

Going Forward: First-ever national youth conference a big success

There was an amazing amount of energy amongst the young people walking around the Fairmont hotel in Winnipeg on September 23-24, 2001.

Why? What brought them there from far and wide? More than 60 youth members of UFCW Canada – from across Canada – were gathered at the Fairmont to participate in the *Going Forward* conference.

This historical gathering was not only the first national youth conference for UFCW Canada, but the first fully-national youth conference of any union in Canada.

Participants got a chance to build



Debora De Angelis and UFCW Canada Director Michael Fraser welcome youth delegates to Winnipeg convention.

their public speaking, organizing, and instructing skills. They also got a chance to have their voices heard by developing strategies in areas such as: increasing participation amongst young people in UFCW Canada local unions, increasing the participation of young people in electoral politics, and getting the name



of UFCW Canada more recognized.

Workshops were intense and exciting. Participants discussed and developed a number of initiatives and strategies, including:

- UFCW Canada should play a bigger role in educating young workers about their rights at work. This means getting into more elementary and high schools and talking to more students. As well as being educational, it has to be fun!
- UFCW Canada could be more representative by including more young people in its structure, especially through young organizers and other staff. In order to increase the participation of young members, UFCW Canada can organize events such as sporting events (something fun) so young members would be encouraged to participate.
- UFCW Canada can increase participation of young members by starting a “kids camp”, or sports teams, or even a television program featuring young workers who are

friendly and educational.

All in all, this first national youth conference was a lot of fun, but lots of work was accomplished, too. Thanks to all those who participated!

*Debora De Angelis, chair
UFCW Canada National
Youth Committee*

ACTIVIST TIP: Keep an eye on your workplace union bulletin board (if you have one) for upcoming workshops and conferences.

If you are interested in attending a workshop or conference, be sure to let your UFCW Canada full-time union representative know!

Keeping It Real

by Paula "Bomba" Gonzalez



“Do you think you could maybe rap the lyrics to *Solidarity Forever*?”

I remember hearing those words on my phone, and I sat, a bit shocked, a bit amused ... but more than anything, I was thinking, “Is this for real?”

This conversation took place two years ago, in the spring of 2000, a year that, for me, became more and more infused with a sense of urgency and responsibility in regard to my music. On top of performing at the usual jams, I was getting calls from different political organizations and community groups to come out to demos, benefits, etc.

I had always felt, and still do, that it was my responsibility as an artist to provide music that would move everybody to do something: that something could be shaking your butt, or starting a revolution. This is how I was raised.

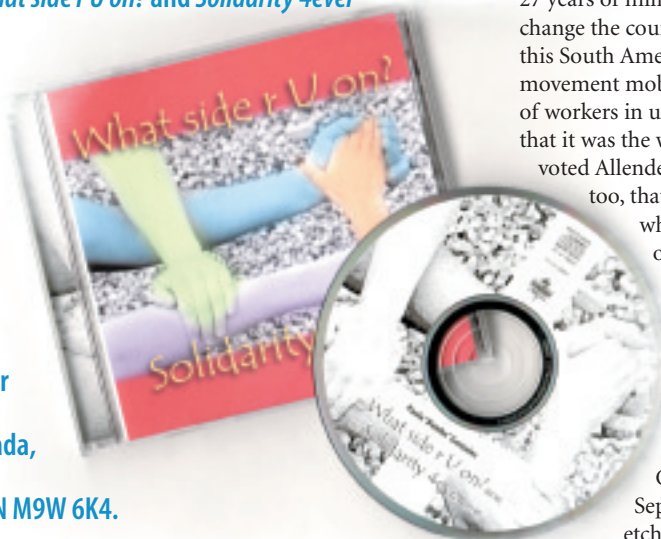
I was born in Talca, Chile. Chile is that skinny, long country right next to Argentina, and is best known for being the first country in the history of Latin America to democratically elect a Socialist president, Dr. Salvador Allende. I also like to point out the fact that Chile produces very good wine.

Allende held the presidency from 1970 until 1973, when a bloody military coup – backed by the United States – ended his life, along with freedom for the majority of the civilian population. What followed were 27 years of military dictatorship that would change the course of history for millions in this South American nation where the labour movement mobilized hundreds of thousands of workers in unity. It was a known fact that it was the working class who had voted Allende in, so it became a fact, too, that it was the working class who would become the victims of this brutal dictatorship. It’s ironic that our equivalent of the White House, *La Moneda*, was bombed to smithereens – and our president assassinated – on the same day on the calendar the World Trade Centre was attacked.

September 11, 1973 was already etched into every Chilean citizen’s

ACTIVIST TIP: Bomba’s hit renditions of *What side r U on?* and *Solidarity 4ever*

– produced as a special youth project by UFCW Canada – are available, free for the asking. You can download MP3s from the youth section of our national web site (ufcw.ca), or you can get a CD by emailing youth@ufcw.ca, or by sending your request to UFCW Canada, 300-61 International Blvd., Rexdale ON M9W 6K4.



memory as a day of death and destruction.

The images on CNN on September 11, 2001 brought a flood of painful memories, and I could not help but feel, “Oh, no, it’s happening all over again.”

My father, a supporter and member of the Socialist party, joined the ranks of thousands of Chileans that were persecuted. He became a political prisoner in 1973, until 1978, the year he was released, and we all emigrated to Canada. During the years he was incarcerated, he was systematically tortured and abused, as were many comrades who were held in the concentration camps.

My mother raised my brother, sister, and me in a happy house that tried to camouflage the horror and terror infused by constant military raids, the curfews, and the weekly Sunday visit to the county jail to see our father. During these years, it was she who instilled in us a love for music. She would play music that had been censored, artists such as Victor Jara, Violeta Parra, Quilapayun, and Inti Illimani – very quietly in our living room.

It was at a very young age that I understood the power of protest music, as we understood that we were risking our lives by even having these records in our house.

When we came to Canada, our father brought his guitar, and we were able to sing and hear all these songs loud. Growing into adolescence in Canada, we were surrounded by Chilean music, hip-hop, cumbia, salsa, merengue, funk, and even some punk rock.

It was here in the *barrio* in Toronto (or, now known as T-dot) that I started kickin’ my music. My brother, David, also pursued his love of music, and became a drummer. He currently drums for a four-piece thrash outfit, *Dirty Bird*. I played punk rock for a while, then some reggae. It was during these five years that I played for local reggae divas *Women Ah Run Things* that they encouraged me to rhyme. After rehearsal, we would all just play and improvise, and I would do it too. But I was too shy to do it live. It was Lady Luscious and MC Lush that basically demanded that I do it live.

The audiences loved it, and pretty soon I was performing solo as *Bomba* (Spanish for

“Bomb”). At that time, I was reluctant to use the name *Bomba*, as it was also my name as a graffiti writer, and I felt it would put me at risk. So I renounced illegal spray painting, and came out as *Bomba* the me.

Being out as one of the only Latinas rockin the mic brought me even more recognition amongst Latino youth. I had already established myself as a graf artist, but now I was getting known for my rhyming



skills. I started looking for other Latino MCs, as I felt a lack of presence of us in the hip-hop scene. I got tired of being the only Latina at all the shows, so I started performing as *La Bomba and the Latino All-Stars*, in order to keep the door open for new talent. This was the first all-Latino crew to ever come together in Toronto, and I feel proud that it was me who pulled everybody together.

This is where I came across the MCs to come and record the UFCW Canada CD. Wicho and Ill Will have both performed with me as part of the *Latino All-Stars*. Ill Will was also responsible for co-producing the music for the two tracks.

It was crazy in that studio, trying to find the proper cut to sample from the vinyl! Sombra, the third MC, is the lead rapper for *PapiChulo Crew*, another crew that is distributed by EMI here in Canada. I have a

track on their album, so I asked Sombra to come and do this collabo.

Stokeley, the man behind the soundboard, kept looking at me like I was crazy, but he still believed in my vision. More than anything, I looked at this project as a way to create more unity amongst our growing scene, while helping youth across the world to reach some kind of consciousness about history, and the people who have made it possible for us to have benefits and protection at our work.

Last summer, I was in Coquimbo, in the northern part of Chile, doing a project with the Chilean National Arts Council. The project was a two-week workshop with inner-city youth and hip-hop culture. Somehow, some of the kids had a bootleg copy of the CD, and they were blasting it in their hood when I went to visit. I told them it was from Canada, and that the songs were about the workers, and they were like, “Bomba, you are hardcore. You are not scared to sing about that.”

It was very symbolic for me to be approached by UFCW Canada to produce these tracks. I felt proud to be able to say that it was a Chilean who revamped a song that is sung in Latin America, in Spanish, despite the threat of death and incarceration.

Chile’s labour movement, at one point, was one of the biggest, most driven, and most powerful entities in the history of the world. I whispered that song as a child, not even knowing exactly what those words meant. Now, 20 years later, I found myself rhyming on it, inviting my other MC friends to kick it and say it with pride.

I am alive to write these songs and continue this tradition hand-in-hand with all my brothers and sisters that make up the labour force, the core of Canada. And that, my friends, is REAL.

peace, one love, respect, guidance



JESSICA VARGA

I'm Jessica Varga, a member of UFCW Canada Local 1518 in British Columbia. We represent close to 26,000 workers, and we are the second-largest local union in UFCW Canada.

In our local, 68% of our members are young members, and a lot of them work part-time shifts. This type of employment presents specific problems for young workers – such as daycare issues and scheduling around school programs – that are not always adequately addressed by employers.

Got a question about work or UFCW Canada? Write to youth@ufcw.ca ...

ACTIVIST TIP: Unionized workers have a process called the **grievance procedure** in place when their rights are violated.

For example, Karma has been working at her workplace for seven months, and was entitled to a raise, according to her collective agreement, in the sixth month. She asks her manager for a raise, but her manager refuses. What is Karma to do?

She should contact her steward or union staff representative, and bring them up to date with the violation in the collective agreement. If Karma is entitled to a raise, then the grievance procedure will kick in.

IMPORTANT: Grievance procedures vary from one workplace to another. Get a copy of your collective agreement and understand it.



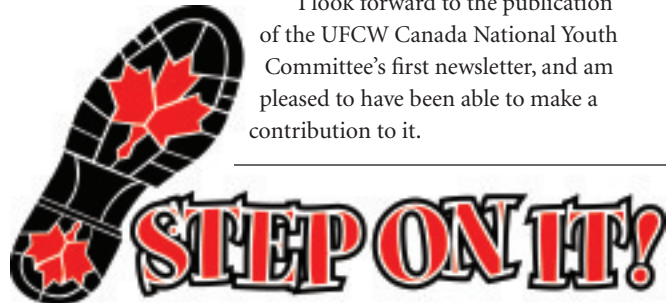
I'm a member of the UFCW Canada National Youth Committee and I also sit on the executive board of my local as a youth representative. The only other province that currently has a youth representative on a local executive board is Ontario's Local 175. Because youth represent such a large part of the current union membership, it is important that we have a voice in our locals, and that we have representation that can relate to our particular problems and needs. I encourage young members

in other provinces to get involved in their local unions and possibly become executive board members.

As a member of the executive board, I sit on various committees and participate in fundraisers. I also attend conferences on behalf of youth and bring back what I have learned to share with others.

Most importantly, I go from workplace to workplace and talk to our young members in an attempt to mentor and help them understand our union and what we do for them.

I look forward to the publication of the UFCW Canada National Youth Committee's first newsletter, and am pleased to have been able to make a contribution to it.



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Send us your ideas or articles, too, by snail mail or to youth@ufcw.ca

We'll not only give you an answer, but it may appear in a future issue of *Step On It!* to help other members