



BIOGRAPHY

ROBERT DESFONDS

**Union of Canadian Transportation Employees
National President - 1993 to 2000**

When people refer to social activists, they refer to a fire -- a spark to fire justice. This quest for justice on behalf of Canadian workers has always been in the heart of Brother Robert Desfonds. It all began in 1968. He was a site delegate at the start of construction of infrastructure for the Olympic Games. In 1976, as construction was completed, he was laid off and applied to work in the federal government. His first job, that same year, was at the Dorval Airport as a maintenance tinsmith. The following year, in March of 1977, he became a steward for a three-year term for his Local 10107. In 1982, he became president of the Local with the ambition of settling problems with the Employer. Subsequently, he decided to devote his career to union work.

His career advanced following this debate with the Employer and this is what led him to become Regional Vice-President of the Montreal Chapter in 1987. In 1990, at the Vancouver Convention, he was elected the pan-Canadian Regional Vice-President for the Province of Quebec. Unfortunately, the Union's financial situation was obviously unsound. It was then, in 1993, at the age of 41, that he became the official President of UCTE.

UCTE was practically bankrupt, with \$300,000 in the Contingency Fund. When Brother Desfonds failed to be re-elected in 2000, the Union's finances were at \$2 million.

During his years as President, he had to deal with all the airport privatization in the Department of Transport Canada. This was equivalent to about 4,000 transferred jobs. He ensured that all members kept their jobs following this critical change. He stated:

"I could count on two hands the number of people who were unable to transfer to the same type of job they were working in."

This President of past years brought nothing but positivism to the Union. He was an advocate who wished to pass on his knowledge to Canadian workers. He provided training throughout his years with PSAC and UCTE. He was motivated by an exchange of knowledge and the experiences of each and every person. Human contact was always very important in his career. He quotes:

"I have always put members before my ego."



Today, Robert Desfonds is still involved in the unions. He is a Brigadier for the City of Gatineau and is involved in his Local, ensuring that the rights of workers are respected in the areas of health and safety at work. He plays an important role in the Public Service Union. He is Recording Secretary, Union delegate and Occupational Health and Safety representative. Brother Desfonds is an advocate for workers' rights across Canada, and a person of conviction and passion.

