

Capitol accused of union busting

by Nancy Ross

Capitol Supermarkets provide the best bargains in town and pay the lowest wages.

This small, privately owned, lucrative chain is now being charged as being a union buster.

In December 79 there were nineteen employees at Capitol's Burnside Warehouse who voted almost unanimously to form a union. It was certified March 5, 80.

Ruben Coward, a former Capitol warehouse employee heavily involved with the union, says "we felt the only way we could accomplish anything was through a collective group since they would not listen to complaints made before the union."

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"Following knowledge of a union the employer was enraged," says Coward. "They began a program to systematically get rid of all unionized employees." None of the employees employed by Capitol at the time of certification of the union are working now.

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Norman Newman, co-owner of Capitol Stores Ltd., said of the original nineteen employees at the time of certification: "two were forbidden to join by law because they were management, two resigned of their own free will, five are now on strike, and the other ten, I can't remember particular cases but they were terminated."

Once the owners had rid themselves of all pro-union employees they hired an entire new staff. Blatant union busting tactics.

Today there are twenty-five employees on their payroll at the warehouse. The owners have hired more people and are paying them higher wages.

To explain the increase of staff Newman says there were two reasons: "our business has increased and we are planning to expand our warehouse and are training more people due to the increase of space and increased duties."

Newman accounts for the increase in pay stating, "they were receiving \$10 more a week, plus individual increases according to seniority and individual productivity."

Who pays warehouse workers according to individual productivity?

"Once rid of the former pro-union employees, Phil Arnold, (brother-in-law to Newman and co-owner) handpicked the twenty-five scabs he now has with the knowledge that they were anti-union, telling them they would be fired if they signed a union card," says Coward.

Co-owner Phil Arnold told his employees: "Some of us have it and some of us don't. I got rich by not paying Christmas bonuses."

Coward describes the owners policy as "minimizing on wages to maximize on profits."

Behind the image of a poor little family-run company trying hard to get ahead lies a sleek, lucrative financial operation. Capitol is now number two in supermarket sales in Metro and is moving up fast with sales of 65 million dollars and annual profits of about one million dollars.

The family also owns the Derby Tavern, Ice Cream Factory, Steak and Stein and Value Fair stores.

Why does this little empire pay less than half the wages and benefits of its major competitor?

"This kind of treatment of employees has gone on for the last forty-six years," says Coward. "The fellows on strike outside will stay on to the bitter end."

Five of the unionized employees were fired for allegedly threatening a fellow worker (a fact they present evidence against and will dispute in court. They say they were fired

for being Union activists.) On the flip side of the coin, four anti-union Capitol employees were charged a few weeks ago by the Sackville Police for brutally beating a chief union member with a hammer and smashing his car as well. They are still in the employ of Capitol Ltd.

Coward says, "they seem to uphold these happenings because these employees are still working for them." "We don't know if these people were hired to beat him or not."

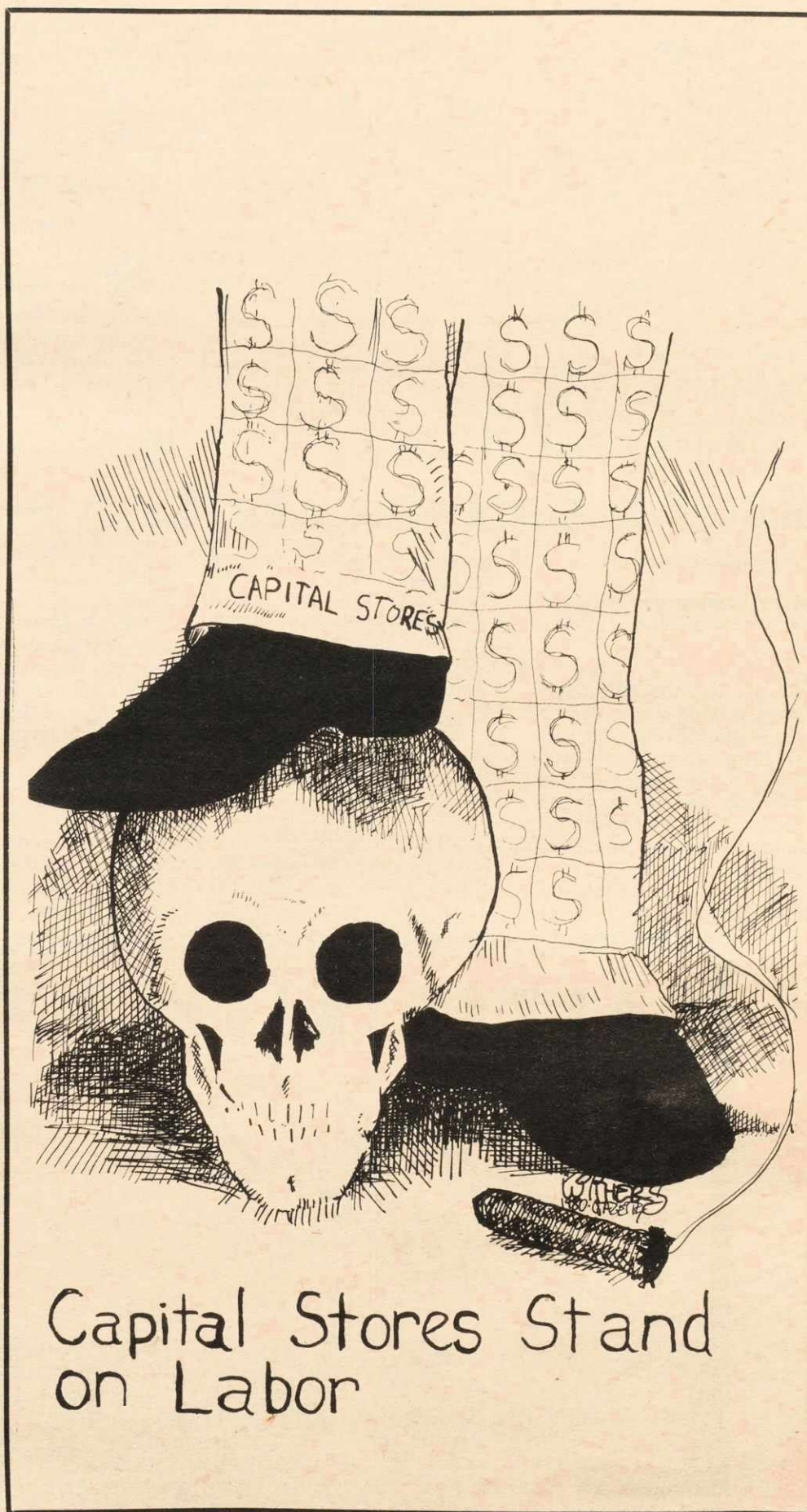
Damaged goods sent to Gottingen Street

Saturday morning, September 27, 80 information pickets made up of striking Retail Clerks and sympathetic trade unionists handed out leaflets to shoppers at the Gottingen Street Capitol Store.

The striking warehousemen have recounted how they were forced to put damaged goods received at the Capitol Store warehouse aside until a salesperson from the manufacturer or wholesaler arrived. After the goods were credited by the salesperson as 'no good,' the strikers claimed they were ordered to pick out the best of the damaged goods, clean them up as far as that was possible and then ship them off to a Capitol Store.

What has enraged the strikers is that the Plaza (Capitol) Store on Gottingen Street always received these damaged goods. Most of the customers in this location are either black or elderly. These people often cannot afford a car or a taxi that would permit them to shop elsewhere.

So, last Saturday morning the



Capital Stores Stand on Labor

strikers were at this location to inform customers how they were being exploited due to the fact that they were a 'captive' market in many cases as a result of their inability to afford shopping elsewhere.

Nelson Reed, head of local 1973 of the Retail Clerks currently on strike against Capitol Warehouse operations in Burnside, says "raises for these men will only add a nickel to a typical \$100 grocery bill for its customers."

The union's primary concern is not money. It is matters concerning human rights! They want to exist as a union and are now fighting for survival. They are striking for better working conditions and more safety measures.

At the annual meeting of Nova

Scotia Federation of Labour it was decided that they would march on behalf of the strikers at Capitol. This decision has important symbolic value because there are principles at stake which this large group has recognized and are willing to fight for.

Gerald Yetman, President of the Nova Scotia's Federation of Labour, has promised that if nothing is done concerning the strike he will ask the 7,000 members of the Federation to boycott the Capitol Stores.

"It seems that in Nova Scotia you have to fight so much harder for what is a standard thing in other provinces such as Quebec," says Coward. He is hoping "that the fellows on the picket line will see that justice can be achieved."