

BC Federation of Labour 56th Convention
November 24 – 28, 2014
Held at Vancouver Convention Center, Vancouver BC

Report by Jennifer Chieh Ho
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First all, I would like to thank the PSAC BC Regional Council, my Component, Union of National Employees(BC and Yukon Region) and the PSAC West Fraser Valley Area Council for funding my attendance at the Convention. I am pleased to provide herewith a report outlining some of my observations.

The Convention started off with a Diversity Forum on Sunday, Nov 23 from 8:30 am to 12:00 noon. As I recall from the 2012 forum, there were twice as much attendees this year than the last. There were four panelists altogether who covered topics on all four equity groups. For your reference, please find below some bio points cited from the information given out to participants at the session on the panelists

- **Rhiannon Bennett** is the Aboriginal Representative on the BCNDP Provincial Executive and is the first ever Musqueam person to be elected to School Board in Delta. She is currently a Family Outreach Worker for the Musqueam Indian Band, and is a Musqueam woman who stood up with her community to stop condo development on a traditional Musqueam Burial Site,, and won.
- **Romi Chandra Herbert** is currently the co-executive director of PeerNetBC, a not-for-profit organization that delivers anti-oppression and facilitation skills development training for peer-led groups and spaces across the province.
- **Conni Kilfoil** is a lifelong activist who is a frequent speaker on disability rights issues. She has been teaching courses on bullying and harassment, human rights, and the duty to accommodate to CUPE local and district councils from coast to coast, to joint union-management groups in BC, and through the Labour Studies Program at Capilano University for more than a decade.
- **Dileep Athaide** is a retiree from a position with the Labour Partnership at the United Way of the Lower Mainland. He still teaches labour education courses at the annual CLC Harrison Winter School and is now primarily engaged in a Formation Program towards being ordained as a clergy member in the Catholic Church.

Some of the things I learnt from this session were that we all know what problems and issues are out there, we don't need to be told. We need to ask ourselves - what the solutions? For example Rehiannon Bennett asked the delegates "We need to ask ourselves – what are the solutions?" She went on to say "In order to help the indigenous people/indigenous issues, we need to know what privileges are for them." In other words if society and the media keep claiming that indigenous peoples have extra ordinary privileges then what what and where are they.

I also learnt more about "Mental Disability" and "Episodic Disability" as well as about Bill C14. (reference: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/bill-c-14-criminally-responsible-reform-act/#.VHKatvnF89Y>).

Dileep Athaide indicated that "Canada is no longer the Canada from 30 years or more ago when there was fairness and equality especially for the equity seeking groups." Policies that affect workers of colour have changed to make working lives more difficult such as: policies on immigration, TFW expansion on policies, minimum wage salaries, shutting down recourse for complaints, income tax policies (which are at the expense of the low income makers who are generally workers of colour, immigrants), health and safety, collective bargaining, etc! Mr Athaide ended by saying, "We need to push for systemic changes and for political changes in the Canadian Government."

After the panelists' presentation, the four BC Fed Equity Reps provided their reports for the mandate of 2012 – 2014. Both the Aboriginal Workers and LGBT Workers Representatives are from BCGEU while both the Workers With Disabilities and Workers of Colour Representatives are from CUPE BC. We had the opportunity to learn about their background, what they have accomplished, what challenges they faced and what to carry on. Three out of the four representatives are stepping down

and wished the new representatives are all the best. BC Fed staff member, Kassandra Cordero was acknowledged and thanked by all representatives for work she has done.

Outgoing President, Jim Sinclair was present to give a speech. He acknowledged and thanked Lorene Oikawa (former chair of the BC Fed Human Rights Committee) and Nora Butz (current chair who took over from Lorene) for the great work they have done with the rest of the Human Rights committee. Jim emphasized the fact that we need to strategize, move on, organise, take action, build the networks, and continue to fight.....

Last business of the day was discussion on the following resolutions submitted by the BC Fed Human Rights Committee:

- 1) The Federation will work with the CLC to raise awareness of the need for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada; and
- The Federation will, through the CLC, demand the federal government implement a national public inquiry into missing and slain Aboriginal women and develop a national plan of action to improve the safety and security of these women, and will support the CLC national petition campaign (submitted by BCGEU, HEU, Kamloops DLC)
- 2) The Federation will encourage its affiliates to send more members representing equity seeking groups to send more members representing equity seeking groups to attend BCFED conventions, conferences, forums and workshops (CUPE1936)
- 3) The Federation will encourage its affiliates and membership to initiate discussions with employers about creating positive spaces by implementing all genders welcome washrooms and changing facilities where necessary. (PSAC BC)
- 4) The Federation will ensure that accommodation is provided to delegates with disabilities at all BC Fed conventions, conferences and educational; and
The Federation will ensure that needed resources are available to ensure accommodation for members with disabilities will be provided to all members with disabilities (CUPE 1936)
- 5) The Federation will demand the Minister of Social Development change income assistance guidelines to eliminate the current requirement of persons with disabilities to receive regular income assistance for a period of one year before being eligible to apply for Persons With Disabilities (PWD) income assistance; and
The Federation will demand that the Minister of Social Development abandon the three-week waiting period for all persons who apply for income assistance, and in particular for persons with disabilities who apply for income assistance (CUPE 1936)
- 6) The Federation will lobby the provincial government to fully fund sex reassignment surgeries, hormone treatments and gender transitioning related procedures and develop access to health care services with the ability to approve surgeries in each jurisdiction (PSAC BC)
- 7) The Federation will, through the CLC, work with Canada's aboriginal communities to ensure that the federal government fulfills its obligations under the Kelowna Accord; and
The Federation will, through the CLC, call on the federal government to reverse its shameful position on the UN Human Rights Council declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples (BCGEU)
- 8) The Federation will lobby the provincial govt to allow people with episodic disabilities to work without deductions or interruption in their disability benefits; and
The Federation will, through the CLC, lobby the federal govt to allow people with episodic disabilities to work without deductions or interruption in their CPP disability benefits (CUPE 1936)
- 9) The Federation will encourage affiliates to negotiate collective agreement provisions that protect workers from discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression; and
The Federation will call upon provinces and territories to amend their human rights codes by including provisions that protect individuals from discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression (BCTF)

- 10) The Federation will, through the CLC, condemn the federal govt policy, lobby health Canada and work with all political parties to amend the regulations and policies that prohibit men, who have sex with men, from donating blood and make it difficult for them to be bone marrow and organ donors; and
The Federation will partner with social justice organizations to educate about why ostracizing men who have sex with men is discriminatory (PSAC BC).

This was the second time I have been to the BC Federation Convention, The convention began on November 24th with a little over 1,000 delegates and ended with well over 2,000 delegates on the last day, which was election day - Nov 28. It was quite something to watch how politics unfolded as the Convention progressed up to the day of election.

Jim Sinclair's opening speech was very motivating and touching, as always; he shared his personal story that he walked his first rally, for immigrants, at the age of 17. Jim has been the President of BC Federation of Labour for 15 years, he is committed to the social justice and labour movement. His commitment to young workers is incredible, the young workers' committee was created under his leadership. A video on health and safety was shown; and he was proud to share that, about 10 years ago, an education program was introduced by the BC Federation of Labour to reach out to high schools in BC to educate on health and safety workplaces. To date 125000 high school students have had the opportunity to learn about how they have rights to health and safety at work, which is a very important principle in all workers' lives.

Another highlight of the day was that NDP Leader, Tom Muclair was there to welcome and deliver a speech to the delegation. Some of the things he talked about are reduced funding for health care from Chretien's time and at today's date, there has been more reduction! He quoted that "Health care is a foundation for the Canadian nation like education is", He also mentioned that it is important to have care for the seniors and the importance of political battle to defend seniors' care. Another issue mentioned was Childcare – the lack of childcare. Canadians need provincial and national childcare - publicly funded childcare programs so that our children are in proper and safe childcare; so that workers can work and contribute to the economy. Having affordable childcare allows men and women opportunities to further their education which enables them to go into the workforce with good and high paying jobs.

Keynote speakers at the Convention who talked about what critical issues working people face. (*their bios as cited from www.bcfed.ca*)

TRISH HENNESSY - the founding Director of the new Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' (CCPA) Ontario office. She was the founding Director of the CCPA's national project examining income inequality in Canada, which began in 2006, and is an ongoing contributor to the growing gap team.

DAVID FREIBOTH - the Executive Secretary Treasurer of the King County Central Labor Council in Seattle and is a Vice-President of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. Mr. Freiboth currently serves on the governing boards of United Way of King County, Economic Development Council of King County, Seattle's Convention and Visitors Bureau (advisory member), Puget Sound Labor Agency, as a commissioner on the Seattle Economic Development Commission, and is a Visiting Committee member of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington.

DR. DANIELLE MARTIN - the Vice-President of Medical Affairs and Health System Solutions of the Women's College Hospital in Toronto. Dr. Martin has been a family physician in the Family Practice Health Centre since 2006 and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto. She is the Board Chair of Canadian Doctors for Medicare. She also served on the Health Council of Canada from 2005-2011.

In addition to the daily convention procedures, there were evening sessions and forums to attend such as the Women's Forum. There were four strong women who gave inspirational talks as well as shared their personal stories, which were very powerful. Chantel O'Neill from the CLC Pacific Region shared information on the CLC Survey on domestic violence in the workplace and that results would be out on Dec 6, 2014. (reference <http://www.canadianlabour.ca/national/news/december-6-2014-national-day-remembrance-and-action-violence-against-women>). Fay Blayne from the Women's Organising Women (WOW) talked about male violence against women, continued genocide, wide spread discrimination of indigenous women and children, murdered and missing women. She indicated that a national public inquiry needs to be in place and if a Terms of Reference comes into place it

should be overseen by indigenous women. Fay shared her personal story and suggested the video “Finding Dawn” which she was a part of. She said, “Stories need to be told, shared and heard! An examination of the system is all we want! ...Poverty and homelessness is a big problem and the need in programs for indigenous women is necessary.”

Tracy Porteous, Executive Director from Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA) talked about different programs and projects at EVA (ref <http://endingviolence.org>) such as Community for Indigenous Safety, sharing knowledge and guide for front line workers on health and safety, how important it is to know what the risk factors are. She also mentioned that it is very important for men who are non-violent to not be silent - to speak out against violence. EVA partnered up with BC Lions in 2011 to come up with a prevention program called “Be more than a bystander”, a program to create awareness and to “Break the silence on Violence Against Women”. BC Lions have taken this program into high schools to encourage breaking silence and speaking up. (reference: <http://endingviolence.org/prevention-programs/be-more-than-a-bystander>)

Another session I attended was the “Chinese Forum” where I heard about how strong Chinese unions are and some of the successes unions have had in China. The presentation was made by Cathy Walker who was one of the delegates who visited Chinese Unions, workers and workplaces in June-July 2014, a trip organised by The British Columbia Federation of Labour and the Vancouver & District Labour Council. (reference to the power point presentation: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/14fxmdgx7y9r61k/AABdRO0j5LLl75u1HjWopG9xa?dl=0>)

BC Federation of Labour launched the \$15 minimum wage campaign and there was a rally held outside of Vancouver Convention Center during lunch break on Nov 25. It was pouring rain but nothing stopped the launch.

The 2014 newly elected CLC President, Hassan Yussuf delivered a speech in which he mentioned the private member’s bill Bill C377 and how 81% of the jobs created are part time jobs! He stressed that childcare is not just a woman’s issue, but also a man’s issue.

It was wonderful to hear and watch all the tributes given to Jim Sinclair at convention by some of the people who truly appreciated Jim and the many things he has done.

The resolution on raising the age of young workers from 30 – 35 was defeated, there was good discussion on the floor but unfortunately our PSAC delegates did not get a chance to speak to it due to the question being called.

On the other hand PSAC delegates did speak to resolutions 93 and 94 on Employment insurance and I personally appreciated their input at the microphones.

I spoke on the resolution “The Federation will encourage its affiliates to send more members representing equity seeking groups to attend BCFED conventions, conferences, forums and workshops”. I shared my personal success story of how I started and where I am today because of the opportunities available to me through my Union (PSAC) and my component (Union of National Employees). It is important to have equity voices heard and be part of decision making at every avenue and opportunity.

On a side note, during the resolutions session, I asked for a “Point of Privilege” and had the opportunity to do a three minute long presentation of a petition on “Mental Health”. I want to thank Jim Sinclair for letting me have the full three minute long privilege. The chair of the resolutions committee commented to Jim on stage (which can be heard through her mic) that he was a far more generous chair than she was, meaning the allowance of the three minute long “point of privilege”. At this point, I want to share how successful I was with getting the petition signed and how quickly I received support from the union family outside of PSAC. By the time I got up to the mic that day to talk about the petition, I had a working team of at least 8 members from other unions and who stood with me at the mic.

Another highlight of the convention was that I was privileged and honored to have been elected the BC Fed Representative for Workers of Colour. This will help enhance the position I hold as the PSAC BC Co-Ordinator of Racially Visible Membership as well as allow working with a broader network with other unions and affiliates. There were about 70 delegates in the caucus and only 4 were PSAC members. There were three nominees and I was very proud to be elected on the first election run with majority votes. My nominator at the caucus was a member from BCGEU whom I only met for the very first time at this convention; I appreciated the trust and value he saw in me. The way election was run at the convention was different than what I have experienced within my Component as well as PSAC. I want to thank Bob Jackson for endorsing me to run for the position of the Rep for Workers of Colour and Amit Deo for the initial nomination.

I am pleased to have been in the LGBTQ caucus and be part of Paul Croes's successful election to the position of the Representative for LGBTQ caucus. Congratulations, Paul!

This is the first time PSAC BC region has equity representation on the BC Federation of Labour Executive Council and I am proud to be one of the two from PSAC holding this role.

One of the final highlights of the Convention was the election of the PSAC supported candidate, Irene Izlinger. She was the first woman elected to be President of the BC Federation of Labour.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer Chieh Ho

