

## LEADERSHIP



## AMAZON WARS

By Paul Moist

The new year did not begin well for 1,700 Amazon workers employed at seven company facilities in Quebec. All will be laid off by March, as the company decided to permanently close its Quebec operations.

Amazon is not ending their business in Quebec. They have decided to shift to a “third-party model”, where contractors will be used to deliver packages throughout the province.

The Amazon playbook does not include unionization of its staff, and after 200 workers at the company’s DXT4 warehouse in Laval chose to organize last spring, the company challenged Quebec’s automatic certification labour laws, which grant certification without a vote if a clear majority indicate, by signing a union card, that they want to be organized.

Automatic certification is foreign to Amazon, such provisions do not exist in the United States. The company lost their challenge to the Quebec laws, and they have opted to close operations as they faced the imposition of a first

contract by way of an arbitrator if they did not reach a negotiated deal with the union.

Even where workers win government supervised certification votes, as occurred at Amazon’s JFK8 Fulfilment Center, in Staten Island, New York, in April 2022, the company has filed countless legal appeals and refused to negotiate with the workers.

This approach to labour relations is not new in the U.S. It is why late last year, the downward trend continued to where less than 10 per cent of the American workforce is now unionized, the lowest level in nine decades.

American educator and writer, Jefferson Cowie, in his book, *The Great Exception, the New Deal and the Limits of American Politics*, quotes American labor law professor, Cynthia Estlund, commenting on the state of American labor law, stating:

“The core of American labour law has essentially been sealed off – from both democratic revision and renewal and from experimentation and

innovation”, leaving it, “frozen or ossified, for over fifty years.”

Billionaire oligarch, Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon, joined Elon Musk and most of the leaders of Silicon Valley in support of Donald Trump’s successful re-election as U.S. President. Bezos and company had front row seats at the Trump inauguration with cabinet members seated behind them.

Trump, who won the election largely due to the unprecedented support from working-class people, especially males without college degrees, has quickly pivoted from those workers and is delivering for big tech.

In late January Trump fired the acting chair of the National Labor Relations Board, Gwynne Wilcox. This was an unprecedented move as Wilcox served under a congressional appointment not set to expire until 2028. This move, along with the dismissal of NLRB General Counsel, Jennifer Abruzzo, caused former U.S. Labour secretary, Robert Reich to comment:

“Presto – American workers are no longer protected from illegal firings or unfair labour practices by their employers. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 is effectively gone. Employers can wreak havoc on their workers.”

In the end, this is all about power, and the oligarchs, some of whom used to oppose Trump, have decided their path to enhanced privilege and power is through alignment with the Trump 2.0. Expect union density in America to continue its long, steady decline, which means inequality will continue its long steady rise.

Contrast that with events here in Manitoba, when it comes to worker rights.

Since their election in October 2023, the NDP government led by Wab Kinew has increased worker rights, including the following changes:

- Introduction of Anti-Scab legislation.
- Restoring card-based union certification rights.
- Restoring Project Labour Agreements for public sector capital works.

- Restoring 1-1 apprenticeship ratios..

- Restoring the bipartite ministerial health & safety advisory committee.

- Restoring respect for public sector collective bargaining rights.

- Proclaiming Orange Shirt Day as a statutory holiday.

- Ensuring trade union representation on crown corporation boards.

The NDP have won nine of the last 15 elections in Manitoba. No NDP government has done more for workers in such a short period of time than the present government. Their record is not perfect, and they face no shortage of challenges.

But the restoration and expansion of worker rights paves the way for less inequality and a brighter future for our province.

This will offer little solace to Quebec Amazon workers as they face lay-offs. But it underscores the fact that worker rights are central to the formation of the strong democracy that we all want, and must fight to defend.

## Bringing vitality back; Proposed design to bring rebirth to old lot

Architect George Cibinel remembers arriving in Winnipeg in 1985. “I remember coming back from Europe and Boston, and was just surprised at how many empty parking lots we had,” he says, of Winnipeg’s downtown. “And it hasn’t changed much.”

It’s one of the reasons that Cibinel is excited about a new project to put some life back into what has been quite a notorious parking lot behind the Sherbrook Hotel.

The hotel’s new owner Neil Soorsma bought the property last year and has sold the giant parking lot behind it. It has mostly sat empty for the last 15 years, as the hotel morphed mainly into low cost apartments. Soorsma wants to keep the affordable apartments and maybe revive some of the entertainment capacity of the original hotel building, but saw a new opportunity for the back property.

The parking lot was so big, there’s enough room to put a 5 story building on it while preserving the mature trees on the boulevard in front of the new building site, and adding more trees along the back.

The planned multi-family development is slated to have two story, three bedroom, suites facing Furby Street, with a mix of studio, and 1 and 2 bedroom suites throughout the building, and with a designated commercial space off of Westminster Ave. Approximately 25% of the suites are planned to be affordable in accordance with CMHC’s MLI Select program, and with up to eight of those units in accordance with Manitoba Housing’s affordability requirements.

As recipients of the tallest net zero (ZCB-Design v3 Certified) building award last year (in western Canada) for their 21 story building design of 308 Colony Street, Cibinel Architec-

ture has ample experience in environmentally-conscious design. Cibinel says that its design will be 25% better than the national energy code, with a well-insulated building envelope, and high efficiency mechanical systems.

Lotus Holdings Winnipeg, (who were also the developers of 308 Colony Street) along with Soorsma, are the developers of the new project.

Newer building codes provide for greater accessibility in general, but Cibinel also stresses that accommodations can be tailored to accommodate persons with disabilities.

Two spots in the des-



**Artist’s rendering of proposed design shows Sherbrook Hotel in grey that will remain as is, and new design for an apartment and green space off the hotel’s east lot.**

ignated 28 parking spots at the building will be for shared vehicle use, but the building will also feature secure bike storage for up to 45 bikes, and 14 outdoor bike racks.

“It’s a really nice walkable neighborhood well located, and close to transit and I think developing a few of the pockets in the area will contribute to

the vitality in the area,” says Cibinel.

**Cibinel Architecture has provided questionnaires for residents to comment on the proposed design which can be accessed on their website, or by contacting Connie Jantz at Cibinel Architecture by email at [connie@cibinel.com](mailto:connie@cibinel.com).**