

# The Transmitter



**TWU Merger Referendum  
Membership Vote: 65% in favour  
Votes needed to pass: 66 2/3%**



Cover photo: TWU local 31 members listen to merger referendum information during a local meeting in New Westminster, B.C., on February 7, 2013

- Message from the President • Results of Referendum Vote • Breaking New Ground
- TWU Member Pens New Book • TWU Supports Idle No More Movement
- TWPP Voluntary Contributions • Negative Impacts of Employee Engagement Schemes

## Message from the President



Dear Members,

On March 8, International Women's Day (IWD), let us all remember the efforts and contributions of women, past and present, in pushing for equal legal and social rights. The Telecommunications Workers Union (TWU) has a proud history of defending and working for the advancement of our Union sisters' rights. Throughout the Union's 69-year history, TWU women and

worthy of labour's support. It is important that our voices be heard.

On a federal level, the attack on labour unions is growing increasingly fierce. Bill C-377 which was passed in the House of Commons on December 12, 2012, is part of the Conservative government's attack on labour unions. This is a law that clearly favours employers over unions, essentially forcing labour organizations to provide detailed and costly financial reporting requirements. The legislation will likely be challenged in the courts.

**"The Conservative government's attitude towards minorities and the environment in the face of increasing inequality should make everyone stand up and pay close attention."**

men have selflessly given of themselves with courage and in solidarity. It is in this spirit that, on behalf of everyone at the TWU, I salute our sisters. Please read articles "Breaking New ground" (page 3) and "TWU Member Pens New Book" (page 4) which feature two of our sisters.

The B.C. provincial elections are soon approaching. Voters go to the polls on May 14, 2013, to choose B.C.'s next Premiere. The TWU commits itself to involving the membership and the Union as a whole in election campaigns on the side of those candidates and those parties which support the interests of our members and the interests of the labour movement as a whole. The TWU endorses the New Democratic Party in British Columbia on the basis that they are the only party whose principles and record are

Growing discontent with governments that do not put the needs of people first is evident with the Idle No More Movement (see story on page 9). The Conservative government's attitude towards minorities and the environment in the face of increasing inequality should make everyone stand up and pay close attention.

Retirement security is important to TWU

*"Message from the President" continued on page 3*

## Results of Referendum Vote

The TWU recently mailed ballots to Union members who were instructed to return the ballots to the Union head office in Burnaby, B.C., by 3 p.m. on February 28, 2013. The ballot question read "Do you support the National Executive Council's decision to authorize the negotiation of a tentative merger agreement that would, once negotiated, be brought back to the membership for a referendum vote?" The ballots have been counted and the results are:

Ballots cast: 3471, Ballots spoiled: 290, Yes votes: 2071, No votes: 1110.

The TWU did not achieve the required 66 2/3 per cent of Yes votes to move forward with only 65 per cent voting in favour.

Following the referendum vote outcome, National TWU president, George Doubt, expressed, "We are pleased that so many members took the time to participate in this important vote." He continued, "I am sure that the concept of merging with another union will continue to be discussed as many of those who were not in favour of this referendum vote have expressed interest in moving in that direction in the future. This decision clearly reflects the fact that TWU members are getting involved and thinking deeply about how to build a better future."



A special thanks to the TWU Ballot Committee (March 1, 2013).

members. The Canadian Labour Congress has been advocating for a gradual doubling of Canada Pension Plan benefits as the best way to provide retirement security for everyone. The numbers do not lie. Sixty per cent of workers are without a workplace pension with little or no room for savings. One-third of Canadians between the ages of 24 and 64 have no personal retirement savings and 1.7 million Canadian seniors today live in poverty or near-poverty. Now is the time to demand change for a better future.

TWU delegates will be meeting for this year's TWU Annual Convention at the Fairmont Palliser Hotel in Calgary, Alberta, from May 6-10, 2013. We look forward to keeping

members updated with daily convention Hotlines at [www.twu-stt.ca](http://www.twu-stt.ca).

We encourage everyone to keep abreast of Union news by visiting [www.twu-stt.ca](http://www.twu-stt.ca) and attending local meetings in your area. Please contact your local Shop Steward or Union representative should you have any questions.

In Solidarity,

George Doubt  
TWU National President

## Breaking New Ground

*As many TWU veterans can attest, the Union has been instrumental throughout its history in integrating women into positions that were and still are male dominated. The TWU wishes to thank Sister Michele Shepherd, a retired TWU member, for sharing her story with us.*

"Anything you can do, I can do too." That is the attitude Michele Shepherd lives her life by and one that also helped her gain the respect of the men and women she worked with at B.C. Tel throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s.

"The Union had been encouraging women to take a pre-craft apprenticeship course which, at the time," as Sister Shepherd recalls, "was extremely forward thinking for those men." When the opportunity came up in the fall of 1981 for her to take the course, she jumped at it. Unfortunately, during the next few years, B.C. Tel experienced a job freeze which made it impossible to apply for a job in Craft. It was not until almost ten years later that she was hired to work at the Test Desk. Standing at 5 feet 8 inches tall with what she describes as "Disco era permed hair and Elton John glasses," Sister Shepherd started her first day in a new position as one of only three female Test Desk Craft personnel.

She remembers that day very well and describes, "I was a single parent and my son's daycare called that same day with news that he was throwing up and running a fever of 102 degrees." Sister Shepherd continues, "Here I was on my first day trying to prove myself in a man's job and I had to face my manager with the news that I had to leave. We proceeded to exchange words, to put it kindly. My trainer, Greg Kear, told me not to worry about anything and then got in touch with Steve Bolam who was the Shop Steward at the time. They took care of the situation. My manager and I apologized to each other and agreed to start fresh. It was great to have the support of my union."

The transition into Craft at the time for women was not without its battles. "When we originally transferred from Clerical to Craft, the company (then B.C. Tel) forced us to



Michele Shepherd (third row, third from left), celebrating Christmas in 1990 with the Test Desk crew.

take a wage cut." Sister Shepherd explains, "They were paying us the equivalent of a first year service wage in Craft. For some of us that represented a loss of approximately \$20 per day. This was really difficult in my case being a single parent and paying for daycare as well as all of my other expenses. The Union worked hard on our behalf and created a letter of agreement that stipulated we would not lose any wages when transferring into Craft and made the wage loss we endured retroactive to the day we were originally transferred. When we received our cheques about 10 to 12 months later, there was a big celebration!"

It was not always easy, but Sister Shepherd let her work speak for itself. "The younger guys were great to work with but some of the older men were just set in their ways," she explains. Originally from Operator Services where she was hired by the company in 1974, skills such as communications and customer service greatly improved the quality of the work being done. Eventually, the men were able to see for themselves the contribution from other skill sets and it became give and take of knowledge amongst the staff from their various work backgrounds.

In over 32 years working for B.C. Tel/Telus until 1996, Sister Shepherd held a number of positions that included Long Distance Operator, Plant Clerk I & II, Computer Operator I, Customer Service Residence & Business Accounts, Test Desk Person & Coordinator/Service Delivery Technician.

Today, the self described "Cascadian"\*, most content wandering the forest trails, is a happily married mother of seven children and seven grandchildren who feels fortunate

to have had so many wonderful opportunities in life. She shares, "I have always listened to my inner voice and let that be my guide. I really believe that there were many times in my life that God must have certainly been watching over me."

\*Many people refer to the region of the Pacific Northwest, east to the continental divide, as the Cascadia.

## TWU Member Pens New Children's Book



When asked to bring a children's book with a black protagonist to her next reading, Arcelle Appolon, a member of local 602 and a 14-year veteran of Telus who volunteers her time reading to elementary school children, was surprised at how difficult it was to find one. That is how the idea was born for what eventually became the children's book *Les Aventures de Nanou et Ti Ko* (The Adventures of Nanou and Ti Ko).

Sister Appolon explains, "Clearly, there was a gap that needed to be filled which is exactly why I wrote the book – so children could be introduced to leading characters who are black and to also learn about my Haitian-Creole culture which I am very proud of."

*Les Aventures de Nanou et Ti Ko* is the story of a girl and a boy, twins Nanou and Ti Ko, who are turning five years old. For this joyous birthday occasion, their grandfather comes to visit from Haiti. He brings them to the Grande Bibliothèque which is part of the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec (Library and National Archives of Quebec) in Montreal. Through this experience, the reader learns more about the children, their family, the Haitian

culture, and other great wisdoms from their grandfather.

A native of Haiti, Sister Appolon has always loved reading and writing. She regularly writes poetry in Haitian-Creole, one of Haiti's two official languages, along with French. In fact, the book appears in both languages with wonderful illustrations by Maxime St. Juste.

Asked who her greatest mentor is, Oprah Winfrey figures prominently. She says, "Oprah comes from a place and time when black women had very few opportunities." Sister Appolon continues, "She has given so much to people and makes philanthropy a central part of her life. Her message to others is to always persevere and to never give up which is also my personal philosophy. If you believe it is for you, then go for it." In the near future Sister Appolon hopes to have her own foundation to open libraries in elementary schools in Haiti.



Arcelle Appolon (middle) with Isabelle Miller, TWU Business Agent and Isabelle's daughter Sienna Miller-Joseph.

*Les Aventures de Nanou et Ti Ko*, published by Kiyikaat Publications, was launched on October 7, 2012 (Sister Appolon's own birthday), and very well received by critics.

She shares, "This book is truly a labour of love for me. I believe in the importance of reading, especially at a young age, and the value in sharing my Haitian culture and language."

As part of Black History month this year, Sister Appolon was asked to give a 60-minute reading workshop to children in different schools throughout Montreal every Friday in February. She is also presently working towards participating in the Fête du livre jeunesse and Livres en folies, both events taking place at the end of May in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The TWU wishes to congratulate Sister Appolon on the success of her book.

The good news is that she plans on writing more books about Nanou and Ti Ko's adventures in the future. Stay tuned...

For more information on the book and where to purchase it, please go to [www.kiyikaat.com](http://www.kiyikaat.com) or write to [nanouaktiko@gmail.com](mailto:nanouaktiko@gmail.com). Facebook page: Les Aventures de Nanou et Ti Ko.

## TWU Members Attend the B.C. Federation of Labour 55th Convention

Several TWU Business Agents and Table Officers attended this year's B.C. Federation of Labour 55th Convention held from November 26-30, 2012, at the New West Wing of the Vancouver Convention Centre. The B.C. Fed Convention takes place every two years and hosts over 2000 attendees daily from over 50 affiliated unions across B.C.

President Jim Sinclair, who was re-elected this year (along with Secretary-Treasurer, Irene Lazinger), addressed delegates in his opening speech, touching on key issues such as, among others, health care, union raiding, wage increases, worker health and safety, card-check, union apprenticeship, etc. Brother Sinclair spoke at length about a new vision for the labour movement and invigorated the crowd when he concluded the morning speech by saying, "We are stronger as a province, we are better as a province, and we are more successful as a province when we embrace equality and justice for everyone."

From day one of the Convention, the energy and enthusiasm of the delegates were palpable. There were many heated, but always respectful, debates on issues that ranged from the proposed pipeline and exporting of raw logs to temporary foreign workers.

The demonstration that took place on Wednesday, November 28, outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery was just as passionate. Union brothers and sisters and labour supporters stood proudly

side-by-side in solidarity holding union flags, banners, and signs in a rainbow of colours, listening to community leaders and labour leaders address the crowd.

The Convention welcomed many visitors and invited guests. Speakers included Linda McQuaig, journalist and author, Adrian Dix, Leader of the B.C. New Democratic Party (NDP), and Celeste Drake, Washington Fair Trade Coalition. On Thursday, November 29, invited guest speaker, Ken Georgetti, President of the Canadian Labour Congress, addressed Convention attendees. Brother Georgetti shared personal anecdotes and touched on many important issues facing the labour community in Canada; Canada Pension Plan, private member's Bill C-377, the importance of the Union Advantage and much more. He stressed the need to improve and communicate differently about why workers should join unions,

especially in light of the changing social landscape of communications.

Brother Georgetti was followed with great applause by Federal NDP Leader and Opposition Leader, Thomas Mulcair, who also addressed the crowd. He touched on issues of concern such as the private member's Bill C-377, Employment Insurance, and NAFTA, among others. Mr. Mulcair fingered the Conservative government as acting in bad faith after the spat of back-to-work legislation imposed on workers in the last few years by Federal Labour Minister Lisa Raitt, calling her the "incarnation of bad faith."

The Convention adjourned on Friday, November 30, 2012. For more information about the B.C. Fed Convention, please go to the B.C. Fed website at [www.bcfed](http://www.bcfed).

From L to R: George Doubt, TWU President, Tamara Marshall, TWU BA, Betty Carrasco, TWU Vice-President, Colin Brehaut, TWU BA.

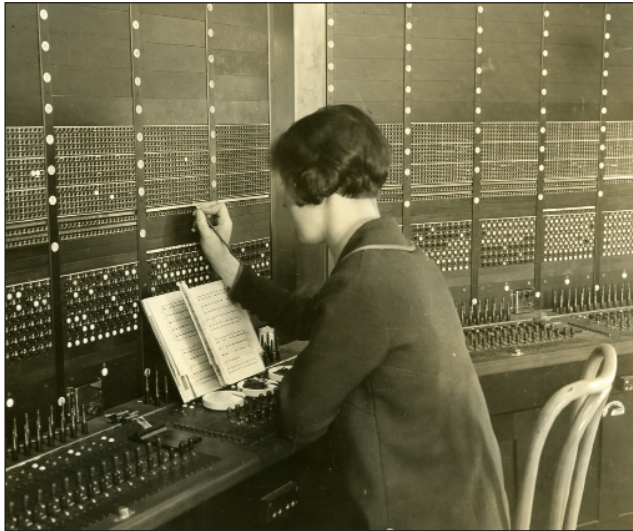


## Retail Operator Services

Submitted by Colin Brehaut, TWU Business Agent, B.C.

After more than 100 years, Retail Operator Services in Alberta and British Columbia ended on December 31, 2012. However, the role of the operator will continue within the framework of Competitive Operator Services.

Photo submitted by Allan Hagstrom, formerly local 5.



The telecommunications industry has seen a large number of changes over the years. From manual switchboards to step-by-step switches to mechanical switches to digital switches, from party lines to private lines to dedicated lines and from open wire to fibre optics, the changes have been phenomenal. But throughout it all, there has been one constant – Operators.

The first telephone switching technology was the manual switchboard where all the telephone lines in a local area terminated. At the terminal points, plugs were installed so that wires could be connected between any two lines. When a customer places a call, a light, bell, or other signal alerted the operator who answered the call. The operator, who was in the local area, would then assist the customer by providing information or by placing local and long distance calls. In most areas, operators could be counted on to have all sorts of information at hand such as the names and addresses of local customers, the latest news, weather, sports results, the correct time of day, and even gossip. Because the operators often served the same group of customers on a daily basis and customers grew to recognize operators' voices, a respect was developed.

Throughout the history of operators, unions have played an important role. The book *The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers Union*, written by labour historian Elaine Bernard, highlights some of that involvement. One excerpt reads, "In the fall of 1902, the women operators at the New Westminster and Burrard Inlet

Telephone Company joined [IBEW] local 213 as a women's auxiliary." Following a strike in September 1902, the group was able to achieve "company recognition of the IBEW." However, the company did not believe "recognition" meant "that the union had any right to bargain with the company."

As a result, on November 26, 1902, the operators went on strike. Their main demands were "increased wages, sick leave with pay, and an end to the company's use of unpaid trainees." The operators detailed how they had to "pay the salaries of replacements if they were ill" and referenced "the case of one woman who had been operating for nine months before she was put on salary." The operators were also incensed that company representatives were telling the press that the operators were only on strike because of pressure from the men. Because the technology of the time meant that almost all subscribers had to contact an operator to be connected, the operators' strike "completely paralyzed the city's telephone network."

Because of their close contact with the public and the role they played as the "face" of the company, the operators were able to garner a lot of support. The book *Never Done* points out "phone service was so important in the business life" that unions, private citizens, businessmen and politicians all supported the striking workers and demanded that the strike be settled at once. "The strike was quickly settled. The women obtained recognition of their union, employment of all union workers who had been fired, a series of regular pay increases giving them salaries from \$20 to \$35 a month and a regular salary after a ten-day training period."

However, it was a difficult struggle. Despite (or perhaps because of) the vital role played by the operator within the telephony system, the company placed inordinate demands on the operators. Operators were forced to raise a flag and get permission in order to go to the bathroom. Operators were forced to resign their employment when they got married. Operators were forced to resign their employment when they became pregnant. With most operators working fewer than four years, the constant turnover among operators prevented stability in the local's leadership and it was hard for the local to constantly educate new members about the advantages of unions.

At the same time that the local was struggling to maintain experienced leadership, the company began linking efficiency drives to contests and incentives. *The Long Distance Feeling* notes, "In 1913, for instance, the company introduced a weighted service contest." The contest required management to monitor calls answered by operators and record extensive statistics for each office" in

exchange for a "pennant with the company's shield on it, to be hung in the lounge for the month." The book goes on to remark, "The approach was ingenious. Under the guise of a game, the company extended its monitoring of operators while operators willingly increased their production and accuracy. All for the price of a pennant."

Over the years, and as the number of customers grew, the work became more demanding and the company began to install automatic switching equipment. These automatic switches allowed customers with dial telephones to make connections themselves without operator assistance except for long distance and collect calls.

The operators continued to fight for their rights, though. In the 1962 contract negotiations, in order to decrease the effect of automation and increase the number of operator jobs, the operators decided to make a shorter work day with no reduction in pay a priority. Despite the fact that neither

the clerical nor craft appendices saw it as a priority, the operators fought for it on their own. Fighting it all the way to conciliation, the operators were able to win the seven-hour day and a 1.5 per cent wage increase while "clerical and plant, working a seven-and-a-half and eight-hour day respectively, received three per cent increases."

With the changing technology and the increasing automation, the need for local operators declined and the company began centralizing operations. As a result, many local operator services offices were closed and operators were forced to resign their employment or move. For example, did you know that in the year 2000 (a short 12 years ago), there were Retail Operator Services offices in Abbotsford, Calgary, Campbell River, Camrose, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Kamloops, Kelowna, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Nanaimo, New Westminster, Prince George, Red Deer, Vancouver and Victoria, and there were Competitive Operator Services offices in Calgary and Edmonton?

*The following story "Information, please" was first published in 1966 in Reader's Digest and highlights the role that operators used to play (and still can play).*

When I was quite young, my family had one of the first telephones in our neighbourhood. I remember well the polished oak case fastened to the wall on the lower stair landing. The shiny receiver hung on the side of the box. I even remember the number — 105. I was too little to reach the telephone, but used to listen with fascination when my mother talked into it. Once she lifted me up to speak to my father, who was away on business. Magic! Then I discovered that somewhere inside that wonderful device lived an amazing person — her name was "Information Please" and there was nothing that she did not know. My mother could ask her for anybody's number and when our clock ran down, Information Please immediately supplied the correct time.

My first personal experience with this genie-in-the-receiver came one day while my mother was visiting a neighbour. Amusing myself at the toolbench in the basement, I whacked my finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible, but there didn't seem to be of much use crying because there was no one home to offer sympathy. I walked around the house sucking my throbbing finger, finally arriving at the stairway. The telephone! Quickly, I ran for the footstool in the parlour and dragged it to the landing. Climbing up, I unhooked the receiver and held it to my ear. "Information Please," I said into the mouthpiece just above my head. A click or two, and a small clear voice spoke into my ear. "Information." "I hurt my fingerrrr—I wailed into the phone. The tears came readily enough now that I had an audience. "Isn't your mother home?" came the question. "Nobody's at home but me," I blubbered. "Are you bleeding?" "No," I replied. "I hit it with the hammer and it hurts". "Can you open your icebox?" she asked. I said I could. "Then chip off a little piece of ice and hold it on your finger. That will stop the hurt. Be careful when you use the icepick," she admonished. "And don't cry. You'll be alright."

After that, I called Information Please for everything. I asked for help with my Geography and she told me where Philadelphia was, and the Orinco—the romantic river I was going to explore when I grew up. She helped me with my Arithmetic, and she told me that a pet chipmunk—I had caught him in the park just the day before—would eat fruits and nuts. And there was the time that Petey, our pet canary died. I called Information Please and told her the sad story. She listened, then said the usual things grown-ups say to soothe a child. But I was unconsoled. Why was it that birds should sing so beautifully and bring joy to whole families, only to end as a heap of feathers feet up, on the bottom of a cage? She must have sensed my deep concern, for she quietly said, "Paul, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in." Somehow, I felt better.

Another day I was at the telephone. "Information," said the now familiar voice. "How do you spell fix?" "F-I-X." At that instant my sister, who took unholy joy in scaring me, jumped off the stairs at me with a banshee shriek—"Yaaaaaahhh!" I fell off the stool, pulling the receiver out of the box by its roots. We were both terrified—Information Please was no longer there, and I was not at all sure that I hadn't hurt her when I pulled the receiver out. Minutes later, there was a man on the porch. "I'm a telephone repairman. I was working down the street and the operator said there might be some trouble at this number." He reached for the receiver in my hand. "What happened?" I told him. "Well, we can fix that in a minute or two." He opened the telephone box exposing a maze of wires and coils, and fiddled for a while with the end of the receiver cord, tightened things with a small screwdriver. He jiggled the hook up and down a few times, then spoke into the phone. "Hi, this is Pete. Everything's under control at 105. The kid's sister scared him and he pulled the cord out of the box." He hung up, smiled, gave me a pat on the head and walked out the door.

All this took place in a small town in the Pacific Northwest. Then, when I was nine years old, we moved across the country to Boston and I missed my mentor acutely. Information Please belonged in that old wooden box back at home, and I somehow never thought of trying the tall, skinny new phone that sat on the small table in the hall. Yet, as I grew into my teens, the memories of those childhood conversations never really left me; often in moments of doubt and perplexity, I would recall the serene sense of security I had when I knew that I could call Information Please and get the right answer. I appreciated now how very patient, understanding and kind she was to have wasted her time on a little boy.

A few years later, on my way back to college, my plane put down in Seattle. I had about half an hour between plane connections, and I spent 15 minutes or so on the phone with my sister who lived there now, happily mellowed by marriage and motherhood. Then, really without thinking what I was doing, I dialled my hometown operator and said, "Information Please." Miraculously, I heard again the small, clear voice that I know so well: "Information." I hadn't planned this, but I heard myself saying, "Could you tell me, please, how to spell the word 'fix'?" There was a long pause. Then came the softly spoken answer. "I guess," said Information Please, "that your finger must have healed by now." I laughed. "So it's really still you. I wonder if you have any idea how much you meant to me during all that time..." "I wonder," she replied, "if you know how much you meant to me? I never had any children, and I used to look forward to your calls. Silly, wasn't it?" It didn't seem silly, but I didn't say so. Instead I told her how often I had thought of her over the years, and I asked if I could call her again when I come back to visit my sister when the semester was over. "Please do. Just ask for Sally." "Goodbye Sally." It sounded strange for Information Please to have a name. "If I run into any chipmunks, I'll tell them to eat fruits and nuts." "Do that," she said. "And I expect one of these days you'll be off for the Orinoco. Well, good-bye."

Just three months later, I was back again at the Seattle airport. A different voice answered, "Information," and I asked for Sally. "Are you a friend?" "Yes," I said. "An old friend." "Then I'm sorry to have to tell you. Sally had only been working part-time in the last few years because she was ill. She died five weeks ago." But before I could hang up, she said, "Wait a minute. Did you say your name was Villard?" "Yes." "Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down." "What was it?" I asked, almost knowing in advance what it would be. "Here it is, I'll read it-'Tell him I still say there are other worlds to sing in. He'll know what I mean'"

I thanked her and hung up. I did know what Sally meant.

Retail Operators, you have made a huge contribution to your family, your community, your Union and the labour movement. The TWU salutes you!

## Education Committee Provides Training across Canada

Submitted by Ivana Niblett, TWU Business Agent, Calgary

The Education Committee was able to provide training to approximately 140 new Shop Stewards across Canada from both Craft and Clerical in 2012. The classes are designed to provide the basic tools necessary to deal effectively with management, handle members' grievances and complaints, as well as how to encourage the participation and solidarity of their local members.

This was also the first year since 2009 that we were able to send TWU members to the CLC Winter Schools in Harrison Hot Springs in British Columbia, Jasper Park Lodge in Alberta and Port Elgin in Ontario. There were 14 successful candidates that participated in these schools where they were able to see how common issues affect all members in various sectors and industries across the country. These schools promote strength in the labour movement and solidarity amongst working people.

We have also made some strides in working closely with the



Shop Steward training class in Burnaby, B.C., on September 28, 2012.

Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) where we funded two members to become facilitators in Quebec so that our members have training that is consistent with the rest of the unions in Quebec.

We are hopeful that educating our members with further courses will continue in 2013 and ask that all members follow the training schedule on the TWU website to see when new classes are announced.



From L to R: John Trautman, activist, Jason Devine, activist, Betty Lockhurst, TWU Business Agent - Calgary, Peggy Askin, retired past President of local 203, Collin Anderson, retired past President of local 204.

# TWU Supports Idle No More Movement

Submitted by Jason Devine, Community Organizer and spokesperson for Anti-Racist Action Calgary.

Idle No More is one of the most important social movements in recent Canadian history. This is not just because of the immense rapidity and scope of its growth in a matter of weeks, but also because of the reasons which motivate its members and supporters.

Omnibus Bill C-45 was passed by the Senate on December 14 2012, has since received Royal Assent, and is now law.

One of the major aspects of Bill C-45 is that it has introduced changes to various existing legislation such as the Navigable Waters Protection Act. Previously, this Act protected 2.5 million rivers and lakes across the country. Now only 97 lakes and 62 rivers will be covered.

This means that hundreds of thousands of rivers will no longer enjoy protection and there will now be a drastic reduction in the number of federal environmental assessments that are required for resource extraction.

In essence, our environment is now open to an unbridled increase in mining and pipeline construction with all the risks such industrial production imply.

However, such changes will have a serious and detrimental impact on First Nations' land and their ability to carry on traditional practices. These are, in fact, constitutionally-protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Even more important, Section 35.1 of the Charter commits the federal government to consult with First Nations before any changes in legislation are brought in that may or will affect First Nations. Thus, sections of Bill C-45 are unconstitutional as no First Nations were ever consulted on these changes.

Today, besides continuing and growing protests, there are now legal challenges being mounted to overturn the relevant

legislation.

This is a crucial fight for all people who reside in Canada, and contrary to popular myth and poor journalism, the Idle No More movement is a fight for everyone's rights and for environmental protection.

The labour movement has frequently suffered from unilateral decisions taken by the government and seen its rights restricted; most recently with the attacks on Air Canada, CP Rail, and Canada Post workers. It is the history of such actions by government and employers that led to the historic rallying cry of the international union movement: An Injury to One is an Injury to All!

Idle No More is asking for all allies to come forward and help them. We must do what we can to popularise and spread the word. This is a situation where we can both learn and share with our neighbours.

Such actions will go far in helping to overturn undemocratic legislation, protecting our environment, and will also help expose and end racist stereotypes about First Nations that still linger as a poisonous heritage of Canada's colonialism.



## TWPP Voluntary Contributions

Telecommunication Workers Pension Plan (“TWPP” or the “Plan”) offers actively employed Members in B.C. the option of making Voluntary Contributions to the TWPP. Voluntary Contributions will be deducted from the Member’s pay cheque in addition to the Required Contributions currently being deducted.

Voluntary Contributions are similar to making contributions to an RRSP and are based on the current RRSP contribution limits. The 2013 RRSP contribution limit is 18% of Gross Earnings to a maximum of \$23,820.

As a Member of the TWPP you are accruing a future retirement benefit and this reduces the 18% maximum you can contribute to an RRSP. The Employer reports the Member’s contributions and the Pension Adjustment (“PA”) on their T-4 slip. The “PA” is based on the Federal Income Tax Act prescribed formula. That formula is  $(9 \times 1.75\% = 15.75\%)$  of your Gross Earnings less \$600. This leaves a Member with 2.25% of their Gross Earnings plus \$600 that they can contribute to an RRSP or make Voluntary Contributions. However, the sum of the PA plus Voluntary Contributions for a single year must be less than or equal to the allowable RRSP maximum in that year.

### Example Calculation of the Maximum Contributions

The following example is the maximum amount a member can contribute in a calendar year based on \$50,000 earnings.

$\$50,000 \times 18\% = \$9000$  (Maximum RRSP Contribution Limit)

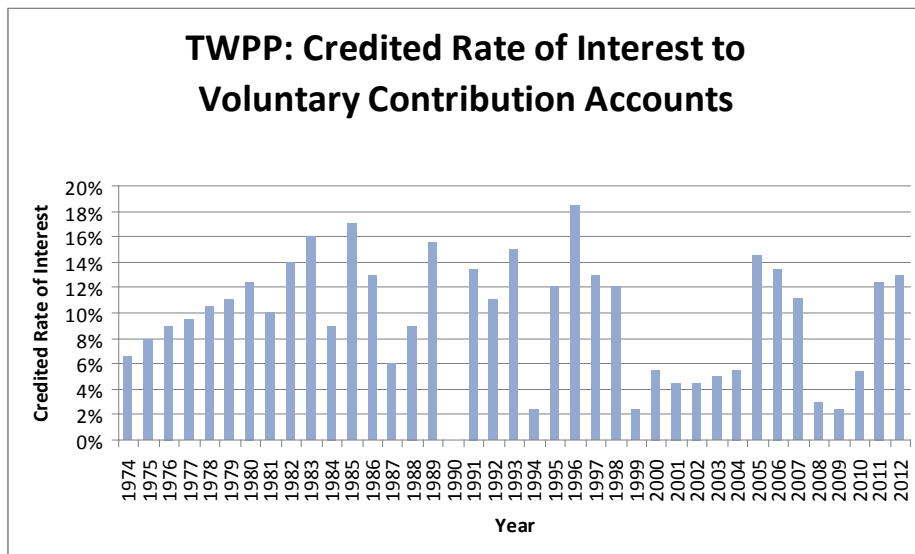
“PA” reported on the Member’s T4 slip is \$7275 (15.75% of Gross Earnings less \$600).

The maximum amount a Member can contribute to an RRSP or make Voluntary Contributions in the current year is \$1725 (2.25% of Gross Earnings plus \$600).

If this Member wants to make Voluntary Contributions he or she will then need to decide on how much to have deducted from each paycheque, keeping in mind that the maximum for the year must not exceed \$1725. The Member is responsible for ensuring they do not contribute more than the allowable maximum.

### Credited Rate of Interest to Voluntary Contribution Accounts

The Voluntary Contribution accounts are credited with the three-year average rate of return on the Plan’s Assets on a market value basis, if the rate is positive. If the rate is negative, no interest would be credited for that year and the member’s contributions would not be negatively impacted. In subsequent years, the voluntary contribution accounts would only begin to be credited with interest once the cumulative three-year average return (beginning with the first negative year) becomes positive. The following is a historical chart showing the rate of interest credited to Voluntary Contribution Accounts since the inception of the Plan:



## Investment Strategy

The Plan uses a liability driven investment strategy with a heavy allocation to fixed income investments. In a rising interest rate environment, the Plan would expect negative (or at least lower) investment returns. This could produce lower interest rates for Voluntary Contributions than have been credited in the past.

## Annual Statement

Each year, Members receive an Annual Statement advising them of their accrued retirement pension benefit with the TWPP. This Statement also includes the Member's accumulated Voluntary Contributions including interest and the credited interest rate in that year.

## Withdrawing Contributions

A Member can withdraw their Voluntary Contributions at anytime but not more than once a year. There are no partial withdrawals; the Member must withdraw their total contributions including interest. To request a withdrawal, the Member must contact the TWPP administration office and request a Voluntary Contribution Withdrawal form.

The Member will have the option of having their Voluntary Contributions paid out as cash less tax or transferred to a non-locked in RRSP.

When the office receives the completed withdrawal form, a

copy of the form will be sent to the Employer advising them to stop taking deductions and the Employer will advise the TWPP office of the pay period the deduction will cease. The withdrawal will be processed after the final contributions have been remitted. Members can re-apply to have Voluntary Contribution deductions after the withdrawal has been completed.

## Retirement

Members who have Voluntary Contributions at the time they retire are entitled to elect one of the following options:

- A refund of contributions plus interest paid in cash less tax
- Have the contributions plus interest transferred to a non-locked in RRSP
- Elect an annuity that will increase their monthly pension from the Plan

## Voluntary Contribution Applications

If you are interested in making Voluntary Contributions to the TWPP, you can find the application forms on the Plan's website at [www.twplans.com](http://www.twplans.com) under Pension/Booklets and Forms. Both the Voluntary Application Form and Voluntary Designation of Beneficiary Form must be completed and returned to the TWPP administration office, or you can simply contact the Administration office at 604-430-1317 or toll-free at 1-877-430-3302 and request the forms be sent to you.

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# B.C. Family Day not Observed by Telus this Year

The Union office received several calls from members in B.C. regarding the new Family Day holiday which, beginning in 2013, will take place on the second Monday in February every year (February 11th this year). Telus will not be observing Family Day as a paid holiday because it is not one of the agreed upon holidays listed in the TWU/Telus Collective Agreement.

Our sisters and brothers in Ontario suffered the same fate in 2008 when Family Day was introduced in Ontario. Telus has yet to agree to observe Family Day for its TWU members in Ontario. Employees in Appendix B are not entitled to Remembrance Day off. Recognition of these days off would require an agreement with the employer during the next round of bargaining which is something that Telus has resisted to date.

It is interesting to note that TWU members who work for Shaw will get a paid holiday because Shaw is recognizing Family Day across the country, even though the provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia do not have a Family Day holiday.



National TWU Vice-President, Betty Carrasco, being interviewed by Global Television (Feb. 2013).

## You Have the Right to Refuse Dangerous Work

Submitted by: TWU Health and Safety Committee

TWU members should not put themselves at undue risk of injury, exposure to a hazardous environment, or worse. Every member should be aware of their right to refuse dangerous work. A worker can legally refuse to work if they have reasonable cause to believe that:

- a condition exists at work that presents a danger to himself or herself;
- the use or operation of a machine or thing that presents a danger to the employee or a co-worker;
- the performance of an activity constitutes a danger to the employee or to another employee.

However, that right is not absolute. Workers have the right to refuse dangerous work only if:

- the refusal does not put the life, health or safety of another person directly in danger; or
- the danger in question is not a normal condition of

employment.

In order for workers to be protected by Part II of the Canada Labour Code when exercising the right to refuse, they must follow the proper procedure.

### Procedure for refusing dangerous work

As long as the worker follows these steps he/she will be protected by the Code.

The first step is to report the circumstances to the employer and specify that you intend to pursue the matter under the Canada Labour Code.

If the employer agrees that a danger exists he/she must take immediate action to protect employees from the danger. The employer must then inform the workplace health and safety committee or representative of the matter and the action taken to resolve it. In this case, the procedure would end here.

However, if the employer feels that there is no danger, or if the situation is not corrected to the employee's satisfaction, then the worker has the right to continue to refuse to work and must now report the circumstances to both the employer and workplace committee or the health and safety representative.

Following the investigation, should the employer disagree with the worker on the existence of danger, or take steps to protect the workers and the worker still believes the danger exists, the worker must inform their employer of the continued refusal. The employer will then inform the workplace committee or representative and notify a Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) health and safety officer.

For more details go to [www.twu-stt.ca/en/health-and-safety](http://www.twu-stt.ca/en/health-and-safety).



## Negative Impacts of Employee Engagement Schemes

Submitted by Perry Pasqualetto, Business Agent – Burnaby, B.C.



Telus annually embarks on an employee engagement scheme in order for you to provide your feedback and give management a "Reality Check." They ask you questions to evaluate and rate how the company or, more specifically, how Telus' senior management should be better run. The part you may be unaware of is that senior management has already had their meetings to decide how they want things to change.

Remember that they had the employee feedback request created to, once again, try and reach for another employee engagement award. Now, they will try and entice you, the unionized employee, in this evaluation scheme to validate the changes that they have already decided to implement in the workplace.

Since the implementation of the company's Pulse Checks and other survey tools, they have turned the phrase of “quality of service” into something of a joke among employees.

The use of Pulse Checks in the workplace is just another tool that management uses to mislead its unionized employees. By getting Union members to provide feedback directly to the company on how it may be run more efficiently might sound like a good idea initially. However the company and, more specifically, Telus senior management, is only going to select and highlight ideas that come out of the employee engagement scheme or Pulse Check program that fit within their own organizational plans.

Please do not fill out any company surveys. They are hazardous to your working life.

What have surveys on supportive management ever accomplished in the workplace other than threaten the loss of your job, negatively impact your work/life balance, less control over your working environment, created Telus programs and policy that have sanctioned harassment of our members and eliminated dignity and fairness at work? Not to mention accelerated the elimination of jobs through attrition, voluntary severance programs and contracting out.

It is important to raise awareness and spread the truth about the negative impacts of employee involvement schemes to our members. Annual slick marketing campaigns by Telus have our members wanting to believe that the “future is

friendly” or that management really cares about “quality of service”, but what is really happening behind closed doors is alarming.

To understand why the company solicits our members' feedback in an attempt to raise employee engagement, you have to look at what is at stake for the employer. They want access to the discretionary effort you bring with you every day to work. The company pays you for the necessary tasks that they require you to perform every day.

But, an employee's willingness to perform duties above and beyond their basic job requirement is a reflection of the employee's desire to utilize their discretionary effort. Is that something that you unknowingly give away to the company each day for free?

The reality of it is that we all want to put in a good day of work for decent wages, benefits and working conditions. We want to go home to a life that is not interfered with by the company, and to be secure in our jobs for the future.

Severely flawed Pulse Check polling leads to our members being mistreated and negatively impacts your working life. How are you coping with the constant performance monitoring and lack of a balanced work atmosphere in the workplace?

Watch for the company's next employee feedback request. Beware if it is commissioned by the company and for the company because it will not be good for your working health.

The Union is asking members to not participate in any form of company solicited feedback surveys or programs. Tell your manager that if they want a Reality Check to stop trying to manipulate and misrepresent the facts for another meaningless award and to check somewhere else.

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## Employment Equity and You

Submitted by Jason Devine, Community Organizer and spokesperson for Anti-Racist Action Calgary

What is Employment Equity? Why is it important? These questions are best approached by referring to the purpose of the Employment Equity Act:

“...to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with

disabilities and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences.”

Thus the Act recognises the existence of four specific groups of employees that can and do face systemic barriers in the workplace. These barriers and obstacles are discriminatory in nature,

whether intended or not. Here are some examples:

- sexism, racism, or prejudices which manifest in the workplace
- physical barriers which prevent disabled people from accessing or participating fully in the workplace
- lack of accommodation of family responsibilities (caregivers of young children or elderly parents)
- lack of awareness of cross-cultural issues

There are certainly other systemic barriers and this list is not exhaustive. Rather, the point is that federal legislation recognizes the wide and continuing existence of discrimination and mandates that all employers covered under the legislation shall work towards locating and removing these barriers.

In the case of Telus, the company has an agreement between itself and the TWU to pursue employment equity. Under the agreement, a joint committee exists with representatives from both parties, tasked with making recommendations on employment policies and practices designed to achieve quality for the four designated groups and to identify areas of further concern.

An absolutely crucial aspect to this is the Employment Equity Survey and the question of self-identification. If people do not fill out the survey and self-identify, both the Union and the employer will be hindered in achieving equity in the workplace. This is because the survey is the basis for identifying members of the four groups and, hence, of the existence of systemic barriers.

While the employer is legally mandated to do this, the Union, as the representative of the interests of its members, is likewise mandated by its membership to seek greater equality.

However, both the Union and employer must respect people's right to decline to

self-identify. Participation in the survey is voluntary. Contrariwise, people have a right to self-identify, to fill out the survey. Thus, the results of the latter are completely confidential and are only used for employment equity purposes.

The Union is a voice for its members. By filling out the survey, an employee is further empowering the Union's ability to represent their interests. If the Union is unaware of areas of discrimination, if those facing it do not speak up, it cannot carry out its mandate to the best of its ability for lack of evidence. Finally, the company will have no obligation to remove a barrier that technically they are not aware of.

## Light Up: The Lagerstrom's Christmas Light Show



Dan Lagerstrom, a TWU Network Technician from Local 1, and his family have been outdoing themselves every year since 2002 by decorating their house with Christmas lights to the delight and suspected horror of their neighbours. Through the family's website [www.lightup.ca](http://www.lightup.ca), which features the Christmas light show and donation page, over \$25,000 has been raised for charity since 2005. This year, all the money collected was donated to Camp Goodtimes which provides a safe, medically supervised, fun and recreational experience for children with cancer and their families. If you would like to donate, please go to [www.lightup.ca](http://www.lightup.ca). The following is a Q&A from the Lagerstrom family which appears on the Light Up website.

### Where and why did this all begin?

I'm sure this all started because we lived in a townhouse for way too long (over 10 years). The possibility to decorate outside was

just not there. We moved into this house early in 2002, and as soon as we were settled in, the planning began. My wife was unaware that I was totally nuts at that point, however, she is very aware now.

That first year we were quite proud of ourselves for putting up over 4,000 lights. I believe that was when the neighbours first started to curse the day that we moved in. Little did they know what was in store...

The year 2003 brought the grand total to over 11,000 lights. We discovered that even at this number (low by many standards), I had to make some serious adjustments in my life to get everything up on time. Much work later, we feel it was a pretty good display. In 2004, we cleared the 30,000 barrier, but it took 1 1/2 weeks vacation, plus a lot of help. For the 2005 season, we managed to beat 42,000, but it did take the entire month. From 2006 to 2008 we hit almost 52,000, but we had lots of help. 2009 and 2010 saw our totals drop, as we began the LED conversion. It will likely continue to drop until the changeover is complete. Then, we anticipate the numbers to go back up.

### Where are we going from here?

In 2012, the display again grew into the neighbour's yard. It was quite a change from past years shows. The arches and large tree were there, of course, but most of the smaller features were gone. In addition, 100 per cent of the music was new. We are going to continue to raise money for Camp Goodtimes. Our ultimate goal is 250,000 lights and opening up the back yard. I'm sure we are several years away from that. Note: This is not Cindy's goal. 2013 and beyond...who knows?

### Why do we keep doing this?

Many times during the setup I wonder this myself. Mostly, it's when I'm six feet up a ladder being pelted by horizontal rain or hail. Here are some letters we received that keep us motivated (see website). We receive quite a few of these, but these ones kind of say it all. It's nice to see that our efforts don't go unnoticed.

If you have any ideas or suggestions, please feel free to contact the Lagerstrom family at [danandcindy@lightup.ca](mailto:danandcindy@lightup.ca).

Thanks,

Dan, Cindy, & Kyle



## Letters of Appreciation

### Retirement Thanks

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the TWU,

I wish to express my appreciation on receiving my lifetime membership with the TWU. Thank you for the \$1,000 gift from the TWU upon my recent retirement. I have been a member and proud supporter of the TWU since 1975 and an active executive member in local 4 for my last 10 years, and thank them for allowing me to serve.

All the best in Solidarity,

Andy Burke  
Formerly local 4

Dear TWU,

Thank you for the retirement package which I received yesterday. I really do enjoy everything that is included in the package. After 37 years of work, it is now a change going forward.

Once again thank you,

James W. Rowley  
Formerly local 7

Dear George Doubt and the TWU,

Having recently retired from Telus, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the TWU for the retirement gift. It was a very welcome addition to my retirement package and it is earmarked for something that will be a memento of my years at Telus and all the wonderful people with whom I have had the honour and pleasure to cross paths with.

Sincerely,

Isabel Chernoff  
Formerly local 50 and 51

Dear TWU,

Wishing you all the best this Holiday

Season. Thank you so much for everything that you do for us all year. Have a wonderful Christmas and a great New Year.

All the best,

Al and Polly Hawkins  
Locals 10 and 31

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Thank you very much for the generous \$1,000 retirement gift. It is very much appreciated. Thank you as well for the Honorary TWU Lifetime Membership. I'm grateful for the benefits and support of the TWU and the Benevolent Society over the many years of my employment at B.C. Tel/Telus, and now in my retirement.

Regards,

Johannes (John) Nielsen  
Formerly local 5

*"Letters of Appreciation" continued on page 16*

## TWU 2012 Scholarship Recipients

Four \$1,000 and three \$750 awards went to children of TWU members entering their first year of post secondary education. All of the recipients demonstrated academic excellence, strong leadership qualities and a dedication to the community.

The TWU congratulates the following scholarship recipients:

- James Bell from Surrey, BC, will be studying Mechanical Engineering at the University of British Columbia - Okanagan Campus. (\$1,000)
- Felicia Belle Dueñas from Surrey, BC, will be studying Nursing at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. (\$1,000)
- Melanie Hameluck from Coquitlam, BC, will be studying Nursing at the University of British Columbia - Okanagan Campus. (\$1,000)
- Taysia Louie from Burnaby, BC, will be studying Design at Emily Carr University of Arts and Design (\$1,000)
- Christine Adrian from Grand Prairie, AB, will be studying Teacher Education North (TEN) Program at Grand Prairie Regional College (\$750)
- Janae Dunlop from Maple Ridge, BC, will be studying Science, majoring in Biochemistry at the University of Victoria. (\$750)
- Rachel Wood from Victoria, BC, will be studying English at the University of Victoria. (\$750)

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Dear Isabelle (Business Agent - Quebec and Maritimes),

As time goes by, we grow older and we tend to hang onto some of our past achievements. As a young man in the early 70's, I worked with B.C. Telephone Company as a tradesman. I was also introduced to the opportunities of belonging to a group of workers that had the beginnings of a strong union movement in the TWU.

I had the opportunity to watch the Union grow further into a new generation. As an executive member of the present TWU in Quebec, you have undoubtedly studied the development of the Union. When I had an ill informed question of a merger with another union, you and George Doubt were the only persons who did not dismiss my concerns.

I really do not have anyone to pass on this piece of memorabilia and a token representation of the Telecommunications Workers Union. I would like to pass this on to you and you can either guard it or pass it on to someone who will appreciate it.

Thank you again for your consideration and I hope that you will regard this with the care that is due, as it may be a piece of history. And to think that you may be the only person west of British Columbia to have a real piece of the TWU.

With respect,

Terry Steinke  
Formerly local 22

## General Thanks

*The following letter of thanks was forwarded to Paolo Réhel, TWU Business Agent, on behalf of the directors from Maison Oxygène, a unique community resource in Quebec which hosts struggling fathers and their children. For the past five years, Brother Réhel has been collecting personal toiletries and donating to this cause that is so close to his heart.*

Families from Maison Oxygène warmly thank everyone from the TWU who contributed by donating toiletries and hygiene products throughout the year.

Who among us knows at least one father who has found himself on the street with his children, or had to leave his home in a hurry or without any possibility of seeing his children?

It is for these families, fathers and children that Maison Oxygène has worked to help for over 23 years now.

Maison Oxygène is a hosting resource and community support for fathers who experience personal, marital or familial difficulties, who have their sole, shared or access rights, of their children or are in the process of obtaining those rights.

All these fathers have in common the desire to develop, strengthen or maintain a relationship with their children.

Maison Oxygène is a breath of fresh air for fathers and children in need:

- It provides an opportunity for fathers to safeguard this precious relationship with their children or to regain contact with them again.
- It provides an opportunity for temporary housing, and allows families the time to find adequate housing.
- And it is also an opportunity for each father to perform personal housecleaning in his life and to make positive choices.

At Maison Oxygène, you will find:

- A room for a father and his children.
- A team of people who support fathers in all their endeavours
- Material support that allows for a brief financial respite
- A family-oriented organization, the Carrefour Familial Hochelaga, enables families to participate in varied activities, provides the services of a daycare, a communal kitchen, and a space where people can build solid relationships

Finally, Maison Oxygène:

- Helps to prevent fathers from straying
- Helps to strengthen relationships between fathers and children
- Helps to prevent additional family conflict

[www.maisonoxygene.com](http://www.maisonoxygene.com)

## THE TRANSMITTER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE TWU

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