

April 30, 2002

Mr. Brooke Sundin,
President & CEO
U.F.C.W. 1518

Mr. Sundin,

Thank-you for your letter of Nov. 30, 2001. After recent events I feel the need to comment further on the issues I raised in my Nov. 14, 2001 letter to you.

Firstly, you confuse an issue of quality with an issue of quantity. Let me reiterate in the simplest terms possible.

As I indicated there is a consensus at the warehouse that our representation at this critical juncture would be furthered by having someone who actually works at the warehouse on the E-Board. I believe the membership does not really care how you may statistically present your assertion that we are comparatively over represented. What they know is that they have no one at the heart of the decision making process who is intimately familiar with the issues on a daily basis. Quite simply they would trade ten non-warehouse representatives for one that was actually employed at the warehouse.

Secondly, your insistence that this is not necessary has furthered the perception that the Executive Board is distancing themselves from our situation and this is but one indication of the unions lack of resolve to do everything possible for us. How you can assert that Mr. Temple was "produced" by the warehouse is beyond me. Most members do not even know who he is. How can you expect them to have any confidence when you suggest our "mystery representative" has things well in hand?

Thirdly, apart from perceptions of the membership, reasonable or otherwise, is the issue of communication. During the recent leafleting it became clear that the retail sector has little or no awareness of the facts regarding our situation at the warehouse and, as you may understand, we find this unacceptable. It is precisely the situation my letter to you spoke of and hoped to avoid.

Communication between Industrial and Retail sectors must certainly be a key element in not only our strategy but in alerting retail to what we are trying to achieve and how this will aid their own upcoming battles.

As it has apparently been decided that no one working at the warehouse will have a position on the E-Board I would like to speak to the issue of communication.

Communication is surely a sore point among the membership. Answers are extremely hard to come by. Meetings regarding our issues are few and far between. Getting Ivan to attend has been problematic. Why is it so difficult to get an E-Board member to a

meeting? Recently I have tried to get some basic information that I believe we all have a right to with no success. Every member I talk to is very interested in having both Ivan and a lawyer present for our next meeting. Will you make this happen?

In times of labour peace we are told “THE MEMBERS ARE THE UNION”. In times of conflict we are kept in the dark.

In this day and age I simply cannot see any excuse for communication being an issue. The internet has made access to information and discussion available to an unparalleled degree. Be informed that members at the warehouse have been polling retail members as to their knowledge of events at the warehouse and the results are shocking. Why every union member in this province is not aware of what is going on at the warehouse is beyond me.

In researching the various issues I have some observations. For example, in comparing your website, www.ufcw1518.com, to www.ufcw.net, I find some significant differences.

Firstly, the www.ufcw.net site actively seeks out feedback from members, provides several venues for such, and posts it for all to see. Certainly member to member contact must be one of the more effective ways of getting union issues into the light of day and sharing information. They list several E-mail addresses to contact them. Your site does not -only a window in which one may submit a comment. What if I want to send an attachment or e-document? I have to use fax or snail mail. One site is clearly more interested in what the membership has to say than the other.

Your site reads more like an advertisement for what a great job you are doing rather than a venue for effectively and factually addressing the issues. I am most often better informed by their site than I am by yours.

Their site is constantly updated not only by the webmasters but by the members themselves. In comparison yours changes at a snails pace. Prior to your April 25 article the most recent article on Loman Warehousing on your site was from last June!! Furthermore the article describes our situation in the most basic terms. I found nothing in the past Stewards Bulletin at all on the warehouse. This fuels concerns that you are distancing yourself from the warehouse. It seems to me that www.ufcw.net is likely to become the internet venue for our issues simply by default.

Your site has virtually no interactive tools and generally speaking I find it less professional in comparison to www.ufcw.net. While this may be a subjective statement it should be noted that you use paid help while www.ufcw.net does not. One site seems to be “by the people, for the people” while the other seems to be “by the executive, for the executive”. Does this instill confidence in the membership? Is this dues well spent?

Strong organizations should not only be able but willing to learn from criticism. And I believe they should be seen to be actively engaging in such. Where this is not the case and the free flow of information appears to be inhibited it is logical that aspersions of

backroom deal-making and politics will be made. They are more politely referred to as “Partnering Agreements”. Provigo and the 777 deal are commonly used examples. Dues collection as motive for such is often attached. The central question seems to be whether UFCW is committed to maximizing the quality of collective agreements or maximizing membership. As always, actions speak louder than words.

I suggest to you that the membership is not interested in the in-house politics of our local nor in what appears to be an overriding concern with enrollment. What they are interested in and have a legal right to demand is an overriding focus, at least for the next five months, on communication and representation of the issues here at the warehouse to every member in the province. If this smells like a recipe for success I suggest it is a good start.

You should remember that we are a mature, well educated workforce and many of us are financially able to withstand a protracted battle. Many of us are prepared to get the word out with or without you. The information age has brought with it the corporate doublespeak that has characterized the working person as nothing more than another disposable commodity as we at the warehouse are well aware. It has also brought the means to publicize to whom, by whom, where, and why this is happening. I suggest you are failing to recognize and act on this opportunity and that this also fuels concerns that you are distancing yourselves from the warehouse.

As you are well aware there is an upcoming “Major Foods Conference”. Certainly this would be the perfect venue to communicate what is happening at the warehouse and how the same agenda will impact retail negotiations next year. Why have you refused to allow a representative from the warehouse to attend? Again, this fuels concerns that you are distancing yourselves from the warehouse. At this point any suggestion that this is a “retail only” conference will only add fuel to the fire. Why have we been excluded?

There was recently a meeting with the afternoon shift and Stewards Gord Carter and Rick Pickering in which it became clear, under direct questioning, that some degree of decision making authority had been transferred to them. If you are or have transferred your responsibility for decision making to our stewards will you clarify to what degree you have done so?

The UFCW constitution puts decision making responsibility solidly in the hands of the UFCW E-board and we have a right to know if you are distancing yourselves from that dictum and who is making decisions regarding our representation.

The membership is highly motivated to participate in a united and aggressive display of solidarity as recent events demonstrate. Your failure to communicate our issues to the retail sector, to include us to the upcoming conference, or answer basic and reasonable questions, such as what is being done to get the LRB to expedite our issues, does not instill confidence. This also fuels concerns that you are distancing yourselves from the warehouse.

I want you to know that I would love to congratulate you on your efforts but I cannot. I have tried to expedite what I saw as inevitable but have been given the cold shoulder. I have tried to get information from you decision makers with the same result. I have brought forward concerns about our representation on the E-Board and your response speaks for itself. I see minimal effort to effectively and factually communicate our issues or address criticism. That there are questions regarding the quality of our representation cannot be a surprise to you. My comments are an extension of similar expressions of discontent that I cannot believe you are not fully aware. Your silence on these issues is, as they say, deafening.

I sincerely hope that the above may serve to improve not only our representation but the union as a whole. I look forward to working with the executive toward that goal but will pursue it in any event.

I look forward to your response to these questions and what suggestions you may have.

In Solidarity

Darryl Gehlen

cc: Gord Carter
the membership