labour Heritage Centre's website.

The stories show what it takes for lab technicians to continually test a large population, and the risks facing grocery store clerks and the workers who keep the transportation routes going. It's an encouraging tale of what people can do when we work together.

MARIE DECAIRE, board member, BC Labour Heritage Centre



NO WAY TO TREAT A HERO

ALBERTA HEALTHCARE WORKERS
ON THE FRONTLINES

When Sahra Kaahiye became the first person in her province to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, the Edmonton respiratory therapist felt a rare moment of relief. Working conditions have been grueling, hazardous and unpredictable for many workers during the pandemic's second wave, taking an enormous toll on frontline healthcare workers in particular. "I'm sure you might know that there's been tension between some doctors and the provincial government," says the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) member. "We've unfortunately had a lot of uncertainty regarding our doctors. We've had a lot of doctors leave, and the number of doctors we've had rotate through our unit has also declined. The ones who are currently there can't tell us if they are going to stay."

In 2019, Premier Jason Kenney's United Conservative (UCP) government began drawing a blueprint for cuts to public healthcare. To justify increased privatization, they used two reports: the MacKinnon report, which was released by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta's Finances (2019), headed by former Saskatchewan finance minister Janice MacKinnon; and

the \$2-million Alberta Health Services Review (2020), commissioned from multinational consulting firm Ernst and Young. Framed as trimming fat from provincial spending, recommendations leaned heavily in favour of diverting funding from the \$20.6 billion allocated for healthcare in last year's budget. As Sammy Hudes and Dylan Short outlined in the September 10, 2020 *Edmonton Journal*, \$5.2 billion of that budget had been earmarked for doctors, which Health Minister Tyler Shandro found unacceptable. The Alberta Medical Association could not agree to drastic cuts to physicians' services and fees proposed

by Shandro in February of 2020. Then COVID-19 struck, forcing the UCP government to hit "pause."

Suddenly, doctors and other workers in essential jobs were being called "heroes." Kaahiye describes the arduous workplace conditions created by the pandemic: To guard against COVID-19, "We do regular swabbing; I get swabbed once or twice a week. If it comes out that there is an asymptomatic positive, we end up having to do a whole other round of swabbing, and swabbing the patients as well. That staff

By Melissa Keith

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

THERE IS ALWAYS A SHORTAGE AND SHUFFLING OF STAFF MEMBERS. THE STRUGGLE WITH “WORKING SHORT” IS VERY REAL ON THE FRONTLINE OF ALBERTA HEALTHCARE

member who is asymptomatic has to stay home and quarantine,” as must co-workers who exhibit any of the vague, varied signs and symptoms of the novel coronavirus. Because of all these factors, “there is always such a shortage and shuffling of staff members. I know it’s something that management really struggles with.”

The struggle with “working short” is very real on the frontline of Alberta healthcare. “There are times where we’re down to just a handful of nurses on the unit, and only one RN who’s in charge, or they’re scrambling trying to get a casual to come in, or lots of overtime to get people to stay overnight,” says the respiratory therapist, who divides her time between the respiratory unit at CapitalCare Norwood and Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital. “I know myself,

TIRED OF 16-TO-24-HOUR SHIFTS, OF BEING CALLED “HEROES” WHILE THE GOVERNMENT LOOKS FOR WAYS TO TAKE AWAY THEIR JOBS, AND PUBLIC HEALTHCARE

and a lot of people not just in respiratory but in nursing fields as well, everybody is just trying to do their best to pick up as many shifts as they can. But they’re getting really tired.”

Tired of the pandemic, tired of 16-to-24-hour shifts, and tired of being called “heroes” while the government looks for ways to take away their jobs — and make sweeping cuts to public healthcare: All of the above apply for Susan Slade. She’s a licensed practical nurse (LPN) who is currently working full time with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), and was elected one of its six vice-presidents. “I am the only LPN of the six; we all come from different areas of union membership,” she explains. “My portfolio is the Edmonton area, so a significant amount of the membership in my area works in healthcare, plus I have regular contact with various other places, simply because of working for Alberta Health Services for 28 years.”

Slade says that pandemic mismanagement was there from the beginning in Alberta. “The first concerns we were hearing of course were around the personal protective equipment and the masks particularly. That has been ongoing ever since the very start of COVID.” Some masks caused facial irritation and rashes. “There was a massive concern about the PPE workers were being given, especially in our long-term care facilities.” Sometimes, at the very beginning of the pandemic, personal protective equipment was rationed, says Slade. “It wasn’t readily available.



Respiratory therapist Sahra Kaahiye was the first person in Alberta to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. She is a member of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA).

“Then of course there’s the pandemic pay that was promised to the healthcare aides; that was said by the minister of health, but then he backtracked on that and said it wasn’t for everyone, it was only for certain groups of healthcare aides. So that created another fiasco.”

In November 2020, the Alberta Federation of Labour revealed that federal government documents showed the Kenney UCP government had refused to contribute to an “essential worker wage top-up program” (also known as “hero pay”) — provinces and territories were expected to contribute \$1 billion to match the federal pledge of \$3 billion. Because Alberta contributed only 3.5 per cent of what was expected, it could not access over \$300 million designated to boost the pandemic wages of frontline workers.

“It was actually based on whether you worked in a private, for-profit care facility, and there were a whole

PHOTOGRAPH: NUURA MOHAMMOUD

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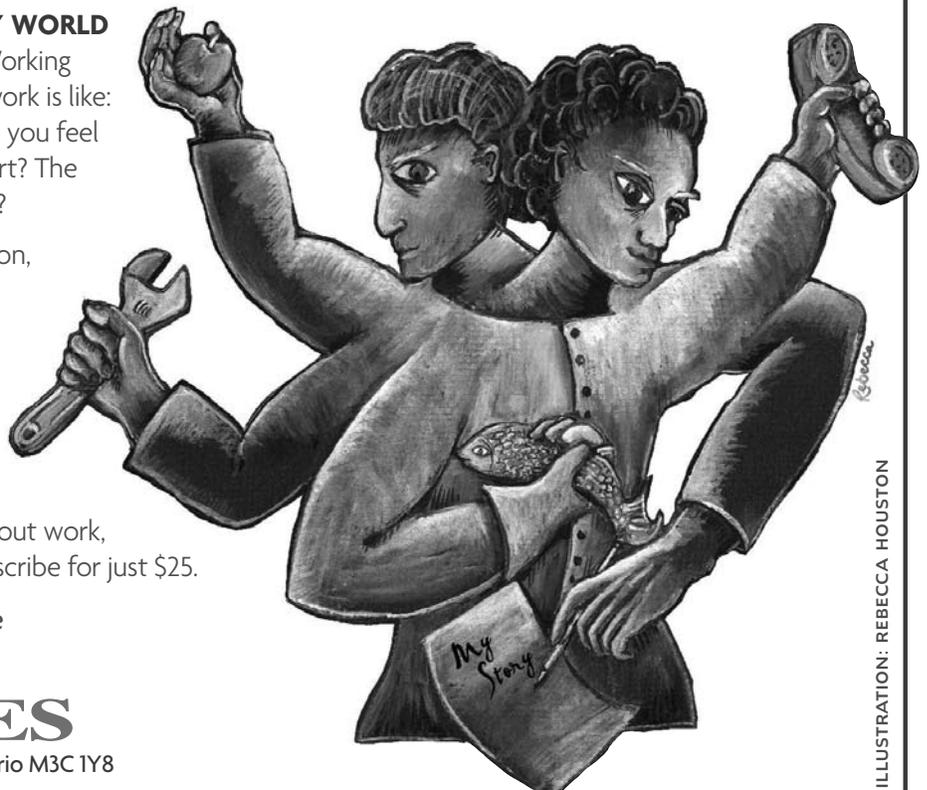


ILLUSTRATION: REBECCA HOUSTON

**EVERYBODY WORKING THE FRONTLINES SHOULD BE RECEIVING PANDEMIC PAY,
WHETHER THEY ARE ACTUALLY IN HEALTHCARE OR NOT**

bunch of parameters around it," says Slade. "Then recently it's been said that the provincial government didn't apply for all of the federal funding that was available." Pandemic pay is not based on an individual's job classification, and she argues that it shouldn't be: "Everybody working the frontlines should be receiving pandemic pay, whether they are actually in healthcare or not." It's not only the high-profile doctors and nurses who have seen their lives broadsided by COVID-19, she adds, but workers much further down the pay scale: "It has increased workloads hugely, especially in healthcare, but of course we see that in other areas as well, so we've been continually talking, in the media especially, about the need to ensure that people are being paid properly. They are risking themselves every day that they go to work."

Rather than recognizing the sacrifices made by essential workers and their families, the Kenney government chose to reward them with the news that they, and their colleagues in supporting roles, were dispensable. "The government did come out last fall, stating that they would be eliminating up to 1,000 jobs," the LPN tells *Our Times*. "It's a lot of frontline environmental services; they want to privatize it, take the laundry facilities out [of healthcare

facilities]." Citing the Ernst and Young report, Slade says it was commissioned to "find efficiencies within Alberta Health Services," resulting in a familiar list of recommended "efficiencies": "It actually came down to privatizing; selling off the rest of the public long-term care facilities, such as CapitalCare and Carewest, employers within Alberta, and privatizing those;

**RATHER THAN RECOGNIZING THE SACRIFICES
MADE BY ESSENTIAL WORKERS, THE KENNEY
GOVERNMENT CHOSE TO REWARD THEM WITH
THE NEWS THAT THEY WERE DISPENSABLE**

privatizing the rest of the rural laundry facilities that aren't privatized already; the environmental services; cutting numerous registered nursing jobs . . . The list goes on."

But so does the pandemic, which, through fall and winter, transformed into an ominously escalating second wave in Alberta. On January 18, 2021, the province reported 117,767 total cases of confirmed COVID-19; 456 were reported for that date alone.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF AUPE



"We spend a lot of time rewarding people for being CEOs and executives, but we certainly don't reward them for being a housekeeper, or for looking after your children, or anything like that. It's a very skewed system in our world right now," says LPN Susan Slade (front, right).

LABOUR IS ALWAYS A LOW-HANGING FRUIT, BECAUSE WE MAKE UP THE LARGEST PORTION OF ANY BUDGET, AT THE HOSPITALS IN PARTICULAR



Registered nurse Pauline Worsfold is secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) and a member of United Nurses of Alberta (UNA).

While 105,208 people had recovered, 11,096 cases remained "active" and 740 of those patients were currently hospitalized. The total number of COVID-19 deaths in Alberta was 1,463, third among all provinces/territories, behind only Quebec and Ontario.

Registered nurse Pauline Worsfold works in the post-anesthetic recovery room at the University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton. She's also secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) and a member of United Nurses of Alberta (UNA). "It's kind of odd. Our work is dependent on the operating rooms. After you have surgery, you come first to the recovery room to recover from your anesthetic, and get any problems that you have sorted out before we send you to the post-op unit," she says. "During COVID, off and on, we've had to decrease surgeries to intentionally keep the hospital empty, to allow for COVID cases to be admitted." The normal 17 operating rooms that can function concurrently have been reduced to just eight. The reduction in capacity means only emergency, trauma, and some cancer surgeries are scheduled, while less-urgent procedures have been postponed.

"We did the same thing in the spring when we

expected the [COVID-19] numbers to be terrible, very high. When our numbers levelled off, we ramped up right away," recalls Worsfold. "We were able to do lots of surgeries, to attempt to catch up from the ones that were postponed in the spring. I can foresee that we will be doing that again, as soon as our numbers are looking better." (On the day of her interview, Alberta was second in the country by active cases per capita.)

Worsfold notes that some nurses were redeployed to virus-screening/testing, contact tracing, post-op units and intensive care units. Their adaptability and effort didn't change the UCP government's pursuit of efficiencies, however: "There was a rumour that was confirmed in the fall of last year, that they were planning on laying off 750 nurses," she says. "Labour is always a low-hanging fruit, because we make up the largest portion of any budget, at the hospitals in particular. So the easiest way to balance the budget is to cut jobs. It's not the right thing to do, because people need frontline workers there, to care for them, and not solely nurses, either."

The heroism of auxiliary workers in hospitals and long-term care facilities was overshadowed by that of doctors and nurses, says Slade. The possibility of losing these essential healthcare team members to budget cuts, after COVID-19 numbers subsided, was simply offensive. "That is one of the reasons why there was a wildcat strike that happened on October 26," she adds. "That was the final straw. For months and months, you're hearing about how you're a 'hero,' but yeah . . . You're going to be a 'hero' for however

YOU'RE A 'HERO' FOR HOWEVER LONG THE PANDEMIC LASTS AND THEN WE'RE NOT GOING TO NEED YOU: YOU'RE GOING TO BE GONE AND HITTING THE UNEMPLOYMENT LINE

long the pandemic lasts and then we're not going to need you, so you're going to be gone and hitting the unemployment line."

Monday morning, last October 26, these frontline workers instead joined the picket line at University of Alberta Hospital and Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton; Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary; and other locations around the province, including Wetaskiwin, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Cold Lake and St. Paul. Although frequently undervalued, these workers' supporting roles in healthcare are undeniably important, notes Slade: "As an LPN who worked for many years within the system, we can't do our jobs



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without the general support services: the housekeeping, the laundry, the clerical, the maintenance. That's how a hospital runs and that's how it ensures that it stays safe and clean, and that supplies are readily available."

Outsourcing and privatization of these auxiliary positions would damage Alberta healthcare, because workers would seek better opportunities in other fields or places. "You don't stay at a \$15-an-hour job when you can go somewhere else to work for more money, so the continuity of care changes," says Slade. "We see that within long-term care facilities: People don't stay, because they don't make what they would at Alberta Health Services, which is the biggest employer in healthcare in this province. You need to have consistency to have well-run facilities, and people aren't going to work for just minimum wage, nor should they."

Budget cuts at direct personal cost to the "heroes" of the pandemic may have been planned before the crisis hit, but the inflexibility of Kenney and his health minister, Shandro, only highlights the injustice of holding the line now.

"To look after people, to look after facilities, and do all that . . . That is something that should be rewarded,"

stresses Slade. "We spend a lot of time rewarding people for being CEOs and executives, but we certainly don't reward them for being a housekeeper, or for looking after your children, or anything like that. It's a very skewed system in our world right now." She adds that racialized workers and women still commonly do the heavy lifting in the lowest-paid essential jobs, indicating an unfair, if common, expectation that the work of care and cleaning is somehow natural for them, just like low wages. Highly educated immigrants unable to find employment in their field are often found working in hospital or long-term care facility kitchens, environmental services and laundries.

The AUPE vice-president says Alberta can do better for its "heroes": "Even just as much as the pandemic pay would have gone a long way." Limiting workers to one healthcare facility, to prevent spreading infection among vulnerable populations, has been termed the "one-site rule." For some essential workers, it brought a fleeting sense of job security, but for others, it limited their ability to piece together an adequate income. Alberta nurses became eligible for paid sick days in late January 2021, in an agreement between the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA) and

The 70,000 members of UFCW Locals 175 & 633 are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic making sure people can access the food, healthcare, and vital services they need.

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BC HAD A GREAT MODEL: THEY BROUGHT ALL THEIR LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES, PRIVATE, FOR-PROFIT, BACK INTO THE PUBLIC SYSTEM TO ENSURE PROPER STAFFING LEVELS



Pauline Worsfold (right) and co-worker ready to enter a COVID-positive room.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) that includes retroactive payment for employees who had to self-isolate from July 2, 2020. But paid sick leave remains an elusive goal for other frontline healthcare workers.

"There was no consultation with the unions so that we could actually figure something out," Slade recalls, adding that their neighbouring province has implemented a better way to manage the pandemic: "BC had a great model: They brought everybody back into the public system. They brought all of their long-term care facilities, private, for-profit, back into their system to ensure that they had proper staffing levels. They ensured that people were being looked after. Alberta just makes an announcement, and then they change that announcement, or make a ministerial order with no thought to it."

While RNs like Worsfold are not among the frontline workers threatened with post-COVID layoffs, she and many others stand in solidarity with the auxiliary workers and last fall's wildcat strike. "It's insulting, the way that we are just widgets, according to the government," she quips. "How we can be moved around and replaced at any given time. And then to expect a high quality of healthcare to be delivered, at the same time? It's absolute craziness." She has continued to work in her regular post-anesthesia room position. "For me, the piece that has changed is the number of cases that are either COVID-positive or presumed COVID-positive," she explains. "We normally have patients come to us, in the recovery room; now, you go into the operating room and you gear up and

wear all of your personal protective equipment." She counts herself lucky to have adequate PPE, and that the nearby Butterdome field hospital, set up to supplement the five COVID units in her hospital, hasn't had to accept patients.

Worsfold says she has never encountered another illness with an impact like COVID-19 in her 39 years of nursing. "I do see a flickering matchstick at the end of the tunnel, and that's the vaccine rollout," she adds. Worsfold has received her initial vaccination and made an appointment for her second dose.

But, like much in Alberta healthcare at the moment, even the vaccine-distribution plans are not being communicated by the government in a coherent fashion. "There's a lot of staff frustration," observes Sahra Kaahiye. "At the moment, they're very confused as to the vaccine rollout. We have administration staff being vaccinated, for example, prior to emergency doctors and paramedics." Add to this, technical glitches that have further hampered government communications with healthcare workers and, at the time of writing, pharmaceutical companies delaying vaccine shipments to Canada.

As a respiratory therapist frequently in close proximity to aerosol-generating medical procedures, she was the first person in Alberta to receive the vaccine. But Kaahiye doesn't feel much like a hero. "Within my workplace, it's mostly just status quo, in terms of what we're doing, despite the pandemic," she says. "Speaking for myself, and the people I've had conversations

A LOT OF FRONTLINE HEALTHCARE WORKERS THAT I'VE TALKED TO ARE DONE AFTER THIS PANDEMIC, BECAUSE THEY JUST FEEL SO BURNT OUT

with, we always knew that there was going to be a risk with doing our jobs, similar to police officers."

They didn't count on the added danger, though, of a government that calls them "heroes" even as it continues to actively erode their working conditions and further jeopardize their health and safety. "A lot of frontline healthcare workers that I've talked to are done after this pandemic," says Kaahiye. "They're stepping back and looking at alternatives, other jobs, other occupations, because they just feel so burnt out by what's happening now."

Melissa Keith is a former radio broadcaster and an award-winning freelance journalist. She lives in Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY PAULINE WORSFOLD

Championing Spirituality in the Workplace

WORKING PEOPLE IN CANADA RELY ON A ROBUST set of employment laws and regulations designed for their protection. Anti-discrimination laws, minimum-wage standards and sexual-harassment policies help safeguard us from oppressive structures in our society. The Canadian labour movement is largely responsible for these successes and continues to represent over 3.3 million workers today. Though public support for organized labour has declined, inequitable conditions exacerbated by the pandemic have revived many workers' interest in unions. While critics claim that unions promote mediocrity, inflate compensation, protect lazy workers and provide undesired job security, there is another narrative taking hold: As billionaires' wealth skyrockets and working people find themselves struggling with even greater precarity, unions have much to offer.

Forces such as settler colonialism and neoliberalism subjugate people on a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level daily. Discrimination in its many forms threatens our country's rich social fabric, including the workplaces of union members and the communities in which they live. Using race, religion, gender or ancestry to divide people undermines human rights everywhere and serves only to weaken us all. Personal beliefs, cultural norms, structural institutions and spiritual views all converge to produce unequal power relations between individuals.

The politics of recognition is a concept that helps

explain how "misrecognizing" is a form of oppression that harms and distorts people's lives. Misrecognizing someone is the act of deliberately failing to acknowledge a person's positionality, or pretending to do so.

Our identities are often largely shaped by acceptance, or the lack of it, and so trade unionists in the labour movement

must look at how they conceptualize inclusive workplaces. Who or what are we leaving out?

We are leaving out spirituality and religion. Spirituality should be understood the same way as other markers of difference like gender, race, ability and sexual orientation. By examining the religious and spiritual proclivities of Canadians we can gain further insight into how this facet of our lives informs our experiences.

In 2017, an Angus Reid study found that most Canadians characterize themselves as religious and believe in the existence of a higher power. The study also discovered that we enjoy maintaining a high degree of spiritual life. New immigrants, many of whom are racialized and belong to religions other than Christianity, were also linked to the increased growth in faith-based communities. Women had a higher propensity for spirituality than did their male counterparts and placed considerable importance on it. Ultimately, the data suggest that religious and spiritual identities are static, reflect various worldviews and are both internally and externally diverse. They are a critical component of who we are. So why does

By Riley Richman

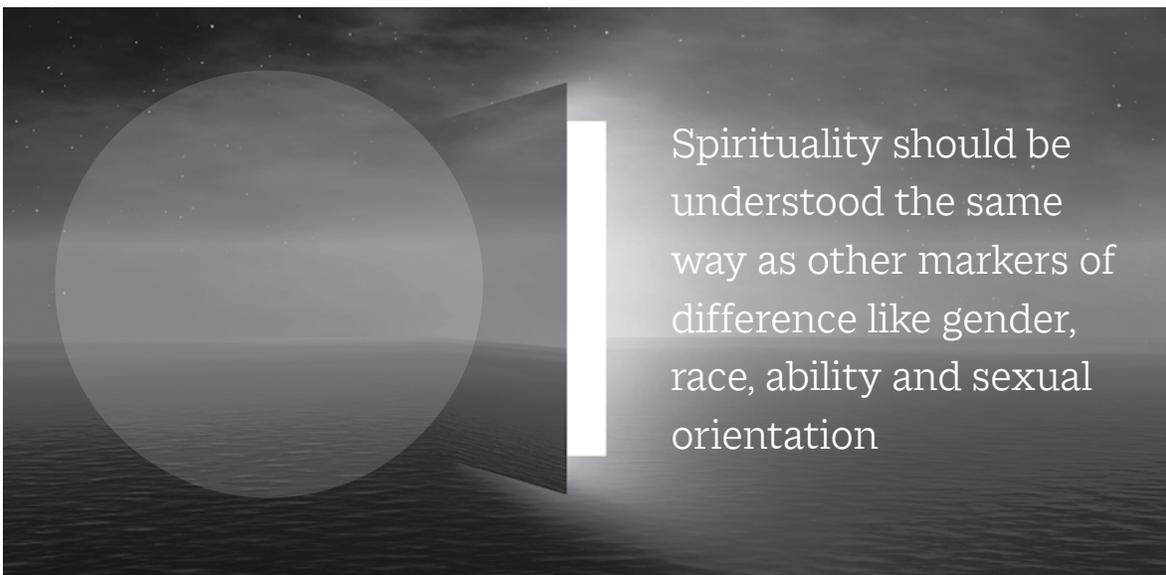


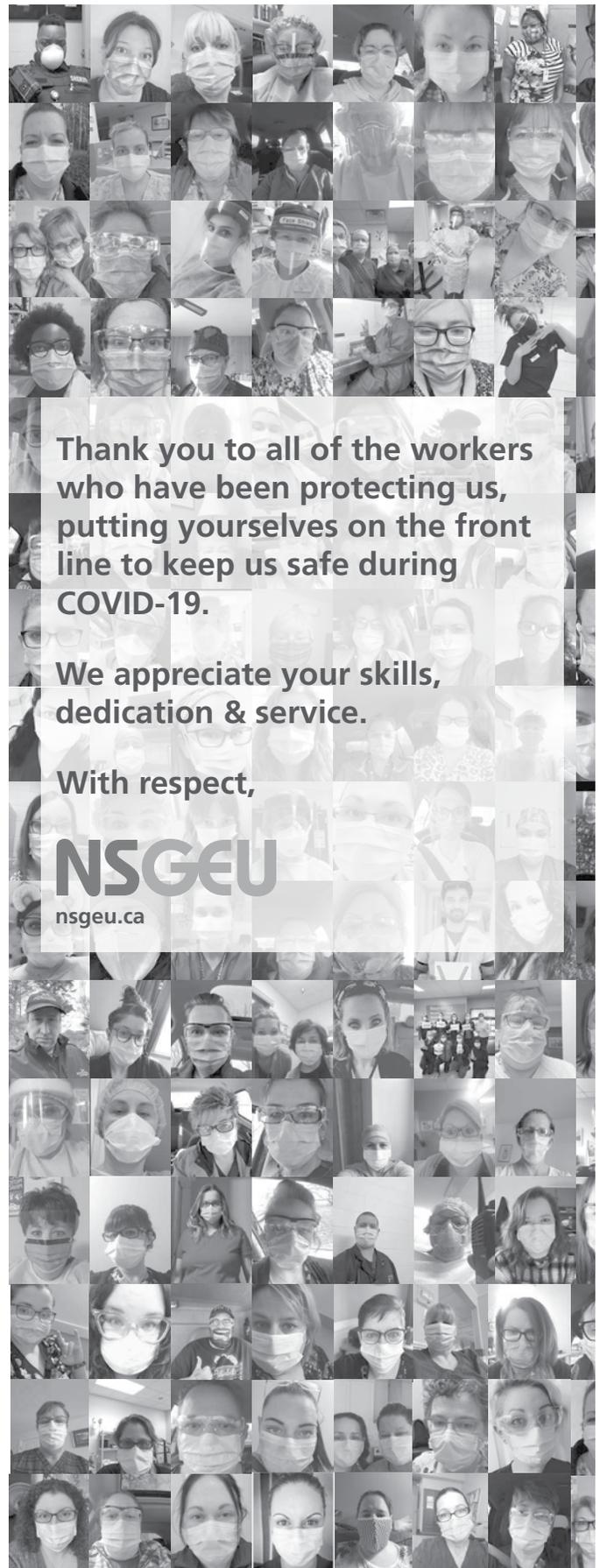
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secularism dominate our public sphere then? Particularly in the workplace?

The shift to secularism had noble beginnings. It was designed to offset dominant Judeo-Christian ideologies pervasive in our Canadian establishment until the 1960s. Unfortunately, as the role of religion in our state apparatus vanished, so did the platform used to openly express our spiritual identities. One's spiritual fulfilment was relegated to the private domain, and it became a classic case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. While secularism in the name of equity is a worthy cause, it has created other inequitable conditions we cannot afford to ignore. In 2019, Quebec successfully passed Bill 21 and banned public servants in a position of authority from wearing religious symbols or covering their faces while on the job. Overnight, hijabs, turbans, kippahs and crucifixes were outlawed. Bigotry was legally sanctioned. For some, it was a solution to the threat of multiculturalism and erasure of what they saw as a distinct, French-speaking cultural element of the province. For others it was an infringement of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For much of the labour movement it was a failure to respond to a watershed moment in our country's history. Let's look at frontline healthcare workers for an example. While women account for 83 per cent of this workforce, women of colour and new immigrants are over-represented across all its occupations. Many of them are part of the same demographic cited earlier, from the Angus Reid study, who value their religious identities. These workers are profoundly giving people who utilize their spirituality as a mechanism to inform their work and the relationships around them. So, what is the solution for individuals made to suffer a spiritual crisis because they cannot hold their dying resident's hand and pray with them on their deathbed? Especially in a time of unprecedented death as a result of the current global pandemic.

The answer can be found in religious literacy. As a national lens, it offers us a way to look at how to deconstruct paradigms designed to divide us, and a path forward. Through awareness and the true celebration of difference, we are better positioned to add more soldiers to our army of social justice warriors. By creating space in our general membership meetings, stewards' trainings, executive-board meetings, conventions, bargaining tables and labour-management agendas we can prioritize the conversation. We must strengthen our commitment to the tenets of equality, respect and justice for all by linking arms with the 3.3 million spiritually diverse members that we serve. We must redefine our ethos and focus on promoting spiritually inclusive workplaces. Who knows, we might even see public sentiment sway back in our favour.

Riley Richman has over a decade of experience working in the labour movement in various capacities including organizing, member leadership development, social justice and equity building, and strategic campaigns.



Thank you to all of the workers who have been protecting us, putting yourselves on the front line to keep us safe during COVID-19.

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FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY: THE TRUE STORY OF JIM HIGGINS

*The following is excerpted with permission from **Fighting for Democracy: The True Story of Jim Higgins (1907-1982), A Canadian Activist in Spain's Civil War, Jim Higgins with Janette Higgins.***

Even before he left Saskatoon in 1937 for a "cause worth fighting for" in Spain, Jim Higgins fought for justice. During the Great Depression, employers blacklisted him for union organizing, the RCMP added him to their radical files for relief camp "agitating," and he was jailed briefly when the Regina Riot ended the On-To-Ottawa Trek. Here, Jim speaks of the strength and inspiration that solidarity brought during those desperate times. — *Janette Higgins and Our Times*

I CONTINUED TO PICK UP OCCASIONAL JOBS, BUT as the Depression deepened, things only got worse. By the spring of 1933, I was in Saskatoon and pretty near broke when I was hired as a carpenter, along with twenty others, to help build the Dundurn Relief Camp, some forty miles south of the city.

Relief camps were first set up by provincial governments in places like exhibition grounds. Many men were forced to go to the camps, because families were told their welfare would be reduced if a single unemployed man was living with them. These men could not live at home, there were no jobs, and they did not qualify for welfare. There was no way out. They were forced to become vagrants and considered a blight.

By early 1933, the camps had been transferred to federal jurisdiction and placed under military command with the Department of National Defence (DND). The DND built new camps in isolated areas as a means to confine and control the single unemployed, who were (it was thought) ripe for revolution. They were being taken out of towns and cities and swept under the rug.

CAMPS IN ISOLATED AREAS WERE A MEANS TO CONFINED AND CONTROL THE SINGLE UNEMPLOYED, WHO WERE (IT WAS THOUGHT) RIPE FOR REVOLUTION

When I got to the Dundurn site, there was only one set of blueprints for the bunkhouses we were to build. I soon learnt that not one of our bosses could read the simple blueprints, which rankled me because they were paid a salary of two hundred dollars a month, plus room, clothing, and food. We received two dollars a day (twelve dollars for a six-day week), out of which we paid five dollars "room and board," leaving

us with seven dollars for the week. That was twenty-eight dollars a month compared to the bosses' two hundred dollars.

It took us three weeks to build eight bunkhouses with ten two-tier bunks on either side so they could house forty men. The two rows of bunks were eight feet apart, and there was a potbellied stove at each end, along with card tables. Each had a two-holer outhouse.

When the work ended, I stayed on as an inmate on relief of \$1.40 a week. We also received clothes and board and were given tobacco and cigarette papers. In our free time, we played card games, such as bridge or penny-ante poker, and took turns with chores like tending the stoves and sweeping and washing the floors.

There were now hundreds of us housed at the camp, sent by relief officers from the towns and cities. This included someone in each bunkhouse to inform on any who made trouble. My trouble-making reputation began when my buddies suggested that draft deflectors be attached to the windows to prevent cold air from pouring in on the lower bunks. I was chosen to present the request, but before I could talk directly with the commander of the camp, I had to go through three administrators. I even had to present a blueprint before this simple job was finally allowed. This would seem to be a reasonable request, but I was now considered a troublemaker.

It was the "work" we were ordered to do that really got under my skin: digging a seven-foot-deep ditch, forty-feet long, over two days, and filling it in the next. When I had opted to stay on at the camp, I was assured we would have useful work. I could not find any use in digging a hole and filling it in again. It was not long before I left to try my luck elsewhere.

The next couple of years were ones of bare survival. When I got desperate, I stayed in relief camps but

would end up being kicked out for “agitating.” By May 1935, I was in a British Columbia camp, where I spent two weeks before being discovered. I was escorted out by two RCMP officers—Royal Canadian Mounted

one of the leaders, James “Red” Walsh, a Communist Party of Canada member who was with the Relief Camp Workers’ Union. Red’s nickname did not necessarily reflect his political affiliation; with his red hair and ruddy complexion, “Red” suited him to a tee. He was a good organizer, and though our contacts were brief, I developed a deep respect for him.

Before leaving Vancouver, the route was established, advance committees set up, and stops planned for each night. The advance committees arranged for food donations and places to billet the boys, such as exhibition grounds. Community committees set up soup kitchens, arranged for clothing donations, and organized tag days to raise money.

A few of us were chosen to make sure our group conducted itself in the best way possible. We impressed this upon those who joined us at stops along the way and got rid of any troublemakers, often undercover police. This discipline was critical to ensure the support of the townspeople along the way.

Among other stops, there was a three-day stay in Calgary and one day each in Medicine Hat and Moose Jaw. Wives and girlfriends wanted to join the trek in Calgary, but this was deemed problematic so arrangements were made for them to travel with the advance group.

More joined us along the route with many on top of the freights or hanging off the sides. We held marches in the towns and cities, holding signs that demanded an end to the “Slave Camps,” or read, “We Want Work With Wages.” Each group of forty trekkers had a parade marshal. We also had men who surrounded the speakers’ platform to ensure police infiltrators did not cause trouble.

Red Walsh, and other leaders, kept our morale up with speeches, which also convinced the citizens that our trip to Ottawa would benefit all Canadians; they were just as frustrated with their own conditions as we trekkers were with ours. News media gave us favourable coverage and mentioned how well-disciplined we were, even during our stay in Regina where things were about to change and not because of us.

MEN LEFT THE CAMPS AND BEGAN ARRIVING IN VANCOUVER, WHERE WE HELD DEMONSTRATIONS. THAT WAS WHEN THE IDEA FOR THE ON-TO-OTTAWA TREK TOOK HOLD

It turned out the federal government wanted everything possible done to bring the trek to an end in Regina. The trek committee knew that the government was sending the RCMP to Regina. Even the City of Regina police had orders to stop us. They planned to arrest our leaders, hoping that the majority of us would disband.

July 1, 1935, Dominion Day, was the day that those



PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY JANETTE HIGGINS

Growing up, Janette Higgins saw her father active in his union and passionate about the rights of working people, but it was only years later that she discovered Jim Higgins had spent a lifetime fighting for justice.

Police—who told me I was on a list of those not to be admitted into any federal government camps. I had suspected this and wondered why it took so long for that BC camp commander to find out I was there. I do admit that I moved my three given names around to avoid detection, but I never changed my surname.

I headed to Vancouver, and a short while later, there was a strike in the relief camps to protest the militaristic and hopeless conditions. Prime Minister R. B. Bennett had led the Conservative government for those first five years of the Depression, and we held him responsible for our miserable state.

Men left the camps and began arriving in Vancouver, where we held demonstrations. That was when the idea for the On-To-Ottawa Trek took hold. After careful planning by our leaders, we hopped the CPR freights as a group and headed to Ottawa, intending to present our complaints personally to R. B. Bennett.

Just before the trek started on June 4, 1935, I met

SUDDENLY, POLICE WERE EVERYWHERE, MOUNTED AND ON FOOT, SWINGING CLUBS AT ANY PERSON IN THEIR WAY. IT WAS VIOLENT AND INHUMANE

in power called the "Regina Riot." We called it "the use of force to halt the trek." Part of the government's strategy had been to bring three of our committee members to Ottawa where they presented our requests for fair wages and meaningful work, but the meeting ended in a shouting match when the government representatives started calling us a bunch of bums and Reds.

In the meantime, in Regina, we arranged a public meeting, just as we had at every stop along the way. The speakers' platform would be well-guarded by boys who could be trusted. We used a borrowed rope to keep anyone unknown to us away from the platform. The speakers were two of our leaders and a local minister.

Only about two hundred trekkers were at the meeting that evening. Most others were concerned citizens, including women and children. One of our leaders started to tell the crowd about what had happened in Ottawa. At that point, I was facing away from the speaker and making small talk with a mother who had a baby in a carriage.

Then ... mayhem.

There was a blast from a whistle, and suddenly, police were everywhere, mounted and on foot, swinging clubs at any person in their way. It was violent and inhumane. Before I could sort out what was happening, a policeman's horse knocked over

the carriage with the baby in it, and the mother was covering her child with her body to protect it from the horse's hooves.

Somebody gripped one of the horse's reins, and it reared. At the same time, I pulled on the policeman's leg and he struck at me with his club, missing my head and glancing off my shoulder. The policeman was unseated and somebody else pulled at the strap around his wrist in an attempt to remove his club, while he defended himself from people trying to strike him in the face with their fists.

I saw this out of the corner of my eye as I helped to get the mother and baby to safety. I received a blow at this point and woke up in a jail cell with two others, one who lived in Regina, the other a union member. I was released the next morning after a Justice of the Peace decided that attending a public meeting

was not a crime.

I stayed in Regina long enough to read accounts of what happened. It was confirmed that a policeman had been killed and many injured on both sides. Our hopes for some kind of government action to lift us from our despair were dashed.

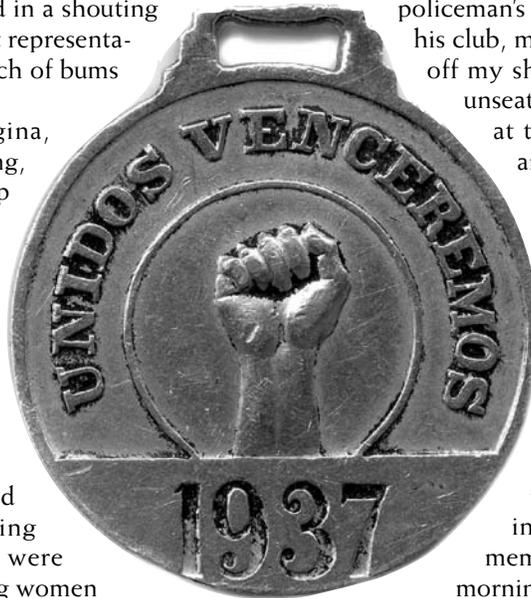


IMAGE: COURTESY JANETTE HIGGINS

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"United, we will overcome." This medal was given to Jim Higgins in Spain, where the clenched fist salute was used by the Spanish Republican Army and Spain's loyal citizens to counter the flat-palmed salute of Franco's rebel fascists. The raised fist continues as a symbol of workers' rights and social justice today.

Frank Lento

Barrister & Solicitor

franklento@lentolaw.com

3200 Dufferin Street, Suite 504
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ASSISTANT

On his private jobs after his union job, I'd tag along
in a matching plaid shirt. I'd help him haul into his
truck a custom countertop or heavy cupboard he'd made
in his jam-packed garage and then I'd watch him think
and install his work in other people's houses. I copped
on to scribing an angle, the power of a fulcrum, and when
it was time to leave, how to properly wind an extension
cord so when unwound it wouldn't get all knotted up.
In a hospital hallway on a gurney, delirious, eyes closed,
his hands out in front of him miming winding an invisible
extension cord, cinching infinity, a bay of fluorescents dim.
The nurse all in pink tells me to go home, tells me I'll burn
out. When I'd tire, wonder how much longer, "Quit time,"
he'd say, and off we'd go for a burger or box of donuts.

Basia Gilas

Basia Gilas, a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, has been a letter carrier with Canada Post in Toronto for 19 years, the last five of which were spent on elder-care leave. She has poems in **This** magazine, **The Humber Literary Review**, **Arc Poetry Magazine** and **Canadian Notes & Queries**. She looks forward to returning to her route this spring.

Searching for Security

I STAND HERE WITH MY FLASHLIGHT AND MY baton. As the sun goes down, my duty begins. Most people will be asleep soon, but I must be awake to ensure the safety of the tenants residing in the apartment. I wouldn't say I like this job, but I have bills to pay, and I have to be there daily.

I came to Canada in 2016 as an enthusiastic student to pursue a course in statistics. With the poverty in my home country, I was sure to get the best education here — one that could land me a lucrative job either in Kenya or Canada. I had never heard of unemployment in Canada, and I was full of hope that I could make many people proud at the end of my academic program.

The education journey started well, and I was very active in class. I got to make a few friends, and we spent most of our time together. The start was indeed a good one, and I was sure that all would end well.

One thing that started making life in Canada difficult for me was the cost of living. My scholarship providers had underestimated the cost of accommodation, and I soon found out that I was running out of

funds to pay the bills in my place of residence. Most of my close friends were financially stable, but I had no guts to ask them to help. I felt as if I would be a laughingstock. I started spending most of my nights thinking endlessly about how I could survive during that time of severe financial crisis.

One day, I was busy reading through the experiences of other people who go abroad to study. I came across a story of a lady who was in the same situation and who decided to secure a part-time job. She became a sales attendant at a grocery store and was

on the night shift. I saw that as an excellent idea and decided to look for a part-time job. I spent two weeks searching diligently, but had no success. Landing a job in your area of specialization in Canada as an immigrant is never easy, especially if you don't have the required academic credentials.

I tried talking to people around, and one of them gave me the idea of being a security guard. I asked myself: Is it worth it? My mother back in Kenya thinks that I am studying day and night, and yet I am battling with my bills. Due to my desperation, I had to give it a try.

One evening after class, I decided to meet one gentleman who was guarding a gate to some institution. I approached him confidently and said, "Good evening sir, my name is Nicodemus. I am looking for a job."

The guard looked at me and started laughing hysterically, and that intimidated me.

"So, what have you been doing when others are working?"

I felt relieved then from the tension he had created in me when he first laughed, and I told him my story as a student and the way my bills were piling up. When he heard my story, he became determined to assist me. He told me that the only available option for immigrants without Canadian academic qualifications was to serve as a security guard just like him.

I asked him how to get started in the security field.

"You first have to go through a training program to understand what is expected of you in the job," he replied.

He told me many security companies could offer the training and later hire you. He recommended that I join Iron Horse Security and try my luck there. I did two days of training on how to respond to emergencies, how to deal with people, and other basics of the

By Nicodemus Kipkorir



PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK.COM / ANDREYPOPOV

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security sector. At the end of the training program, I was deployed to Danforth Avenue, where I was to guard an apartment during the night.

The job worked well for me, since I could study during the day and work at night. The first month was satisfying because I could now handle my bills.

The next month, another problem came in. I started getting low grades in class, and one of the professors threatened that I would have to repeat the course if I didn't do well in the coming exam.

My day was busy, and at night I had to be at work. I could not leave my job because nobody could pay my bills, and I had to pass my course, since everybody back home was awaiting my graduation. The dilemma kept me thinking: Is my education vital? Will anyone

know that I dropped school? Isn't the money I earn the same as the one that a statistician in Kenya earns? Am I not studying to get a job later? Isn't this a job? These questions kept lingering in my mind.

I started losing the passion for studying, and I dropped out of school. My focus was now on my job.

The guard looked at me and started laughing hysterically. "So, what have you been doing when others are working?"

Many people working as security officers in Canada have families, and they live happily together. I had to limit the WhatsApp conversations with the people back in my country who kept asking me how I was doing in school. Sometimes, when I could not avoid them, I had to lie that school was good.

My career as a security guard was now becoming a full-time thing, something more than I had thought it could be. I moved from guarding apartments to guarding parking lots and later to patrolling a busy shopping mall. Life was never easy, since some of the nights were extremely cold. Sometimes I heard stories of robbers who killed the security guard before stealing from the premises, and fear would become part of me.

Some of the people who were posted worked for a few days and then quit the job. On my side, I had no option but to pay the price of my decision to work there.

As I arrive at my residence each morning, I meditate for a while before falling asleep. Is this the reason why I am in Canada? What if my folks get to know of this? In the end, we are all resigned to fate. I have to accept my work, since I get all my bills paid on time.

After the coronavirus pandemic began, Nicodemus Kipkorir travelled back to his home country of Kenya, where his family members were eagerly awaiting him. He has not revealed to them that he never finished his academic journey.



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Before the Wolf

WORKING DURING MY SECOND WINTER at the Transit Parking Garage was like bobbing for apples with a mouth full of novocaine. Temperatures exceeded -30 with the wind chill. In that kind of cold you can keep everything warm, except your hands and feet. It doesn't matter if your boots are a three-hundred-dollar-arctic-rated exemplar of modern footwear, the cold eventually penetrates. The cold brings with it pain; the pain, misery. If cold feet are misery, then cold hands are a torture beyond. The work we performed as electricians did not allow for the wearing of large, well-insulated gloves. You need dexterity to manipulate hand tools and smaller material. That winter we were working high up on elevated platforms, scissor lifts, installing rigid steel pipe for the electrical system. In below-freezing temperatures, working steel pipe with cold hands is harrowing.

By Ivan Suljic

If cold feet are misery, then cold hands are a torture beyond

One morning, only half an hour into the start of the day, Keith said, "Bro', my hands hurt." To which I replied, "No shit." Ten minutes later he said again, "Bro', my hands are hurting," and took off his gloves. His hands were bright red and swollen to twice their size.

We got off our lifts and went to the nearest warming station — one of two small rooms plugged with insulation and running small 240-volt space heaters inside, to serve as respites from the cold. Company

policy was that an employee could seek solace in these rooms, if needed, at any point during the day, but for a duration not to exceed 10 minutes in length. The 10-minute rule was abandoned of course, which kept the frost-bite inconvenient but not debilitating.

When we arrived at the fourth-floor warming station the Irishman was already there, sitting on a foam block with his boots off and his legs outstretched, socked feet mere inches from the little space heater.

His arms were folded across his chest, hands in armpits, and the look on his face reminded me of a child's after a scolding. Mark was direct from Dublin, suffering through his first winter in the Great White North. He looked at us and wiggled his toes, "A tad chilly out there I would say."

In the frigid weather, each floor of the transit garage's concrete structure became a giant wind tunnel, whereas during the heat of summer there rarely came a breeze to stir the stagnant humidity. The concrete itself made the cold air barreling through even colder. On an upper-floor column our foreman hung a thermometer. Each day he would take a picture of it to catalogue the temperature along with time and date. It was to be our advocate when questions were asked and fingers pointed over loss of production. That piece of plastic became the ornament of our pain, shrouded in a darkness broken only by the dull

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK.COM / MIRCEAX

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utilitarian glow of strung-up light bulbs. That was the worst condition: the lack of sunlight. You could see it outside the structure all day long, existing in its fullness but no longer yours, like someone you took for granted living a life without you. I would parallel working in the cold without feeling the sun to entering a time of trial in life without feeling love or the presence of God.

On particularly bad days the crew would arrive on site at the Mississauga/Oakville border, after traveling from Hamilton, Oshawa, and beyond, only to be sent directly home. Some mornings the decision to stay and work was put to a vote. With bills to pay and your well-being to consider there was no right answer. The vote was like being given the choice of losing either a hand or a foot. That winter, many days of work were lost due to the extreme cold. Too many, and not enough. We would be sent home one day for our 'safety' only to return and work the next under the exact same weather conditions. Meanwhile entire sites in the city were being shut down for a month at a time. But no one could afford us not working. Not the transit authority, not the builder, not the company, and not our families.

Beyond the lost pay due to the cold, guys were missing work from flu bugs that had been passed around like trading cards since the start of November. The bugs intermingled. Unholy hybrid strains were created in the cacophony of the work site. The 'shit your pants bug' melded with the 'vomit bug,' which coalesced with the 'dizzy and fatigued bug.' The super bug sauntered around the site, like a schoolyard bully with no teachers in sight.

With its gambit of cold, sickness and injury, winter persisted like it would meet no end. Carlo fell off a ladder and broke his back. There was ice underneath the ladder and while he was climbing down, it shifted and he fell. After being given two weeks off to recover, he returned to work. The doctor recommended six months but he had mouths to feed. He survived his days by taking prescription pain killers. They numbed the pain of what was broken while the work broke him even further. We all sensed he was the lame of the herd. The wolves of disrepair and redundancy, that ever hunted and lurked, would take him first while the rest of us ignored his plight and survived. He had been caught in the industry's ugly reality, where the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board offers much the same protection as the herd scattering before the wolf.

Each day the cold passed, owning no more significance than another day done.

Within the monotony of pain and obligation

The wolves of disrepair and redundancy would take him first while the rest of us ignored his plight and survived

anything was welcome that served to distract. It was the middle of the week when a man stepped in front of a train. 'Moose' was working the north side of the second level and saw it all take place. The man climbed down off the platform and casually approached the tracks. He stepped into the train's path and waited. A buzz went around the site. Men gathered at the north walls to watch the cleanup. Within two hours of his death, the lights of the emergency vehicles and the commotion of their crews came and disappeared like

a night janitor with the morning, and the train was running its course again. I kept working as the cold retained its bite. I did not go and look at the corpse. I couldn't allow myself to. It just didn't seem right to engage a tragedy for entertainment. But I cannot judge others for having done so. My moral certitude was

not satisfying, as I felt like the only kid not lining up at the ice cream truck.

It was the coldest winter in Toronto's recorded history. For those who worked outside through its duration the memory of it remains as visceral as a scar. Each day, in a trial of endurance and attitude, you pledged your body to work while your mind reeled in opposition. I remember well, dressing for those days. The slow preparatory process in a pre-dawn room, suiting up in multiple layers of cotton, wool and lycra, creating the best armour that I possibly could. Frazer looked like an astronaut in his snowmobile suit, with its hood drawn up, a balaclava and ski goggles, so not an inch of his naked skin was ever exposed. I recall the crew meeting in the break room each morning and the frantic disassembling of that armour to capitalize on each minute out of the cold. Jackets were shed as we scrambled to cover the face of the large 600-volt heater with gloves and hats, set boots on chairs in front of it, to hobble around on socked feet and frozen toes. I remember not wanting to leave the break room, ever, and our foreman arriving each day at the 15-minute mark, like a stalwart general to send us back to the frontlines, before he returned to the warmth of his trailer.

That year I don't remember the arrival of spring so much as the departure of winter. But I remember, when winter was finally gone, finished with its death throes and not to return in another late-season cold front, that spring was magnanimous and had set us free.

Ivan Suljic is a licensed 309A Electrician who has worked in the ICI (industrial, commercial and institutional) sector for several years. A former student of the Humber School for Writers, he still writes when work and his three children allow.

Nature is Telling Us Something Fierce

Review by Bob Barnettson

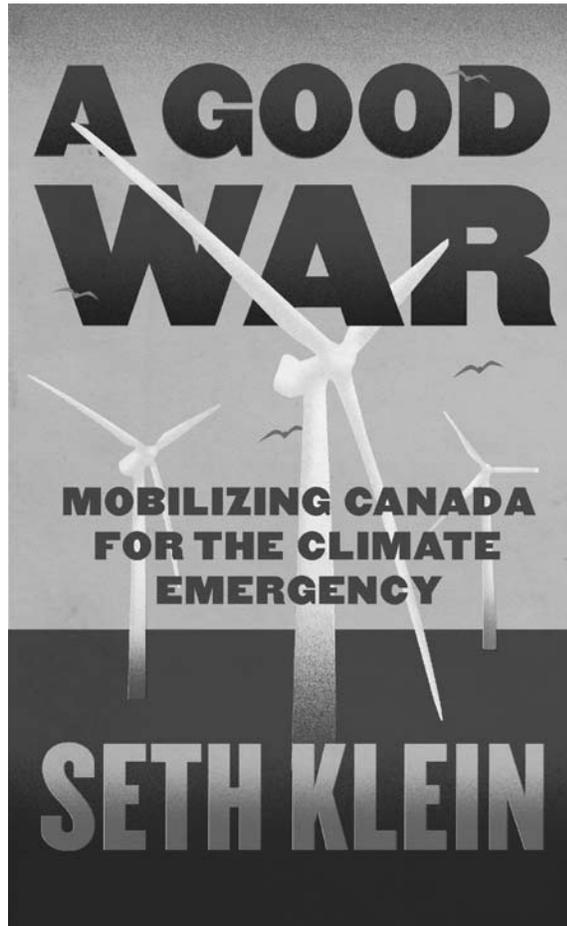
SETH KLEIN. A GOOD WAR: MOBILIZING CANADA FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY
ECW PRESS, 2020
464 PAGES, \$18.99
ISBN: 9781770415454

IN *A GOOD WAR*, AUTHOR SETH KLEIN argues that the climate emergency poses an existential crisis requiring radical economic change. "Politics might be all about compromise and the art of the possible," he says in his introduction. "But there is no bargaining with the laws of nature, and nature is now telling us something fierce." He offers Canada's response to the demands of the Second World War as both an example of, and template for, how this radical change could occur.

Central to Klein's extensive, well-written and passionate prescription is to return to a highly interventionist federal government that will direct, and sometimes undertake, the work required to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 per cent before 2030.

The strengths of this book are three. First, Klein's use of Canada's economic transition during the Second World War is an interesting hook. This fairly recent historical example of how huge changes can be made quickly is easy to understand, is not well known (at least by post-war generations), and has broad appeal across the political spectrum (after all, no one likes Nazis).

Drawing heavily on the work of historian Jack Granatstein, Klein outlines this radical wartime economic restructuring, identifying both successful strategies and missteps. There are some weaknesses to the parallels Klein draws between the rise of fascism and the climate emergency: the nature of the foe and the required response, for example, both differ in important ways. But, overall, the analogy is compelling and, at times, inspirational. Writes Klein: "Only now we need governments that can lead us not into battle against other nations, but rather, into the fight for our collective future."



Second, Klein presents a compelling case that there is an appetite among Canadians for more dramatic policy responses to the climate emergency than a carbon tax and free energy-saving light bulbs. *A Good War* provides data that is a compelling counterpoint to the narrative, repeated by politicians across the spectrum, that the public isn't ready for bolder action. Indeed, given the data, it's unsettling that any politician or party would remain wedded to tepid climate-change strategies.

Third, Klein offers a detailed prescription for reducing Canada's reliance upon fossil fuels. He sees the federal government playing a central role in this effort, much like it did during the Second

World War. Says Klein, "the private sector in wartime did not get to decide on the allocation of resources. Rather, the economic mobilization was coordinated . . . by public servants who planned the overall effort, orchestrated the supply chains, regulated economic conduct including prices and profits, and directed massive public investments into realizing this economic transformation." And, he adds, "in both Canada and the U.S., wartime production was not only done by private for-profit corporations (under the direction of public authorities). A huge amount was undertaken by newly established public enterprises specifically created to meet the wartime effort."

In Klein's vision, a massive rollout of green infrastructure would be paid for through public borrowing, the sale of Green Victory Bonds, raising taxes and resource royalties, and eliminating loopholes and carbon subsidies. Workers' needs would be addressed through a Green New Deal, including income support and training for workers, and economic diversification for affected communities. He acknowledges that justice for Indigenous communities is a necessary, core component of any climate-change response and gives a lengthy description of efforts in several communities to address the climate emergency. Less clear in the book, to me, is what a meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities would look like.

A *Good War* provides data that is a compelling counterpoint to the narrative, repeated by politicians across the spectrum, that the public isn't ready for bolder action

In Chapter 12, "Mobilizing Labour: Just Transition, Then and Now," Klein reminds us of the massive effort governments made to retrain and re-employ over a million men and women returning from the Second World War. He sees that historic undertaking as a possible template for how to support workers' transition out of fossil fuel-based work.

Klein also charges unions with bargaining and striking for carbon-reduction plans in their workplaces, as some have already done. Still, while avoiding ecological catastrophe is in workers' best interests, expecting the weaker party in an employment relationship to negotiate employers into acting against the short-term logic of capitalism is an unrealistic demand to make of unions. I, personally, would have appreciated more analysis of how class conflict might play out in Klein's scheme.

The most significant weakness in the book, for me, is its limited engagement with the question of how to generate the political will among politicians to act in a much more interventionist manner. Klein attributes the tepid policy response by politicians to the climate emergency to politicians having internalized neoliberal assumptions and being fearful of a strike by capital. These are likely important barriers to action. But Klein provides no clear plan for expanding the scope of policies considered politically viable. As any trade unionist can tell you, expecting a good argument (and Klein makes one) to somehow overcome long-standing arrangements (which represent a particular constellation of interests) is unrealistic.

This gap is particularly odd since there is a whole chapter about transforming politics. This chapter identifies examples of how other jurisdictions have addressed the climate emergency (examples which may or may not be applicable to Canada) and moots a series of institutional reforms that Canada could make to help things along, such as electoral reform and curbing the political power of oil companies. But there is no meaningful discussion about how to get Canadian politicians to act differently and boldly on any of these issues or ideas. The closest he comes to concrete solutions to the current neoliberal morass is a nod to (largely youth-led) climate justice groups and non-violent civil disobedience.

Klein's lack of a political plan to realize his proposals for economic restructuring may reflect an underlying assumption that the climate emergency represents a shared interest so powerful that it will force cooperation between labour and capital. The notion of a shared interest is probably objectively true — there are no jobs or profit on a dead planet. It is less clear whether saving the planet has enough political salience to overcome short-term conflicts of interest. Klein's discussion of labour relations during the Second World War glosses over the friction that existed between employers and workers, and that was resolved in favour of employers.

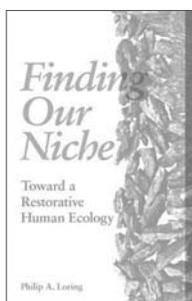
In one instance, the core analogy of the book frays a bit. Fascism represented an immediate threat to all Canadians. Thus, it may have compelled cooperation. The solution to make bullets was

clear. Taking action would make most Canadians' lives better, and that action had an end date. By contrast, the short-term effects of climate change are likely felt differentially — more by the poor than the rich — and the solutions are trickier to understand. They still entail some degree of speculation, and most of them will make many Canadians' lives materially worse, and will call for permanent lifestyle changes.

The response to the present COVID-19 pandemic casts further doubt on whether large-scale cooperation is likely. There are multiple examples of employers happily sacrificing the health and lives of workers in the meat-packing and long-term care industries to maintain their profitability. Even the COVID-related deaths of hundreds of elderly residents in private long-term care have failed to generate an effective response from either employers or government. It remains unclear how bad things would have to get in order to break this political log jam, but Canada's political economy appears to be largely resistant to change.

Overall, *A Good War* conveys a useful plan for how Canada might respond to the climate emergency in a lively and engaging manner. But it does not necessarily offer a politically achievable plan, in part because its analysis of class interests and conflict is limited.

Bob Barnetson is a professor of labour relations at Athabasca University. He is co-author, with Jason Foster, of *Health and Safety in Canadian Workplaces* (Athabasca University Press).



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by Philip A. Loring

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History & the Indian Farmers' Protests

By Archana Rampure

MILLIONS OF FARMERS IN INDIA ARE protesting the proposed gutting of crop-price protections by India's hard-right central government, led by Narendra Modi. Canadians may understand Modi's actions in the context of Stephen Harper's gutting of the Canadian Wheat Board in 2012. Last year, the National Farmers Union in Canada described Harper's actions as "one of the great economic tragedies in Canadian history." And that, in a country where the 2016 census estimates there are about 271,000 farm operators. India, by contrast, has anywhere between 100 million and 180 million farmers — people with some claim to some land who at least partially live on the proceeds of their farming. And then there are another half a billion people who are landless farmers. They work other people's lands, sometimes for generations, sometimes for hereditary *zamindars* (literally land holders) who hold immense power in farming communities. Giant agricultural corporations have also become players in farming.

The system that pre-dated the farmers' protests didn't really work. There were about 1,000 *mandis* (state-established agricultural markets) where farmer-run boards set prices and bought crops. But the inequities of caste and land ownership played out in each of those markets in ways that generally disenfranchised landless farm workers, small landowners, women farmers and non-upper-caste and non-Hindu farmers.

Since the opening up of India's economy to market forces in the mid 1990s, there have been constant reports in the media of farmer suicides. Every year in some part of India there is a drought, followed by reports of horrific conditions that farmers and farm workers endure. Inevitably these reports are followed by stories of how some of these folks are hounded to death by financiers and money lenders. And this tragedy was occurring long before this current round of "reforms" announced by Modi and

his cartel of privateering ministers. So, it shouldn't surprise anyone that there are millions of farmers now in the streets around Delhi, protesting.

I don't imagine that anyone thinks that the systems currently in place to support farmers are idyllic. In fact, if anything, they support only those farmers who have a little bit of power — often through their caste and religious positioning. But the alternative being proposed is so much worse that millions of farmers are desperate enough to subject themselves to tear gas and water cannons.

Reforms could be put in place that would actually make farming life more sustainable for the hundreds of millions of Indians who work upon the land. In fact, land reform was one of the foundational promises of Indian independence. Whoever controlled the votes of India's farmers could control the government. This isn't unique to India, of course — so many anti-colonial movements were deeply entwined with land reform movements. But what makes land ownership in India unique is that it is also deeply enmeshed in a caste system that predates and postdates British imperialist control of the subcontinent.

In many ways, colonialism heralded a sea change in the administration and day-to-day control exercised by various kings and rulers, but the lives of many of the poorest and most vulnerable people who lived on the lands that made up India didn't really change. It didn't matter to the poor whether the land was controlled by the local *zamindari* family entirely for their own gain, or if the farmers were forced to pay taxes to the local ruling families who paid levies to the East India Company or to the British crown itself. It may have meant that the poor workers on the land were squeezed even more, but every historian of post-colonial India will tell you that independence didn't really change that much for most of these farmers.

Yes, a few million people acquired

some rights to the lands that they had worked for decades, sometimes for generations. But in a country the size of India, even that didn't actually change very much for most poor workers, either in terms of what their work looked like or how they lived their lives. As for political power, it still lay in the hands of the elites who now ruled in the name of democracy.

Nothing illustrates this more than looking through the lists of the first generation of elected Indian Members of Parliament: so many of them came from the kingdoms and principalities formally abolished by the creation of the Indian Republic. Many more were drawn from the upper castes of the Hindus, from Jawaharlal Nehru onwards. Nehru, for instance, was a high-caste Hindu from the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir.

My point is this: the farmers' protests are historic for many reasons, not least of which is that they highlight the need to reorder the system of land ownership and farm workers' rights in India. However, this isn't just about Modi's reforms. Land rights — who owns land, who gets to decide what to grow or extract from it — is an existential question for every social justice movement in the post-colonial world.

Many of us in the Global North are so far removed from land in our social and work lives that we sometimes don't understand how critical a driving force land is for those who depend on it for their very existence. Today, we see uprisings on the streets of India, but these issues also underlie the battles in the forests of the Amazon and the mines in South Africa. And, of course, here in Canada, the question of who controls the land and the resources on and under it rages on, from Baffin Island to the Wet'suwet'en territories.

Archana Rampure is a trade unionist living in Ottawa.

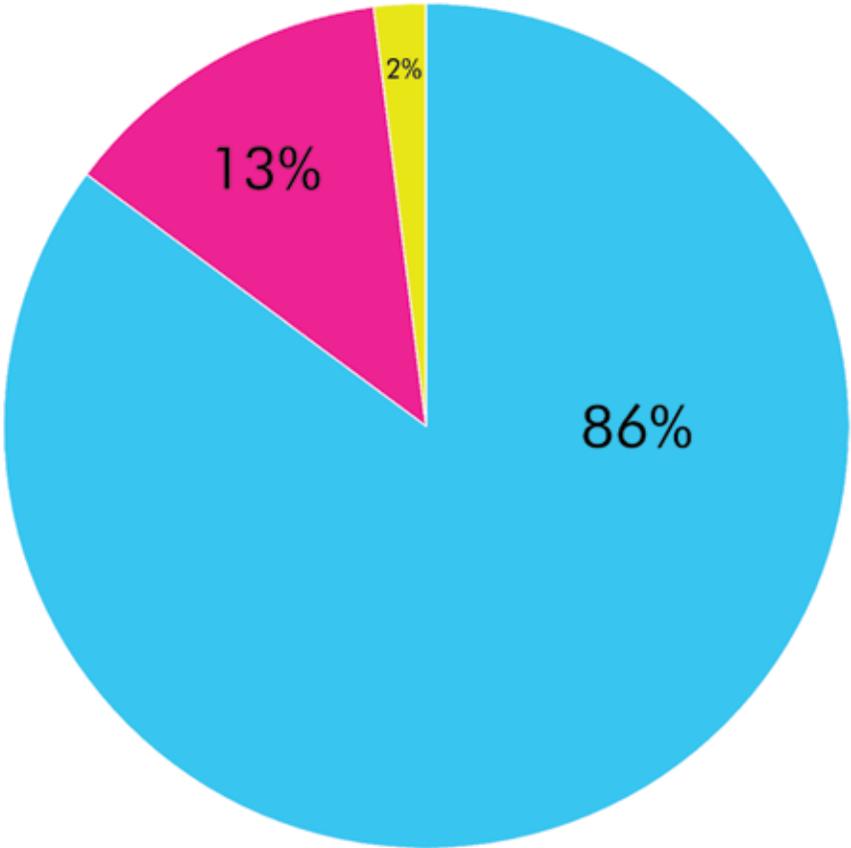
Doug Ford says he'll move heaven and earth and leave no stone unturned when it comes to fixing the problems in long-term care.

But we don't need to re-invent the wheel.

Something that will create a national standard for long-term care already exists.

Something that provides public accountability so our seniors and people living with disabilities in long-term care will never have to re-live the COVID-19 tragedy.

And Canadians are overwhelmingly on board.



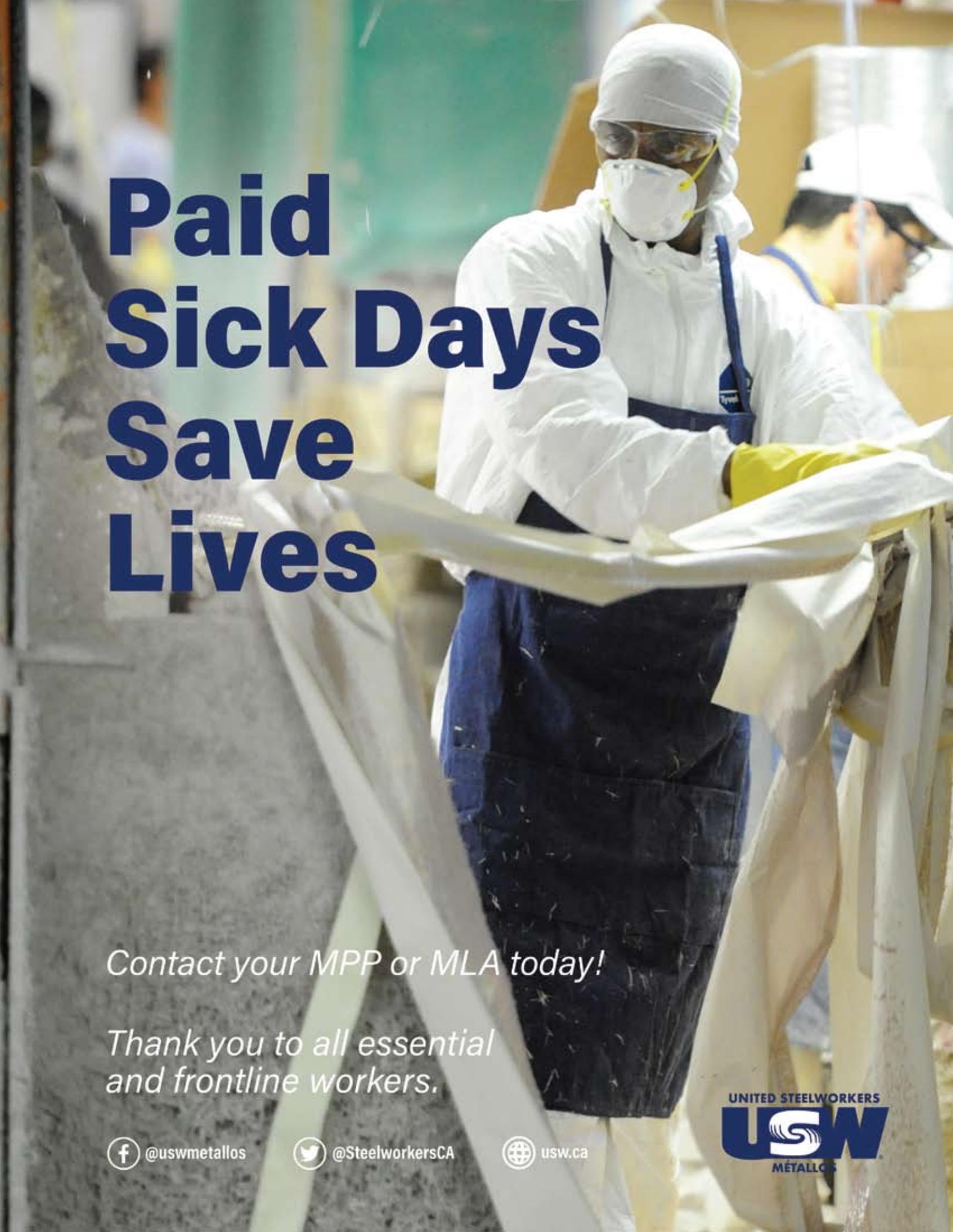
86% of Canadians agree:
it's time to bring long-term care under the Canada Health Act

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