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A tale of two hotels: Hilton and Delta

Two Toronto airport hotels signed new contracts with UNITE HERE Ontario Council in early November, but diverged in their approach to collective bargaining. One hotel corporation, Hilton International, locked out its employees for two weeks and mistreated them on the picket line before finally concluding an agreement. The other hotel corporation, Delta (a Fairmont subsidiary), concluded an agreement smoothly and without disruption to the hotel's business.

The two new contracts, both of which will expire on January 31, 2006, show two very different responses to hotel workers in the post-SARS recovery.

HILTON LOCKOUT The Hilton Toronto Airport, owned by UK-based Hilton Group plc, locked our 115 members out without even making a final offer at the bargaining table. During the lockout, a supervisor drove over a member's foot and another member, Carlos Almeida, was thrown onto the hood of a speeding car that rushed the picket line. Bad publicity from these events together with a strong picket line and broader strategic campaign forced the hotel back to the bargaining table. However, even then Hilton would only agree to defer one of the most controversial issues – its failure to pass a fair share of gratuities on to its banquet workers – to the next collective agreement. Some solid gains were made for members at the Hilton: three per cent annual wage increases, retirement allowances and better employer payments into the health and welfare plan.

DELTA SETTLEMENT President Paul Clifford of UNITE HERE Local 75 credits strong UNITE HERE membership in the airport area and Delta's management for reaching a deal without a labour dispute. "There is no doubt that the Delta was watching



Locked-out members of UNITE HERE Ontario Council picket the Hilton Toronto Airport Hotel.

the fight put up by our members down the street at the Hilton, thinking that they didn't want that going on at their hotel. As well, this deal owes something to Delta's reasonable approach," says Clifford. "The Delta deal shows that collective bargaining can end in a win-win situation, where the hotel continues to operate with experienced workers and no disruptions, while workers get better wages, benefits and working conditions."

Highlights of the Delta settlement include:

- above-inflation, across-the-board wage increases (three per cent annually)
- the lowest-paid workers – room attendants and dishwashers – got 8.5 per cent over 22 months
- pension increases and a retirement allowance
- improvements in room-service gratuities, tour baggage rate and banquet gratuities (a 72 per cent share of the gratuities charged to the banquet customers)
- a new article calling for the hotel to use services, products and materials produced or provided under fair labour conditions
- increase in break time and an allowance for the makeup of cots in housekeeping
- contribution to World Culture Fund of Toronto Hotel Workers

B.C. (Local 40) updates

HOCKEY LOCKOUT AFFECTS WORKERS When the National Hockey League locked out the NHL Players Association in September, it affected not just the players, but thousands of other jobs across North America. Local 40 members who traditionally work at GM Place in Vancouver are now without a job to go to. The lockout has a significant effect on UNITE HERE members who work for Orca Bay Entertainment and Aramark at this facility.



Hilton members rally on the picket line in early November.

SUPPORTING U.S. WORKERS UNITE HERE Local 40 has been engaged in supporting our union's struggles south of the border. We've leafletted at corporate hotels in Vancouver and the lower mainland in support of the 2004–2006 rounds of hotel sector bargaining. We've also leafletted in support of Host workers in Anchorage, Alaska at the Vancouver airport.

UNION MERGER UPDATE UNITE HERE Local 40 President Bill Pearson reports that discussions have continued with the former UNITE locals in BC regarding possible merger in B.C.

Steven Truscott needs our support

Most people in Ontario are aware of the Steven Truscott story. It is the story of a 14-year-old boy being sentenced "to hang until you are dead" for the murder of classmate Lynne Harper 45 years ago. It is the story of a nation debating the death penalty. It is the story of a travesty of justice that has gone on for far too long. It is also the story of one of UNITE HERE's members. Steven has been a member of UNITE HERE Local 1305 for close to 18 years at Owens Corning in Guelph.



In late October, federal Justice Minister Cotler referred Steven's case to the Ontario Court of Appeal, saying that there is "a reasonable basis to conclude that a miscarriage of justice likely occurred in this case."

Those wishing to become active in their support and urge the Attorney General of Ontario to bring a speedy resolution to Steven's appeal (and learn more about the Steven Truscott story) please check our web page at www.unitehere.ca or write: Ministry of the Attorney General, 720 Bay St., 11th Floor, Toronto, ON, M5G 2K1.

UNITE HERE Quebec Council updates

RALLY AT WORLDBEST More than 60 UNITE HERE members and union representatives protested in September against the doubtful labour practices at Worldbest, a textile company in Drummondville, Quebec. Two weeks after signing a collective agreement the employer laid off all the workers for an undetermined period. The Quebec Council let the employer know that we will not stop taking action as long as Worldbest doesn't hire back its unionized workers. We had excellent press coverage on that day, and the employer had a hard time answering the media's questions. At the press conference given by the employer, company representatives made a commitment to communicate with the union – but we are still waiting.

FIRST NEGOTIATIONS After having joined the Quebec Council, workers at Uniprix (in Cowansville), Sac Drummond (eastern townships) and Hilton Garden Inn (Montreal) will soon begin negotiations for a first collective agreement.

CALL-CENTRE ORGANIZING In late September, 110 workers of the Air France call-centre in Montreal decided to unionize with the Quebec Council. The campaign was a great success because of the teamwork between organizers, union reps and volunteer organizers. We await the decision of the labour board regarding the certification.

LAGRAN FIRST CONTRACT The 250 workers of Lagran in Granby, who make safety belts, overwhelmingly ratified their first collective agreement in late September. They succeeded in obtaining important increases, an overtime bank and the participation of the employer in the Solidarity Fund.

NEW COMMITTEES As promised, the Quebec Council will set up various committees in order to serve the union's new priorities in education, finances and political action. This is in order to bring the union back to its members and better involve them in *their* union. Delegates will have all the necessary information at the first general assembly of the Quebec Council in November during which the new committees will be formed.

Ontario labour law changes leave out many workers

"The labour law changes introduced in early November by the Ontario government fall short of what is needed for Ontario's economy," says UNITE HERE Canadian Director Alex Dagg. "These plans are too timid. Much more needs to be done to restore fairness and balance in our laws."

The government proposes to restore the time-honoured practice of "card based certification" only for the construction sector. UNITE HERE believes that all workers in Ontario deserve real rights when making decisions about joining a union. Card-based certification was available under Ontario labour law for decades, through governments from across the political spectrum, until it was removed by the Mike Harris government in 1995.

"We are happy for construction workers, but what about employees everywhere else in Ontario?" asks Dagg. "The government's justification for withholding this fundamental right from all other working people in this province is flimsy."

The government has not yet moved to protect the rights of workers in the low-paid contract services sector, such as food service employees, cleaners and security guards. Employees in these sorts of jobs, mainly women and visible minority workers, lose their trade union membership when contracts of service change hands.

"Our union is active in industries with mainly female and visible minority employees. It should be clear to this government that these changes are not enough to restore the access of working people to real fairness and balance in labour law," says Dagg.

Ontario updates

STANDING TOGETHER In late October the 200 members of UNITE HERE Ontario Council at Silgan Plastics in Mississauga, Ontario ratified a new three-year contract containing average annual wage increases of 2.16 per cent, stronger grievance language, better shift premiums, better shift scheduling and increased safety boot allowance and company-paid coveralls. This new contract came only after the membership gave the bargaining committee a strong strike mandate and then rejected the employer's final offer.

UNION EDUCATION Members of Local 1003 and 1476 (Ontario Council) in Midland, Ontario recently attended Basic Steward's and Executive Training workshops. (Local 1033 represents members at Saint Gobain's Technical Fabrics, a French-based global manufacturer producing reinforcement fabrics. Local 1476 represents members at Bay Tech Plastics, producing plastic components for the plumbing, auto and electrical industries.)

Members learned about the types of grievances, how to investigate grievances, how to present grievances and finally how to write a grievance. There was a good mix of veteran and brand-new stewards, which made role-playing an effective and entertaining exercise.

The following day executives from both locals attended Executive Training. Members learned about their roles and responsibilities, working together and how to build the local. The workshops were led by UNITE HERE Education Director Barry Fowlie. Barry works out of the national office and can be contacted at bfowlie@unitehere.ca or at 1-800-268-4064.

FIRST CONTRACT WIN In early November, Aramark Uniform Services Canada cleanroom workers in Toronto ratified their first collective agreement. With the support of unionized Aramark laundry workers in Toledo, OH, Toronto workers voted for the union in April 2004. Contract highlights include: a pension plan, lead hand premium, shift premium, improved vacation for senior workers, wage increases, improved overtime. Aramark's purchase of CleanRoom Garments in November 2003 is its first step into the laundry industry in Toronto.