

27th Canadian Labour Congress Convention
Held at Palais des Congres de Montreal
Montreal, Quebec

Theme: “Together Fairness Works”

May 5 – 9, 2014

I had the privilege of attending the 27th CLC Convention in Montreal on May 5 – 9, 2014. I want to thank my Component, Union of National Employees , PSAC BC Lower Mainland Human Rights Committee and the PSAC BC West Fraser Valley Area Council for providing funds which allow me to attend this event.

It was my first CLC convention. The official start of the Convention was Monday, May 5th ; however, there was a full program to attend on Sunday. PSAC hosted a two hour caucus where candidates came to speak. It was interesting to see politics already being played even before the Convention started. There was a human rights forum in the evening which featured four equity speakers who spoke of their personal stories of successes and challenges ahead in the fight for human rights for all. One of the speakers, Brother Naveen Mahta spoke about the concept of courage and speaking out on equity issues. Their presentations provided a summary of all forms of discrimination faced by members of Aboriginal, persons with disabilities, racialized and LGBT communities.

Spontaneously the four Equity Vice Presidents self organised, outside the CLC convention agenda, an all candidates debate at which one slate of candidates chose not to participate in.

From my experience at the convention, highlights I would like to share are as follows:

I was happy to see a large group of familiar faces; my PSAC and UNE Sisters and Brothers as well as other networks.

It started off with a huge success of democracy as there was a motion to pass an amendment to the convention agenda to allow for an all candidates debate. This mirrored the success of the first time ever secret ballot at Canadian Labour Congress Convention. Most of day 1 was taken up by convention housekeeping. There were about 1600 attendees on day one and by the time the election was convened on Thursday, there were 4800 attendees.

It was interesting to see that resolutions dealing with one subject were often rolled into one large composite resolution to be voted on. For example, there was one on Migrant workers, a combination of 10 resolutions in which the CLC committed to call for a full, open and transparent review of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program and continue working with affiliates, human rights and community groups to demand full rights for migrant workers and aggressive enforcement against violations of these rights by employers and labour brokers.

Speakers who came to microphones were often the heads of large unions who then seem to make motherhood statements filled with passion and energy. An interesting aspect of speaking at the microphones involved a system of “mic muffins” – mic muffins are individuals who keep a place in the line up at the microphones for a speaker, they can sit in the place up to a day to reserve for a spot.

A large part of the focus on the convention was in support in saving postal delivery and was seen as a Canadian well supported campaign for Public Services.

There were four panel discussions with three panelists' discussion. For example, one discussion was entitled Creating a better tomorrow; sustainable growth and development. During this panel discussion, one panelist Dr Galabuzi described it as an economy that is upside down “The economy is a human institution that should serve the people”. He said, “But we have an economy that people serve”. The panelists mentioned recent movements such as Occupy and the Quebec students as challenging that system. CLC said that these discussion will be made available on youtube.

At the all candidates debate, one of the candidates for the presidential position thanked everyone for their support and stepped away. There were three candidates for the CLC President - two independent candidates and one who was running with a slate. It is interesting to see how campaigns are managed when a slate is offered on the strength of the recognition of just one candidate and the relative novelty of three others on the slate.

The Mayor of Montreal, Denis Coderre was a guest who, as mayor of one of the largest cities, pledged to fight for postal delivery.

On Election Day, right after the election of the President, there was a noticeable decrease in number of delegates, by almost 1500, after the incumbent President was defeated. For the first time ever in Canadian Labour Congress history a radicalized president was voted in. Proud member of PSAC Quebec, Danielle Dubuc was re-acclaimed as the Vice President of Workers of Colour.

The voting started at 10 and the first ballot count took three hours and by the time the entire election was done, it was 7:30 pm. This is all due to non electronic voting procedure.

Thomas Mulcair was a guest speaker on election day and he appeared in a HABS hockey jersey. Mulcair said “A stronger labour movement means a stronger Canada”. As good as a speaker as he was, there was definitely a sense of anticipation of the first ballot count for the office of president. Significantly, Mulcair promised that the NDP will roll back Old Age Security from 67 years old to 65 years when the NDP wins the next election.

While the thousands of ballots were being counted manually, CLC Convention delegates, carrying hundreds of different sized and coloured union flags, took to the streets to the Victoria

Square in Montreal, in a march against government austerity. There was a drum band in the parade and the parade was about half an hour long.

An International Solidarity Forum on Corporate accountability in the aftermath of the Bangladesh Factory Collapse where panel discussion took place on how the international labour movement is promoting accountability of garment retailers. On April 24th, 2013, the Rana Plaza factory collapsed killing over 1100 workers were killed and injuring 2500 injured. The incident placed an international spotlight in the supply chain management for garment retailers around the world including Canada.

Following the successful launch of the CLC ad, there will be a second wave of ads which was shown at the convention. The new website www.fairnessworks.ca was launched at the convention.

Amongst the more interesting aspects of the convention, were the panel speakers and the play for political positions that was happening throughout the convention. Some of the panelists at the Convention are Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Dr. Louis Francescutti and Dr. Pierre Fortin who talked about the role and importance of public services in building a better and healthier Canada.

There were cultural performances; dances and music presentations throughout the convention. I am glad to have had the opportunity to attend the CLC.

Respectfully Submitted by:

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Reference: <http://convention2014.canadianlabour.ca/>