



# Union Bargaining Update:

## Positioning for People Power

What's happening with Safeway negotiations in Alberta?

There's LOTS happening!



**We wanted to provide a brief update on what's been happening around bargaining with Sobeys/Safeway. We've given Safeway management officials notice to commence collective bargaining. This creates a legal requirement for the company to bargain with your union in good faith; it also freezes your terms and conditions of employment while we do so.**

At meetings held earlier this year, Safeway members asked us to position ourselves carefully in anticipation of face-to-face bargaining meetings with Sobeys. Those face-to-face meetings have not yet occurred, but they will.

## People are asking: what is the union doing? Tons!

At recent union membership meetings, and at meetings held earlier in 2017, we reported back to our members comprehensively on the myriad of efforts we've undertaken to position ourselves better in anticipation of bargaining. For those of you who weren't at these meetings, we thought it would be useful to summarize what we have been doing for you.

Our main efforts have focused on the following:

- **We've lobbied.** This past Spring and Summer we lobbied the Alberta government for improvements to labour laws, so that when we actually negotiate, those laws would be more favorable to our cause. The NDP has since made significant improvements to labour law that will be helpful.
- **We've listened.** We have conducted, and recently completed, the most comprehensive survey and evaluation of Safeway members' feelings about workplace issues. Survey results were released at the meetings, and we are considering a much broader release in the New Year.
- **We've been patient.** We have been carefully monitoring Sobeys' business outlook. Business experts increasingly agree that Sobeys fumbled the ball in the Safeway takeover. A consensus is emerging around who is to blame for Sobeys' economic woes, and as that consensus builds, the less credible the company's claims will be that their problems begin and end with "labour costs."
- **We've watched.** We have also been monitoring the Alberta economic environment. There has been a perceived economic downturn. True or not, that environment is not a good one for bargaining. Economic predictors are now saying there could be an economic upswing in Alberta in the New Year.
- **We've merged.** We brought together UFCW members across Alberta into one Local Union, maximizing our bargaining strength, pooling our resources, and minimizing the effectiveness of any possible "divide and conquer" efforts.

- **We've been studying.** We must assess the impact of a rising minimum wage to consider how we can take advantage of this new, positive government initiative and anticipate its impact upon you.
- **We've done our homework.** Along with assembling the proposals our Safeway members have put forward across the province, we've been researching new and innovative contract proposals to deal with the changing retail food industry and to protect your rights into the future.
- **We're coordinating.** We have been working to coordinate with other UFCW Locals in Western Canada. Both Manitoba and BC Safeway employees are now heading into negotiations with Sobeys. Solidarity with other UFCW Locals is likely to enhance our strength at the bargaining table.
- **We're getting visible.** We've launched a special union button campaign to heighten awareness of our agenda in the stores. Sobeys' boss Michael Medline visits Alberta stores – are you wearing your button to show Sobeys' bosses that you won't be a pushover in negotiations?
- **We're building support.** We have recently launched the most dynamic public relations campaign in the history of our Local! We're advertising in buses and trains, on billboards and social media, all to build awareness and support for the issues you're facing. We want people to know what makes a good grocery store: a unionized store where people have fair wages, benefits, and rights. To support this campaign, we have created a new website called **goodgroceries.ca**, where you can win free groceries every week and where you, the shopping public, and Sobeys employees can learn about how important it is for grocery stores to treat workers fairly.
- **We need you.** In the last number of months, we have stepped up our engagement efforts to build interest and solidarity among Safeway union members. This is a difficult time. You are under an unprecedented level of stress. We are encouraging all members to translate your understandable anxiety into a new level of activism and to push back! We are not there yet, but we know that in the coming months, Safeway union members will stand up.

## Win Free Groceries Every Week...



Good negotiators know the importance of positioning. Our efforts to position ourselves in the best possible way is ongoing. We are developing a grassroots activist program and putting together your bargaining committee as well as other advisory bodies made up of Safeway employees. There will be special training for Safeway members who want to step up and be leaders in this effort. More actions are being contemplated and prepared.

**But we need you!** Union staff can provide information and suggest ways forward. We can do this based on our experiences and successes elsewhere. That's what you have asked us to do, and that's what we have done and are continuing to do. Our success depends solely on the grassroots involvement of our members. Sobeys needs you. You have power. But Sobeys must see you flexing your muscle!

**So please, if you have been thinking about it, just get involved. Contact your Union Representative today to find out how.**



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