

# Quality of representation is key issue in Swiss Chalet Organizing Campaign

Traditional organizing issues have always primarily been wages and benefits. The Swiss Chalet organizing campaign in Ontario breaks tradition.

Wages and benefits are important issues, to be sure, but the overriding issue is the quality of union representation.

When the UFCW kicked off its organizing drive at Swiss Chalet last October, the 3,000 employees in 49 outlets across Ontario were represented by an independent company-controlled union known as the Canadian Union of Restaurant and Related Employees (C.U.R.R.E.). The campaign began after a number of Swiss Chalet employees approached the UFCW with complaints about the representation they were receiving from the officers of C.U.R.R.E.

Kevin Corporon, UFCW International Representative in charge of the Swiss Chalet campaign, says that according to the employees, "C.U.R.R.E. seldom called union meetings or visited the restaurants, and kept the members in the dark as to how their union dues were being spent."

Added to these concerns was the fact that in many locations members were never given the opportunity to vote on their contract, let alone on their union executive.

"C.U.R.R.E., it seems, was no more than a dues collection agency," states Corporon.

A waitress at Swiss Chalet in Ottawa summed up her frustrations with C.U.R.R.E. in the following manner:

*"We would adopt policies, the few times we had union meetings, and the executive would not act upon them.*

*For example, we voted to have C.U.R.R.E. insist that red safety non-slip mats be installed in all hazardous*

*areas of the restaurant. We're still waiting for those mats.*

*"We also never received any correspondence from the union and they never provided any training for the stewards in the restaurants."*

The employees at Swiss Chalet approached the UFCW because of its reputation of providing quality service to thousands of food workers across Canada, including a growing number of workers in the food service sector.

For example, the UFCW has represented the employees at St. Hubert BBQ in Montreal for the last three years. Today, the 1000 workers enjoy above-average wages for the industry and various benefits including a pension plan that is entirely financed through employer

contributions and available to both full-time and part-time employees.

The organizing drive at Swiss Chalet is already producing good results. The union has applied for certification before the Ontario Labour Relations Board on behalf of workers at a number of Swiss Chalet locations and expects to file many more applications in the near future.

"We're very pleased with how the campaign is progressing," Corporon says. "The employees at Swiss Chalet need a democratically run union that will provide them with a voice in the decisions that affect their working lives. The UFCW will therefore continue its organizing campaign until it represents all Swiss Chalet employees across Canada."

