

Douglas Dority
UFCW International Headquarters
17175 K Street NW
Washington, D.C.
20006

November 26, 2002

Dear Mr. Dority,

"The most unconscionable statements ever uttered by a labor leader."

That's the only way I can describe the words that came from President Sundin's mouth at the GMM November 21st, 2002. I will return to his remarks later in this letter and I am sure you will be as angered by his callous statements, as I was.

My name is Sharyn Sigurdur, and you may be familiar with me from the controversial web site, Members For Democracy. While MFD is often at odds with the leadership at UFCW 1518, and at times, even the CLC, this letter isn't about any of that. **This is about Union workers who have been verbally assaulted by their leadership. Even more tragic, it comes at a point in their lives when they have lost their jobs and are fighting for their dignity. President Sundin did his best to strip them of even that.**

Since the 250 Loman members were terminated by the Overwaitea Food Group on September 28th, 2002, the unresolved applications before the BCLRB, surrounding their dispute, and the lengthy processes have stalled these members' lives and have ceased their livelihoods.

President Sundin's position, at the general membership meeting, confirmed the absence of my unions' commitment to those union brothers. Mr Sundin's actions also place in question and jeopardy, the future of the retail members just now entering into battle with the same employer in 2003

I am more than disheartened by my unions' lack of allegiance and compassion for the Loman members.

I am more than dismayed at the lack of support these members have received from UFCW 1518 and their failure to solicit support from the B.C. Federation of Labour.

I attended prior meetings expecting the solidarity resolve would have strengthened and expecting the support for my brothers would have grown and each time I have been disheartened. Nothing in my experience as a union member could have prepared me for November 21st. Mr.Sundin, in my unions' name, handed my union brothers what can only be described as *union pink slips*, in a manner which was uncompassionate and unwarranted.

In a blatant attack on the Loman members' efforts to save their jobs, Mr. Sundin told the membership that the Loman members campaign was not winning. "I don't think this is going to be successful", "This fight is not working" Brooke stated. When the Loman members begged to differ, Brooke told them what he judged the point of the campaign to be: A leafleting campaign is only successful if it "brings the employer to the table". Although it seemed obvious, to just about everyone, that there was no chance the company would sit down and discuss the dispute while the LRB ruling was still pending, Mr. Sundin was of another view. The failure of the campaign to bring the employer to the table was given as evidence that it was not working.

My union brothers' efforts have effectively impacted the employers' business by more than 5%. The members from Lomans have done this on their own, through their own resolve and mostly out of their own pocket and yet Mr. Sundin chose to undermine their success.

The Lomans members' leafleting campaign was successful in winning a BCLRB ruling (#B322) that strengthens freedoms for union as a whole. This incredible win, against all odds, was not applauded, instead the members were told the success was detrimental to the Supreme Court K-mart decision and told it placed it in jeopardy. The Presidents' words were "I do not like it".

One selfless union brother who is instrumental in the campaigns' success and the driving force behind the BCLRB (#B322) ruling is facing, not one, but two lawsuits as a result of his resolve to save his and his union brothers jobs. This brother has had his severance stolen by the company, cannot draw employment insurance because of the same severance and yet he fights on. Mr. Sundin chose to place blame on this brothers' impassioned efforts to effect a positive outcome. Mr. Sundin offered no support for this union brother, instead offered admonishment, adding load to an already burdened member.

The Loman members' request for UFCW 1518 to gather support from the B.C. Federation of Labour resulted in yet another demoralizing blow. The membership was told the Loman members' campaign was a liability. Local 1518 would not be soliciting the aid of the federation. The president said "Can't do it because of the incidents". UFCW 1518 was not going to accept liability for the Loman members' campaign. The same liability cushion associated with any and all labour disputes, could and would not be afforded 250 union brothers.

Perhaps Mr. Sundin was getting closer to the truth when he expounded on "political capital", as he put it. He pointed out that there were 250 of the Lomans members and 9,000 members at retail and that he had an election coming up next year. "I know the warehouse guys have never liked me and that's OK" Maybe it is not OK. The membership heard that 250 Lomans members would be the sacrifice to save votes among retail members. His words were stinging: "I'm the President, basically I'm not going to make the decision to piss off the people who are going to vote for me."

The members don't care who is at the top as long as the representation reflects union values, not political values. There are some huge issues at play here. The Lomans members fight is about much more than just 250 jobs, it's about important legal freedoms that should be celebrated and communicated to all. Instead, Brooke has essentially conceded this issue rather than aggressively defending these freedoms. The Supreme Court has very clearly held freedom to share information, as a constitutional right and it should be the position of all unions that this applies to the press as well. The whole issue of what a third party contracting relationship may be used for is about to have a significant ruling rendered. If this ruling goes in the company's favor, there will be a whole new wave of Loman-like disputes down the road by a slew of employers. What will be the cost of defending those fights? UFCW and unionism could have and should have defended these issues vigorously. This would have let the employer know that unionism means something and it would have done the same for members everywhere.

When asked why a majority of the warehouse members believe the UFCW itself is mostly responsible for limiting the leafleting campaign's effectiveness, Brooke responded, "I have no clue." But there exists a steady and well-documented record of abandonment of this bargaining unit when they needed union the most. It has been a sad thing to watch and my faith in unionism has been shaken

The Loman members asked about their union status. Mr. Sundin spared no feelings again, he said "Don't know". (pause) What I'm going to tell you, let me tell you, I'm just saying no." According to Mr. Sundin the Local was under no obligation to listen to them, let alone help them.

The supportive posture UFCW 1518 had taken at previous GMM's was proven just that, a posture. That posture was dismantled in a systematic and callous manner during the GMM. Members, including myself, walked out in utter disbelief prior to adjournment. Leaving the meeting un-adjourned, the president followed to continue his barrage.

President Sundin's comment to the Loman members, before re-entering the meeting, was by far the most disparaging remark of the entire disgraceful meeting. With a smirk on his face he said: "this was the highlight of my evening".

The cost of the Loman members' battle thus far is not an issue and should not be a factor in the decision to support it, but rather what it will cost unionism if the battle is not won. It is imperative that you put the power of your organization behind these brothers. It is also imperative that financial support is found to continue their fight and essential that the manpower is provided to complete this win. The labour movement cannot withstand another loss.

President Sundin's lack of leadership during the meeting and the lack of action surrounding this dispute, calls for a complete and thorough investigation. My intention is to see this matter addressed in-house, but I stress, President Sundin's unmitigated departure from basic union principles must be addressed.

The holiday season is less than a month away. It is fair to ask that you respond by December 15th, 2002. Your intervention will insure these UFCW 1518 members, their wives and their children do not go without Christmas.

In Solidarity
Sharyn Sigurdur

cc: Michael Fraser, UFCW Canada
Jim Sinclair, B.C. Federation of Labour
Ken Georgetti, Canadian Labour Congress