

## **Solidarity on the TransCanada** **The Role of Immigrant Activism and Innovative Union Tactics** **in the 2005 Lakeside Packers Strike**

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## ARTICLE

# Solidarity on the TransCanada: The Role of Immigrant Activism and Innovative Union Tactics in the 2005 Lakeside Packers Strike

**Jason Foster**

### Introduction

BROOKS, ALBERTA MAY BE ONE of the most unlikely sites for a major union organizing victory. This small city of 13,000 people in the heart of southern Alberta is in many ways a standard prairie town, reliant on agriculture and oil and gas. It is also home to one of the largest beef processing plants in Canada, Lakeside Packers,<sup>1</sup> which sits along the TransCanada Highway just west of town. In the mid-2000s Lakeside was a lynch pin of the local Brooks economy, employing over 2,000 workers.

In 2005 Brooks and Lakeside were the location of one of western Canada's largest and most significant first-contract strikes in the past 20 years. The strike made national headlines at the time for its ugly tone and violence, including a dramatic car chase that left the local union president permanently disabled. The union victory was heralded at the time as an unexpected breakthrough for labour in Canada's most anti-union province.<sup>2</sup>

In the years since the strike, there have been a few accounts examining the dispute. As part of a labour history collection, I summarize the key events of the dispute, its political context, and link it to the changing demographics of

1. Lakeside Packers has had two name changes since the period discussed in this article, to XL Foods and most recently JBS Food Canada. However, "Lakeside" is how local residents continue to refer to the plant and for consistency that term will be used in this article.

2. Jason Foster, "Conflict and Solidarity: How the Lakeside Workers Won Their Union," *Our Times* 24, 6 (2006): 28–35.

the labour movement in Alberta.<sup>3</sup> The National Film Board film *24 Days in Brooks* offers a dramatic picture of the strike, highlighting the central role played by immigrant workers and the racially divided nature of the workforce.<sup>4</sup> Michael Broadway uses Brooks and Lakeside as a backdrop for some of his examinations into the meatpacking industry and the changing face of rural communities.<sup>5</sup> However, none of these accounts examine the internal dynamics inside the union before and during the dispute or probe the key factors that led to both the certification and the successful outcome of the strike. The factors that led to the strike and the strategies that resulted in its success have remained largely unexplored to date.

This article retraces the events leading up to and during the 2005 Lakeside strike and examines the factors that led to its occurrence and ultimate success. Specifically, it will analyze the role of African and Asian newcomers in catalyzing and providing momentum for the organizing drive and strike and the impact of innovative and responsive organizing strategies and tactics utilized by the union. It draws upon original interviews of key union leaders and activists conducted in 2014, supplemented by transcripts of oral history interviews conducted by the Alberta Labour History Institute, by newspaper articles related to the dispute and by union material produced during the dispute (e.g., newsletters, leaflets).<sup>6</sup> The article concludes by advancing possible lessons for the labour movement in dealing with ethnically diverse workforces in hard-to-unionize industries.

## Meatpacking in Canada

THE NORTH AMERICAN MEATPACKING industry has undergone significant transformation in the past 30 years. In the postwar period, meatpacking was an industry focused in larger cities near transportation access. While the work

3. Jason Foster, "Revolution, Retrenchment and the New Normal: The 1990s and Beyond," in Alvin Finkel, ed., *Working People in Alberta: A History* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2012), 205–242.

4. *24 Days in Brooks*, directed by Dana Inkster (National Film Board of Canada, 2007), [http://www.nfb.ca/film/24\\_days\\_in\\_brooks](http://www.nfb.ca/film/24_days_in_brooks).

5. Michael Broadway, "Meatpacking and the Transformation of Rural Communities: A Comparison of Brooks, Alberta and Garden City, Kansas," *Rural Sociology* 72, 4 (1 December 2007): 560–582, doi:10.1526/003601107782638701; Michael Broadway, "The World 'Meats' Canada: Meatpacking's Role in the Cultural Transformation of Brooks, Alberta," *American Geographical Society's Focus on Geography* 56, 2 (2013): 47–53.

6. A total of ten interviews were conducted by the author and ten Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) transcripts were reviewed. Under the terms of the ethics approval received for the project, all interviewees were guaranteed anonymity except for the union senior leadership, for whom anonymity was not possible due to their public profile in the strike. The ALHI transcripts are publicly available and participants consented to the use of their name. The research received ethics approval through Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

was physical, demanding, and dangerous, the industry was highly unionized and the workers relatively well paid. In the 1980s, the industry underwent a significant shift in an effort to cut labour costs. In what some have called the “IBP revolution”<sup>7</sup> after the corporation that first embarked on the strategy, meatpacking companies relocated plants and re-organized the labour process. The industry shifted to rural centres close to livestock producers and constructed an assembly-line approach to the processing of carcasses. These moves significantly lowered costs by reducing or eliminating many elements in the process, including transportation of live animals. The changes also resulted in a de-skilling of the work.<sup>8</sup> The shift to rural locations also resulted in transferring the work from highly unionized and competitive urban environments to areas where there was less competition for industrial workers and where unionization was lower. Together these shifts led to significant downward pressure on wages and working conditions in the industry.

The 1980s witnessed a series of strikes and labour strife in the threatened urban facilities, including Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Brandon, Winnipeg, and Kitchener, as employers demanded deep concessions and ultimately closed older-style plants.<sup>9</sup> In the USA, unionization rates in the industry plummeted.<sup>10</sup> In Canada, unions fared somewhat better, finding ways to organize many of the new super-plants built in High River and elsewhere. However, unions could not withstand employer cost pressures and wages and working conditions deteriorated.

Initially meatpacking employers were able to recruit local workers in rural areas who saw the industrial jobs as an alternative to agriculture-related work. However, by the mid-1990s, with worsening conditions in plants and growing employment options for rural workers, especially in oil and gas in western Canada, employers found it increasingly difficult to recruit sufficient labour to staff these large super-plants. As a result, they shifted their recruitment strategy to recently arrived immigrants and refugees. In the most recent decade, the industry also began relying heavily on temporary migrant workers to meet staffing needs.<sup>11</sup> Today meatpacking plants are staffed predominantly

7. Donald D. Stull and Michael J. Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America*, 2nd ed. (Belmont: Wadworth Cengage Learning, 2013).

8. Kathleen Stanley, “Industrial and Labor Market Transformation in the US Meatpacking Industry,” in Philip McMichael, ed., *The Global Restructuring of Agro-Food Systems* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 129–144.

9. Anne Forrest, “The Rise and Fall of National Bargaining in the Canadian Meat-Packing Industry,” *Relations industrielles* 44, 2 (1989): 393, doi:10.7202/050498ar.

10. John Brueggemann and Cliff Brown, “The Decline of Industrial Unionism in the Meatpacking Industry: Event-Structure Analyses of Labor Unrest, 1946–1987,” *Work and Occupations* 30, 3 (2003): 327–360, doi:10.1177/0730888403253912.

11. Dell Champlin and Eric Hake, “Immigration as Industrial Strategy in American Meatpacking,” *Review of Political Economy* 18, 1 (2006): 49–70,

by immigrant workers and temporary migrant workers, particularly those coming from sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Southeast Asia.

Meatpacking today is no less physical and dangerous than it was twenty years ago.<sup>12</sup> What has changed is that the people performing the work experience marginalization due to immigration status, language, and other factors, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. The work-related challenges for the new meatpacking workforce are compounded by the plants' location in smaller, previously ethnically homogenous rural towns,<sup>13</sup> which can lead to community tensions.

The changes in meatpacking have evolved in a manner specific to the dynamics of that industry. However, they occur within a broader pattern of globalization and global mobility of labour. Meatpacking companies' use of immigrants and migrant workers needs to be seen in a context of increased demand by capital for increasing flexible labour, which destabilizes notions of local labour markets. Stephen Castles and Mark Miller have called the present period "the Age of Migration"<sup>14</sup> where globalization has transformed the global labour market. They observe that "[t]he labour force dynamics of post-industrial economies are based on a proliferation of employment relationships that differentiate workers on the basis of ethnicity, race and gender, leading to complex and often highly disadvantageous forms of work for migrants and minorities."<sup>15</sup> The change is abetted by governments altering approaches to immigration. Canadian immigration policy in the past 25 years has shifted from one of permanent settlement to temporary migration, especially for low-skill occupations and workers originating in the Global South, intensifying racial divides through differential citizenship status.<sup>16</sup> In the age of migration, meatpacking represents a location of transformation that is shaped by race and ethnicity.

## Unions and Immigrant Workers

THE TRACK RECORD of Canadian trade unions with immigrants is not positive. Prior to World War II, Canadian unions held strongly anti-immigrant, and often openly racist, views regarding so-called "foreigners" arriving in

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doi:10.1080/09538250500354140; Broadway, "The World 'Meats' Canada," 47.

12. Stull and Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues*, 100.

13. Broadway, "Meatpacking and the Transformation of Rural Communities," 565.

14. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4th ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2009).

15. Castle and Miller, *Age of Migration*, 234.

16. Nandita Sharma, "On Being Not Canadian: The Social Organization of 'Migrant Workers' in Canada," *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 38, 4 (2001): 415–439.

Canada. Historian David Goutor explains that “[l]abour leaders insisted that a restrictive and racially discriminatory immigration policy was essential for protecting both the standard of living of Canadian workers and the social, moral, and medical vitality of Canadian communities.”<sup>17</sup> Unions frequently engaged in exclusionary and racist practices, including prohibiting membership to certain ethnic groups, supporting draconian immigration policies, and encouraging deportation and social exclusion.<sup>18</sup>

In the postwar period, union attitudes toward immigration and race began to change in parallel with societal values.<sup>19</sup> The labour movement shed its racist and discriminatory positions, adopted pro-immigration policies, and now espouse an anti-racist outlook.<sup>20</sup> However, labour’s progress on the issue of race is incomplete. Much of it has taken the form of policy statements, equity positions on boards, and formal recognition. Workers of colour continue to be under-represented in leadership positions,<sup>21</sup> and latent and structural racism remains part of non-white workers’ experience in the labour movement.<sup>22</sup>

Specifically, unions have struggled to organize and represent immigrant workers. Immigrants and non-white workers have lower unionization rates than other Canadians.<sup>23</sup> Traditional organizing strategies are less effective with these groups of workers, in part due to their occupational location.<sup>24</sup> Also, these workers may be more distrustful of union representation and question the value of union membership.<sup>25</sup> For their part Canadian unions have been

17. David Goutor, *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872–1934* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 4.

18. Agnes Calliste, “Sleeping Car Porters in Canada: An Ethnically Submerged Split Labour Market,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 19, 1 (1987): 1–20; Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1996), 56–57; David Goutor, “Constructing the ‘Great Menace’: Canadian Labour’s Opposition to Asian Immigration, 1880–1914,” *Canadian Historical Review* 88, 4 (2007): 549–576, doi:10.3138/chr.88.4.549.

19. Jennifer Kelly and Dan Cui, “Racialization and Work,” in Finkel, ed., *Working People in Alberta*, 267–286.

20. Gerald Hunt, “Introduction,” in Gerald Hunt and David M. Rayside, eds., *Equity, Diversity, and Canadian Labour* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 3–24.

21. Tania Das Gupta, “Racism and the Labour Movement,” in Hunt and Rayside, eds., *Equity, Diversity, and Canadian Labour*, 181–207.

22. Miriam Edelson, “Confronting Racism in the Canadian Labour Movement: An Intergenerational Assessment,” in Janice R Foley and Patricia Louise Baker, eds., *Unions, Equity, and the Path to Renewal* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 61–77.

23. Andrew Jackson, *Work and Labour in Canada: Critical Issues*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2010).

24. Charlotte Yates, “Expanding Labour’s Horizons: Union Organizing and Strategic Change in Canada,” *Just Labour* 1 (2002): 31–40.

25. Gerald Hunt and David Rayside, “Labor Union Response to Diversity in Canada and the

slow to address equity issues both within the workplace and the union itself.<sup>26</sup> The issue of racism continues to pose challenges for Canadian unions.

## Immigrant Workers and Solidarity

WHILE IMMIGRANTS and non-Caucasian workers are under-represented in unions, in the past decade or so unions have made greater attempts to organize these workers. Many studies have been published examining cases that met with both success and failure.<sup>27</sup> The lessons learned from successful cases are that unions need to adapt traditional organizing practices to reflect the realities of how immigrants structure interaction within their ethnic and cultural communities and how they perceive their relationship to work and the employer. However, strong leadership, experience, and stable union structures also contribute to successful outcomes, as does effective education and training of immigrant worker activists.<sup>28</sup>

The union's approach to organizing immigrant workers is crucial in determining the degree of success achieved. As Wells states: "the ideology, practices, and structure of a local union can utilize and overcome sociocultural and economic divisions in the workforce to build a viable, democratic class-based organization."<sup>29</sup> Organizing immigrants and other under-represented workers requires a reform of union practices and structures, but any adaptations must also remain consistent with underlying union approaches to maintain sufficient stability within the organization to ensure learning is institutionalized over the medium term.

The focus on union practices is not to downplay the importance of immigrant worker activism. Successful cases also highlight the importance of building upon pre-existing ethnic and cultural networks and relations and

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United States," *Industrial Relations* 39, 3 (2000): 401–444.

26. Peter Fairbrother and Charlotte Yates, "Unions in Crisis, Unions in Renewal?" in Peter Fairbrother and Charlotte Yates, eds., *Trade Unions in Renewal: A Comparative Study* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 1–31.

27. Gabriella Alberti, Jane Holgate, and Maite Tapia, "Organising Migrants as Workers or as Migrant Workers? Intersectionality, Trade Unions and Precarious Work," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24, 22 (2013): 4132–4148, doi:10.1080/09585192.2013.845429; J. Holgate, "Organizing Migrant Workers: A Case Study of Working Conditions and Unionization in a London Sandwich Factory," *Work, Employment & Society* 19, 3 (2005): 463–480, doi:10.1177/0950017005055666; Ruth Milkman and Kent Wong, "Organizing Immigrant Workers: Case Studies from Southern California," in Lowell Turner, Harry Katz, and Richard W. Hurd, eds., *Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the Twenty-First Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 99–129; Ruth Milkman, *L.A. Story* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006) are a small sampling of cases.

28. Milkman and Wong, "Organizing Immigrant Workers."

29. Miriam J. Wells, "Unionization and Immigrant Incorporation in San Francisco Hotels," *Social Problems* 47, 2 (2000): 241, doi:10.2307/3097200.

re-directing those bonds and avenues of communication toward the union.<sup>30</sup> Immigrant groups often organize differently than traditional union members and their activism may manifest in ways that are unfamiliar to union organizers. In particular, informal, organic leadership within cultural contexts and forms of self-organizing plays an important role in immigrant activism.<sup>31</sup>

It can be argued that immigrants possess a degree of social solidarity that does not necessarily express itself in strict class or work-centred forms. Union action is often centred on identity as worker, while among immigrants this social solidarity may manifest itself through other identities, such as cultural ones. Rick Fantasia's concept of "cultures of solidarity" may help to make sense of forms of solidarity that are not expressed in strict class terms and how they may be made more work-centred.<sup>32</sup> Cultures of solidarity emerge through worker action and shared experience, and represent expressions of solidarity between workers not necessarily bounded by institutional structure. Cultures of solidarity are an informal embodiment of common interest and mutual support that can take different forms in different contexts. Fantasia's conception allows for a greater degree of fluidity in our understanding of solidarity, its formation, and its mobilization in the workplace. We will return to this concept and how it may apply to the current case later in the paper.

## Background to Lakeside Strike

### *Lakeside Packers*

Lakeside began in Brooks in 1966 as a feedlot. The independent company constructed the packing plant across the TransCanada Highway in the early 1970s to support the growing feedlot operation.<sup>33</sup> Originally the plant only partially processed carcasses to supply other downstream companies. It was unionized in 1976 by the Canadian Food and Allied Workers, which later merged with the Retail Clerks International Union to become the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). However, in June 1984, as part of a nationwide meatpacking strike, Lakeside "hired replacement workers at wages 30 percent below the union rate, a cut that ranged between \$3.00 and \$3.80 an hour."<sup>34</sup> The move successfully broke the union. Only a handful of workers maintained the picket line over the next three years. UFCW finally abandoned the strike in 1987 and Lakeside was officially non-union.

30. See, for example, Miriam J. Wells, *Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

31. Das Gupta, "Racism and the Labour Movement."

32. Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

33. Broadway, "Meatpacking and the Transformation of Rural Communities."

34. Alain Noel and Keith Gardner, "The Gainers Strike: Capitalist Offensive, Militancy, and the Politics of Industrial Relations in Canada," *Studies in Political Economy* 31 (Spring 1990): 38.



The plant thrived through the next few years, in part due to its wage advantage and convenient supply of beef. In the early 1990s, economic changes forced Lakeside to extend onsite processing. Lacking sufficient capital, Lakeside's owners sold the plant to Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) in 1994, which immediately expanded production and increased the number of workers at the plant. By 2005, over 2,000 workers were employed at the plant, approximately half being immigrants. At the time of the strike, Lakeside had not yet begun recruiting temporary migrant workers, but this strategy came shortly after.

IBP and its successor, Tyson Foods, which purchased IBP in 2001,<sup>35</sup> adopted a staunch anti-union approach, defeating repeated organizing attempts (discussed below), and even displaying a large banner that read "proudly union-free" on the plant sign beside the highway. In defeating unionizing attempts, the company deployed a variety of tactics including regularly reminding workers the previous union had decertified. Local President O'Halloran recollected the company's strategy at the time: "They said if you join this union you're going to be back on strike. If you join this union, you'll lose some benefits. This is a union that likes to strike. They abandoned you in 1984 and they'll abandon you again when the going gets tough."<sup>36</sup>

### ***UFCW Local 401***

UFCW Local 401 is Alberta's largest private sector union local with over 30,000 members across the province. Grocery store workers make up the majority of the local's membership, although it has diversified significantly in the past twenty years and now represents workers in a wide range of industries, including casinos, hotels, car rental dealerships, nursing homes, and non-profit agencies. Local 401 gained jurisdiction over Lakeside, rather than UFCW Local 1118, which represents the Cargill beef packing plant in High River, because the union local that previously represented Lakeside workers, Local 740P, merged with Local 401 in 1991.

Local 401 has been led by Doug O'Halloran since 1989, a former meatpacking worker from Lethbridge. O'Halloran maintains a firm grip on the union and is widely perceived as having an authoritarian and populist leadership style. Under his direction, Local 401 made repeated attempts to re-organize Lakeside. "Over the course of the years I made a commitment that at some point in time that plant would be unionized. We spent a lot of money trying to unionize it."<sup>37</sup> O'Halloran reports that Local 401 first launched a drive at Lakeside in 1992 and tried almost annually after that. They bought a house in Brooks in 1995 to use as an office and devoted significant staff resources over the years to the project.

35. Tyson Foods, "Tyson Foods Closes Sale of Lakeside to x1 Foods," 13 March 2009.

36. Doug O'Halloran, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview, 12 March 2007.

37. Doug O'Halloran, interview with author, 7 March 2014.

However, the campaigns were failures. One local staff member remembers the futility of it:

In January of 1999 we came, we signed up people, we got a vote, we were slaughtered. In 2000 we came, we talked to people, we got a vote, we were slaughtered worse. 2001, we did the same thing, [except] we didn't take it to a vote. 2002, same thing.... In 2003 [another staff member] and I went back. We talked to a few employees and between the two of us, we said is there anything that is going to be different this year, is anything going to change? Nothing is going to change. We are going to bust our brains.... We convinced Doug, to give it a rest for a while.<sup>38</sup>

If the drive got to a vote, the results were rarely close. The company waged aggressive counter-campaigns including threats and intimidation. During the 2000 effort, the Labour Relations Board took the unusual step of ordering a series of Board-supervised, captive union recruitment meetings in the plant as a remedy for a series of employer breaches of the labour code. The meetings were disrupted by shouts, taunts, and projectiles thrown at speakers by pro-employer workers.<sup>39</sup> The meetings did not change the result of the vote.

Also working against the union was the high rate of turnover at the plant. As another staff member says: "You had to go out and get your percentage, 40 per cent, to get to the Board. Well, we would get our 40 per cent and [by the time the vote came] of the 40 per cent half of them weren't there anymore. So now you gotta go do it again, so we never had the numbers."<sup>40</sup>

### ***Immigrant Workers***

Beginning in the late 1990s and accelerating in the first years of the 2000s, Lakeside struggled to recruit sufficient numbers of local people to work at the plant. Troubles with recruitment were common in the industry at the time and attributable to the deteriorating wages and working conditions over the previous twenty years.<sup>41</sup> Fewer local residents were prepared to work in packing plants when other options were available.

Lakeside expanded its recruitment zone. It began by attracting Atlantic Canadians to come out west. However, soon after these workers began responding in a manner similar to Alberta workers, and sought better employment options elsewhere. Lakeside then began actively recruiting recent newcomers. In particular they targeted workers from sub-Saharan Africa and portions of Southeast Asia such as the Philippines. A disproportionate number of the new

38. Staff Member 1, interview with author, 15 May 2014.

39. Archie Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview, 13 March 2007.

40. Staff Member 2, interview with author, 8 May 2014.

41. Stull and Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues*.

recruits had arrived in Canada as refugees, mainly from Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. By 2005, half of the Lakeside workforce were immigrants.<sup>42</sup>

The influx of African and Asian immigrants altered the dynamics in the plant. First, a clear racial divide appeared, with tensions between groups. Immigrant workers were given the worst jobs and there were accusations that immigrants were paid less than Canadians for the same work. Conflict also arose between immigrant groups. “The Ethiopians they don’t like the Sudanese, or the North Sudanese don’t like the South. ... So they were very separate in that sense,” noted one union staff member.<sup>43</sup>

Second, the immigrants, with reduced employment opportunity compared to local people, tended to stay longer and many were more reliant on the employer, often staying in trailers on the plant site. The same staff member remarked on their vulnerability: “The immigrants had nowhere to go, they couldn’t leave. They had them by the short and curlies.”<sup>44</sup> The reduced turnover among this population increased the potential for the union around certification votes, but the union had few connections in immigrant communities and many newcomers were suspicious of the union. As a result the shifting demographics initially did not benefit the union’s organizing efforts.

Between 1992 and 2002, little changed for Local 401’s attempts to unionize Lakeside, and the prospects of a different result seemed unlikely. In 2003 the BSE (Mad Cow) crisis de-stabilized the beef industry and made prospects even more remote. However, in 2004 the changing dynamics due to the new immigrant workers, as described below, would have a sudden and unexpected impact.

## Wildcat Protest and Organizing Drive

ON 28 APRIL 2004 a group of about 200 Lakeside workers, mostly Sudanese, staged a wildcat protest in support of a group of immigrant workers who were fired by the employer. They gathered outside the plant gates and then marched to the mayor’s office to show their displeasure.<sup>45</sup> The workers had been fired for coming to the defense of a Sudanese worker fired after an altercation with another worker. One of the protesters describes how the situation escalated:

One black guy, Sudanese from Africa, has a problem with a white guy. This white guy sprayed 180 degree hot water on this guy’s chest. They didn’t fire the white guy who sprayed the hot water, they fired the black guy. So the following morning we were telling our friends, today we’re not going to work until the company find a solution to it, or they also fire the white guy. The news goes around and we all gather outside.... So the following day the

42. Broadway, “Meatpacking and the Transformation of Rural Communities.”

43. Staff Member 2, interview with author.

44. Staff Member 2, interview with author.

45. Canadian Press, “UFCW Applies to Alberta Labour Board to Represent Lakeside Packers Workers,” *Canadian Press Newswire*, 4 August 2004.

company call us they named 10 of our members to represent all those black guys, they want to discuss with them. We selected 10 people.... They go in, discuss with management. The management told them ... go back to your jobs or we'll fire you. Those guys said no. Then they fired those 10 guys.<sup>46</sup>

Additional workers got involved and Lakeside eventually fired 60 people. This second round of firing led to the wildcat walk-out.

The firings were the spark, but the immigrant workers had a long list of grievances and concerns that fueled their anger at the employer, including health and safety issues, employer bullying, and inconsistencies around wage rates and hours.<sup>47</sup> There were also allegations of racism in the plant. "Most of the supervisors, most of the people in a position of authority, i.e. safety committees, quality control, individuals who make sure the product is being processed properly, were all white people. Very seldom did a person from an ethnic community get promoted into a higher position," observed O'Halloran.<sup>48</sup>

Following the protest, and a lack of resolution to their concerns, the group approached UFCW 401. "Then the Sudanese community came and asked us to come back in and try to organize the plant," said lead organizer Archie Duckworth in an interview.<sup>49</sup> The union took a different approach this time. "Doug went to Brooks and had a meeting with the Sudanese community," remembered a union staff member. "Doug said if you think this time it is going to be different, it is going to have to be driven by the employees. And it was different from that point on."<sup>50</sup> Learning from past mistakes, the union implemented a series of new strategies. In previous campaigns the union sent down dozens of union staffers and releases from around the province to knock on doors and make cold calls to find Lakeside employees. In the 2004 drive the union only assigned a couple of key organizers whose job it was to build the campaign from the inside. Instead, a union staffer noted, "we had a big inside committee in 2004. We had people that were on the inside, they could tell us what was going on."<sup>51</sup> They learned how to build trust among the various ethnic communities. McLaren added that the lead organizer "would bring the groups together, if it was at the office, if they were having a gathering or meeting he would be invited. He would go. If they had a wedding he would go.... If it was a group of Yugoslavians, he would bring them in and they would have a feast.... But he got involved in every single community."<sup>52</sup>

46. Un-named Lakeside worker, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview, 15 March 2007.

47. Inkster, *24 Days in Brooks*.

48. O'Halloran, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

49. Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

50. Staff Member 1, interview with author.

51. Staff Member 1, interview with author.

52. Theresa McLaren, interview with author, 5 March 5 2014.

The union also cultivated organic leaders in each of the ethnic groups and followed their advice about how to approach that community and build support. One staff member attributes the key role of the organic community leaders to the success of the drive: “as much as I would like to give credit to our organizers, and they deserve a lot of credit, I think that was the biggest thing that happened.... We were intelligent enough to figure out it was the only way it was going to happen.”<sup>53</sup>

The union produced multilingual communications to reflect the 26 languages and dialects spoken at the plant. They trained inside committee members to facilitate peer-to-peer organizing. They worked to make the house, which anchored the drive, a safe space for gathering and support. Members could come and socialize, talk about their experiences at work, and debrief organizing activities. Traditional methods were still used, but in concert with newer approaches. “Again we still had to go from door to door. But this time it was a little different because we had a high population of the Sudanese,” observes organizer Duckworth. “They helped us and were instrumental in helping us organize.”<sup>54</sup> The union also took on the task of bridging ethnic groups in conflict, emphasizing workplace issues they shared in common in an attempt to reduce the degree of enmity between them.

Duckworth remembers the vociferousness of the employer’s efforts to stop the union: “It was a campaign that was vicious within the plant. They fired people. We had many labour charges at the board. It took us three months to organize.”<sup>55</sup> The employer told workers they would have trouble with Immigration Canada if they voted for the union. They threatened that benefits and planned raises would be cancelled.<sup>56</sup>

By August the union had more than 40 per cent of employees signed up and they filed for a certification vote on 5 August. Between the application and the vote, the employer efforts to thwart the campaign intensified. On 27 August, the vote was held. The union won by a slim margin of 48 votes, 905 to 857 (51 per cent of votes cast). The result was challenged by the employer but ultimately upheld. With a razor thin margin, the union asked itself “what do we do now? We had a certificate, but we still had an anti-union employer.”<sup>57</sup>

53. Staff Member 2, interview with author.

54. Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

55. Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

56. Todd Hurman, “Lakeside Using Scare Tactics, Claims Union,” *Calgary Herald*, 26 August 2004.

57. Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

## Negotiations and Strike

INITIAL NEGOTIATIONS did not go well. It became clear the employer strategy was to play out the clock until a decertification application could be filed.

We start negotiations in November, and the company will only agree to 2 sets of bargaining per month for 2 days.... We're telling the company, look, we're available any day you have. We'll take whatever day you've got. They would only give us 4 days. So we went to the labour board and argued that the company was bargaining in bad faith, they weren't giving us enough days to negotiate. What we believed was they were simply going to string us out to the open period of when they could be decertified.... The company cancels a couple of dates. We're getting into the spring, and negotiations are going no place.... They wouldn't agree to a union shop, they wouldn't agree to shop steward language, they wouldn't agree to union visitation.... So in March we filed another bargaining in bad faith charge. So we have a whole lot of charges.<sup>58</sup>

As is often the case, the drawn out negotiations were affecting worker morale. "A lot of our members were losing hope for the union," said one Lakeside worker. "What is the union still negotiating, what are they doing?"<sup>59</sup>

During negotiations, the employer was also encouraging a decertification campaign:

They were trying to make little back room deals with people, saying, okay if you get so many people to decert., we'll give you this. There was rumors going around that for every decert. that certain people got, they were paying them \$10 a head.... Then they would sit in the cafeteria with these things and tell people, this is for the union, sign this. Actually it was to sign off on the union. But because they saw the word union and that's all they understood, they would sign them. They had no clue what they were signing.<sup>60</sup>

In the spring the union started to ramp up its communications strategy, placing ads in newspapers and sending a letter to the Alberta Beef Producers threatening that labour unrest at Lakeside would "undermine your award-winning 'I Love Alberta Beef' campaign" and destabilize an industry rocked by the BSE crisis.<sup>61</sup> They also developed an active internal communication strategy for the membership. Their material emphasized the diversity of the workers and provided strong strategic messaging. For example, they launched a newsletter for members called *Many Faces ... One Voice!*, which featured a series of demographically diverse members' photos on the masthead.

In June the union felt it could not risk losing support by negotiating any longer and held a strike vote, garnering 70 per cent support. On 20 July the workers went out on strike. However, the same day the provincial government intervened by appointing a one-person Disputes Inquiry Board (DIB), which prohibited strike action for two months. The union decided to comply with

58. O'Halloran, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

59. Un-named Lakeside Worker, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

60. Un-named Lakeside Worker, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

61. Neil Waugh, "More Udder Madness!: Two Years into the BSE Crisis, the Manure Pile Continues to Grow," *Edmonton Sun*, 19 May 2005.

the order to cease strike action, but, as O'Halloran remembers, they angered their members:

The fine for individuals \$1000 a day, and union officials \$10,000 a day. With having 2400 people, it would've been millions of dollars, the fines over the course of a week. So we decided to listen and obey the law, and we're on a microphone trying to tell people, you have to go to work. People are screaming at us that we're a useless union, that we backed down, and why should they support us?<sup>62</sup>

The effect among the immigrants in the plant was particularly strong, and the union had to spend weeks attempting to win back the lost trust.

In late September, the union voted, with a margin of 90 per cent, to accept the DIB's recommendation, even though it offered much less than the union was looking for. "It was a bad collective agreement," admitted Duckworth. "It was a bare bones collective agreement, which was okay for us because we knew we weren't going to get anything better out of the employer."<sup>63</sup> The next day Lakeside rejected the report, saying the "recommendations, covering such things as overtime, vacation pay and seniority, would result in unacceptable labour cost increases."<sup>64</sup>

Despite a modified offer from the employer and the emergence of an anti-union splinter group called The Concerned Lakeside Employees for Everyone's Rights, who filed a revocation application (which failed),<sup>65</sup> the workers finally went on strike on 12 October, more than a year after achieving certification. The first few days of the strike were tense, violent, and dramatic.

On the first day about 800 workers showed up on the picket line, with an equal number assembled across the highway to cross the line. The number of strikers was buoyed by the decision by Local 401 a few years earlier to provide significant strike pay. While most unions pay between \$50 and \$300 a week in strike pay,<sup>66</sup> Local 401 paid significantly more. "Our strike pay now is \$8 an hour for the first 2 weeks, and then it increases to \$10 an hour after that. The payroll at Lakeside was about \$800,000 a week," notes O'Halloran. "But how do you ask people to go and put their jobs on the line if you can't reasonably make them whole?"<sup>67</sup> This decision would prove to be beneficial as the strike dragged on, as it reduced the number of workers crossing the line due to financial hardship.

62. O'Halloran, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

63. Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

64. Sean Myers, "Lakeside Rejects Arbitrator's Plan," *Calgary Herald*, 30 September 2005.

65. Canadian Press, "Splinter Group of Employees at Southern Alta. Plant Set up Own Organization," *Canadian Press Newswire*, 8 October 2005.

66. Benjamin Alarie and Matthew Sudak, "The Taxation of Strike Pay," *Canadian Tax Journal* 54, 2 (2006): 426–439.

67. O'Halloran, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

A racial divide between the two groups on opposite sides of the highway was palpable, as a majority of the strikers were immigrants while the opposite numbers existed among the strikebreakers. A number of altercations occurred on the first day. Windows of busses carrying strikebreakers were smashed. By the end of the day the Labour Relations Board had issued picketing restrictions and banned President O'Halloran from the line for wielding a picket sign to smash windows.<sup>68</sup> The second day was marred by a group of strikebreakers who assaulted three picketers blocking their exit from the plant.<sup>69</sup>

On 15 October, the third day of the strike, events turned bizarre. Plant managers, in an attempt to serve court papers to O'Halloran, chased his car through back roads near the plant. The chase ended in a three-car accident, with O'Halloran's crashing into the ditch. O'Halloran sustained significant injuries that have left him reliant upon a motorized scooter. Local 401 lead organizer, Archie Duckworth, describes the events from his perspective:

I was doing an interview with CBC at the time.... One of the company management came up and served me while I was doing the interview on TV. President O'Halloran took off, he didn't want to be served. He took the rest of the day off. He was driving around the back roads. These management had walkie talkies, you'd think they were the secret service or something. They were out looking for President O'Halloran all over. Eventually he was sighted and all these people, including the [former] owner of the plant, including top management were after him to serve him notice, and a car chase ensued.... They literally drove him off the road into a bad accident and Doug was seriously hurt, just so they could serve him a piece of paper.... Someone went up and he was lying on the ground and said, consider yourself served, and walked away.<sup>70</sup>

Two plant managers, including the former owner of Lakeside, and O'Halloran were charged with dangerous driving and other violations. The case never went to court as all charges were dropped following resolution of the strike.

The accident had a profound effect on the strikers, who held O'Halloran in high esteem. The first days of the strike left an indelible mark on the workers:

The first 3 days were probably the best and the worst. My first experience of actually being on strike. The first day the bosses were being stopped. It was like wow, this is cool. You're getting overwhelmed and stuff. Then the second day when they came across the cornfields on the buses you were like, that tells you how much they really care about their team members' safety, when they're willing bounce them across the cornfield to bring them into the plant.... Next thing I hear, a bunch of supervisors gets off a bus and starts beating picketers.... Then the next day comes, the bosses are stopped, production don't go. Then that night, they were trying to give Doug's papers [and] they run him off the road. I don't know

68. Emma Poole and Sean Myers, "Workers Block Brooks Facility," *Calgary Herald*, 13 October 2005.

69. Brian Hutchinson and Emma Poole, "Strikers Beaten in Meat-Plant Dispute: Attackers Used Metal Pipes, Witnesses Say," *National Post*, 14 October 2005.

70. Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.



about you, but to me that's attempted murder... [I thought] will they stop at nothing to make sure this union is out?<sup>71</sup>

The 24-day strike was punctuated by a large number of incidents as well as tactical moves and counter-moves by the union and the employer. Federal meat inspectors briefly refused to cross the line, shuttering the plant. To avoid picketing workers, the employer built over a dozen gravel roads across the fields surrounding the plant to get buses into the plant. The union replied by assigning picket teams to cover the back roads. Multiple charges were laid for picket line violence, including an assault on a female RCMP officer. Two picketers were killed in a car accident unrelated to the strike.

The dispute spilled beyond the picket line. The union engaged in an active communications battle with provocative ads and flyers. One flyer took aim at Alberta's Centennial taking place at the time with an ad asking "Is this an Alberta worth Celebrating?" and profiling an African worker describing their working conditions. The accompanying website, *albertashame2005.com*, attempted to prod the provincial government into intervening. Another ad suggested the strike would create instability similar to the BSE crisis.

After three weeks, negotiations resumed for the first time during the strike. In those talks Lakeside made a sudden shift in its position. Throughout negotiations they had steadfastly refused to accept any language providing union security (e.g., union shop provisions), a clear grievance process, or union access to the site. Senior Tyson management from the USA arrived to participate in the negotiations, which sparked the change in tone. By 1 November, the two sides had a tentative agreement that provided a \$1.90 raise over four years. The deal offered workers less than the DIB recommendation but provided Rand Formula dues check-off and other union rights.<sup>72</sup> On 4 November, 1600 workers voted on the agreement, with 56 per cent voting to ratify. Striking workers returned to work on 7 November.

It was not considered a great deal from the union's perspective, but it granted security for the union. "We got a collective agreement. Not a good collective agreement," Duckworth acknowledged, "Don't forget we weren't negotiating in a position of strength."<sup>73</sup> O'Halloran admitted the agreement was sub-standard: "I was hoping for a higher outcome but it has been a long battle over many years.... The plant is unionized and we're very proud of that."<sup>74</sup> In many respects the ratification vote was more a vote about whether there would be a union in the plant than the actual terms of the agreement, as anti-union

71. Ashley Grandy, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview, 12 March 2007.

72. Emma Poole, "Lakeside Dispute Ends in Handshakes, Deal Offer: Possible \$1.90 an Hour Raise over Four Years and New Attitude from Company Cheers Workers," *Edmonton Journal*, 3 November 2005.

73. Duckworth, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

74. Pablo Fernandez, "Meat Packer Strike Over," *Calgary Sun*, 5 November 2005.

employees turned out to vote the deal down for the purpose of undermining the union presence.

When workers returned to work tensions were high, both between strikers and strikebreakers and between the union and the employer. Over time the relationship became less acrimonious, aided by Tyson selling the plant to XL Foods in 2009 (who then sold it to JBS Food Canada in 2013). O'Halloran summarizes the shifting tone: "the first 2 months after the strike we had 300 grievances a month. [Two years later] we have 26 outstanding grievances, which is unbelievable."<sup>75</sup> Today the plant remains ethnically and racially diverse with a growing proportion of temporary migrant workers in addition to immigrants. The union successfully negotiated a new agreement in 2009 and again in 2013. The Brooks union office is now a site of vibrant, diverse member activism, serving both as a drop-in centre and an organizing vehicle. Immigrants form the backbone of activism in the bargaining unit, although the union reports having difficulties mobilizing the fluctuating numbers of temporary migrant workers. However, the size, geographic scope, and top-down structures of the union have restricted the influence of immigrants in the broader local, whose leadership positions remain dominated by grocery workers.

## **Analysis**

THE ORGANIZING of Lakeside Packers was the largest private sector certification in Alberta in over twenty years. It is noteworthy that it occurred among immigrant workers employed by an anti-union employer. Two key variables shifted at Lakeside between the organizing failures of the 1990s and the bitter but successful strike of 2005. The first was the influx of African and Asian newcomers into the plant. Their arrival sparked new dynamics that, ultimately, opened the door to unionization. Second, Local 401 altered its strategies and tactics in 2004–2005, learning from past mistakes and adopting some innovative organizing approaches. The two variables combined to create an unusual and significant labour victory.

### ***Role of Immigrant Activism***

The catalyst for the Lakeside organizing drive was the spontaneous wildcat protest by a couple of hundred immigrant workers. Their immediate concerns were over health and safety and unfair dismissals. The root cause was a deeper sense of injustice and indignity at their treatment by the employer. Many of those workers were employed at Lakeside during previous organizing drives, but they did not take up the call of the union. What changed was the workers' awakening to their powerlessness against the employer. The protest arose from a failed attempt by the workers to address their grievances directly with the

75. O'Halloran, Alberta Labour History Institute Oral History Interview.

employer. Lakeside's heavy-handed response was a turning point. In interviews for this study, workers spoke about the sense of futility in trying to make change at Lakeside. Suddenly the union, for many an alien form of organization, became the only practical solution.

African and Asian immigrants have little experience with North American unionism. Unions, in the institutionalized form we see in Canada, are rare in most of the newcomers' original homes. This lack of familiarity, and possible distrust, makes newcomers harder to organize. Local union staffers described how much of their energy during the organizing drive was spent explaining what unions are and how they function.<sup>76</sup>

However, a lack of experience with unions is not the same as lacking experience in collective action and solidarity. Many of the workers were leaders in their home communities and fought for issues they cared about. They were not afraid of conflict or standing up for their rights. Many arrived from war-torn countries where conflict was a daily reality. Many of the workers were highly educated and some engaged in leftist politics in their home country. The workers understood solidarity; it simply manifested itself in different forms.

Some of that solidarity was cultural or national in nature. "Of course they back all of their fellow countrymen," said one staff member. "From the perspective of the Sudanese, that is their thing. They stood behind their co-workers. They didn't like the way their coworkers were treated, were fired."<sup>77</sup> A sense of ethnic or cultural solidarity is not uncommon among newcomers to a country or region. However, the social dynamics in the City of Brooks can be seen as contributing to immigrant unity. Broadway's study of the social impacts of the influx of newcomers found a high degree of social dislocation, social stratification, and marginalization among the immigrant population.<sup>78</sup> The racism the newcomers experienced from the existing population contributed to a responsive need to create strong bonds within newcomer community groups.

Those strong bonds became a powerful feature of immigrant activism when focus became trained on workplace injustices. The pre-existing connections, including informal community leaders within ethnic groups at the plant, translated into effective union organizing networks. The work became not about teaching the workers about the importance of solidarity but about the workers themselves making the links between social solidarity and workplace solidarity.

The transfer of social solidarity to work-centred solidarity can be understood through the lens of Fantasia's cultures of solidarity. Both were forged in experience. Racism brought ethnic and cultural groups together for mutual support. Immigrants' experience of being othered newcomers in a small town built a living sense of shared interest and standing together, at least within

76. Staff Member 3, interview with author, 25 March 2014.

77. Staff Member 4, interview with author, 8 May 2014.

78. Broadway, "Meatpacking and the Transformation of Rural Communities," 578.

their specific cultural group. The deplorable working conditions at the plant ultimately drove many to extend the practice of standing together to workplace direct action. Immigrants stood up for others of their ethnic group who were being mistreated. Yet at the same time they were standing up for a fellow worker, agitating for workplace justice. In doing so they began the process of transferring social solidarity to class solidarity. As events unfolded, partly propelled by the union's innovative approaches, the newly formed workplace solidarity strengthened and solidified into a culture of solidarity that could transcend ethnicity and race and unify Lakeside workers as workers. It was that culture of solidarity that created the conditions for a successful certification and strike.

Immigrant activism was not just the catalyst that led to the successful certification and strike, it was the backbone of the campaign. Not only did immigrant workers dominate union activists, their social solidarity fueled their determination to win the labour struggle. They were able to transfer their loyalty for one another to the union, as long as the union was able to demonstrate that their loyalty was well-placed.

### ***Role of Innovative Tactics***

Had UFCW 401 approached the situation in Brooks in the same manner it had in other locations or in previous attempts at Lakeside, it is possible the wildcat protest would have sputtered. However, Local 401 opted to try new tactics that were reflective of the unique situation in Lakeside at the time. Their decision also plays an important role in explaining the success of the campaign.

The campaign contained a large number of traditional organizing approaches such as paid organizers, one-on-one contact, and leaflets explaining the benefits of the union. However, the union adapted these tools to fit the workers they were trying to woo. While they tried a number of things, a few stand out as being important to the success of the campaign.

First, they did not duck the workplace's diversity. While their rhetoric spoke about being colour-blind,<sup>79</sup> their actions demonstrated they knew very well that they were talking to more than one audience and that, strategically, they needed the immigrant workers as a counter-balance to the longstanding locals. Particularly key here was their decision to respect the organic leaders of the various communities and to allow those leaders to direct the nature of the approach within their communities. In short, they chose to follow as much as to lead. Simultaneously they fostered and developed leaders within the union environment to facilitate peer-to-peer organizing.

Second, multi-lingual communications, while a straightforward matter, is an important first step in building connections between the union and workers of different ethnicity. In practical terms it facilitates the delivery of the union's

79. In interviews the local leadership regularly talked about race being irrelevant in the local and that all members are equal.

message. Symbolically it demonstrates a commitment to respect each ethnic group and recognize their value. A leaflet written in someone's first language is a foot in the door for a union organizer.

Third, the local extended its work beyond the workplace. Organizers attended social and community functions. They built a safe gathering space for activists and members to socialize, debrief, and talk. These types of broader social activities may seem superfluous to the task of organizing a workplace. However, whether they were conscious of it or not, UFCW 401 was engaged in an act of translating social solidarity to workplace solidarity. In that context, creating spaces that transcend and strengthen both forms of solidarity are very important.

Fourth, the members, and not the union officials, were the core of the drive and the face of the union to non-members. This dynamic emerged in part because of the leadership taken by the immigrant workers at early stages, and in part because the union leadership facilitated that approach. One of the reasons previous drives failed is their use of dozens of non-resident organizers allowed the employer to accurately describe the union as outsiders imposing themselves on the Lakeside "family." That cannot be said when the organizer is also a co-worker who stands three stations down on the kill floor.

The use of inside committees and grassroots, peer-to-peer organizing is not new. Yet in the context of Lakeside, they were innovative. The union took on new forms of organizing because of the initiative of the immigrant activists and how these approaches were integrated into pre-existing forms of solidarity and collective action.

Also, the role of the unusually high strike pay cannot be under-estimated. Under normal conditions the financial toll on picketers, especially those in low-income occupations, can be severe and can increase pressures to cross the line, abandon the strike for other employment or vote against striking in the first place. By offering strike pay that allowed strikers to pay bills over the period of three or four weeks, the union successfully reduced one of the great risks to strikes among divided workplaces.

Finally, something must be said of the impact of UFCW 401's centralized, top-down leadership structures on the events at Lakeside. They can be seen as having a paradoxical effect. Normally, innovations of the kind observed at Lakeside are associated with unions who embrace a democratic, activist approach to unionism.<sup>80</sup> Local 401's formal structures would not fit such a description. Doug O'Halloran possesses a very strong grip on the operations of the local. However, in this case rather than suppress the motive to reform, the strong centralized control served to facilitate the innovations required for success. O'Halloran learned from past mistakes and realized his local needed a new approach. Because he possessed such strong authority in the local, he could quickly implement the needed adaptations, allowing for a quicker and

80. Wells, "Unionization and Immigrant Incorporation in San Francisco Hotels."

more effective response to the wildcat walkout. O'Halloran should not take all of the credit for the shift; his role was simply to facilitate what was being recognized by staff and activists. The key point is that his authority permitted that shift to happen quickly.

Since the strike, the limited integration of Lakeside immigrant activists into the broader union local points to limitations to Local 401's approach to innovation. Top-down structures were useful when a fast response was required. In the task of building a democratic, activist, diverse union local, the structures serve as a barrier to innovation. Such is the paradox of the Lakeside strike.

UFCW 401 learned from its past mistakes and approached Lakeside differently in 2004–2005. Their openness to trying something new was fed by a decade of failure. Yet rather than walk away, they forced themselves to take a fresh look at how to tackle the fight. Their decision to do so made a big difference in the outcome.

## Conclusion

UFCW 401 *COULD HAVE* easily missed the opportunity provided to it in the form of the wildcat protesters. Often unions fail to capitalize on expressions of worker anger. In particular, Local 401 could easily have mishandled the organizing drive by simply proceeding with the same tactics it had used in the past. That is why the combination of immigrant activism and the local's decision to try new approaches was the source of the dispute's ultimate success.

The Lakeside strike is significant for labour scholars and labour activists alike for two reasons. First, it is a valuable case study in understanding how unions can do a better job attracting, organizing, and representing immigrants. Traditional approaches have proven to be relatively ineffective at reaching out to these workers. Finding a way to bring a greater diversity of workers into trade unions requires attempting new tactics. None of the tactics used at Lakeside, in and of themselves, are particularly revolutionary. However, their cumulative effect, combined with a willingness to follow as much as to lead, greatly shifted the odds of success.

Second, the Lakeside strike is important for helping to shed stereotypes about vulnerable workers such as immigrants. The picture of the passive, reluctant, compliant worker does not fit the description of the immigrant workers at Lakeside. On the contrary, they were crucial in creating and maintaining the momentum toward unionization. They may display their solidarity in ways unfamiliar to North American unionists, and they may have an understandable reticence regarding unions, but it is a mistake to misinterpret that as a reluctance to stand up for their rights.

The victory at Lakeside strike was incomplete. The agreement was not particularly generous, and issues of low pay, line speed, safety and racism did not disappear simply because a union was present and those problems continue today. In that regard Lakeside is also a reminder that a struggle to reverse the

effects of globalization and neoliberalism in the meat packing industry (and elsewhere) requires much more than one organizing drive, one strike or one group of determined workers. The lessons of Lakeside will need to be multiplied a hundred fold if change of that magnitude is to be achieved.