Peter Kennedy (Secretary Treasurer) opened the 2nd Unifor Constitutional Convention which took place in Ottawa during August 22nd through to August 26th 2016. Peter announced he will be retiring after the Detroit 3 bargaining and will not be running again as Secretary Treasurer. He asked for the agenda and the rules of order to be adopted, which were seconded and adopted. An elections committee was put together by randomly drawing names from all the Delegates in attendance.

Candace Lavalley and David Ladouceur both gave a traditional aboriginal welcome to all and said that Ottawa is historically Algonquin peoples land. They were traders and the word Ottawa is derived from the Algonquin word adawe meaning “to trade.”

Chris Buckley – President of Ontario Federation of Labour spoke and thanked Unifor and everyone for helping him get elected as OFL President. He said Ontario must protect every worker, we require employers to treat all workers the same. They must pay them the same, give them decent hours of work and pay workers sick pay when they are unable to be at work. He said we must also push an end to temp agencies and end precarious work. We have to make Ontario that we all want and urged everyone to attend an important rally to Queens Park on October 1st.

The theme for this convention was simply titled “It’s Time”

“It is our time, our time to go to the next stage in building this incredible union,” Jerry Dias told over 1,800 delegates in Ottawa. “It’s time for Medicare, it’s time for National Childcare, it’s time to abolish tuition fees because our children should not have to pay to get a decent education, it’s time to reign in the tax dodgers who have put away about 53 billion dollars in tax shelters!”

When Unifor was founded three years ago, the Canadian labour movement was at its lowest point since the Second World War.

“We gave our all to take our country back and we left not one ounce of energy or heart in reserve,” he said.

Unifor has participated in more than 1,000 rounds of bargaining, with gains in job creation, wage increases, social equality and more Women’s Advocate positions. Currently in the midst of Detroit Three bargaining, Dias said that while the automakers may be powerful, Unifor is tougher.

Dias called for the largest investment in job programs in generations, improved labour laws, better retirement security, a new Health Accord, and a national child care program. He also warned of the dangers of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.
“It’s time that workers across our continent call out the TPP for what it is: an anti-worker corporate plan to engineer a global low wage agenda at the expense of our jobs”

Dias called for solidarity with Aboriginal peoples, calling decades of cultural genocide “Canada’s national shame.” On Wednesday August 24th all the Delegates marched to Parliament Hill in support of the Truth and Reconciliation report and finally face the truth of what injustice had been done to the aboriginal people. Children were displaced and separated from their families and moved to residential schools, forced to learn English and forget their own native language and lose their identity. There were abuses and hardships which the governments knew about but failed to do anything to stop them. The Human Rights Tribunal issued an order to fix the problem, not just once but twice and yet still no action had been taken. The Tragically Hip’s frontman Gord Downie was also quoted saying at his concert which was attended by Justin Trudeau “we trained our entire lives to ignore, trained our entire lives to hear not a word of what’s going on up there (with the aboriginal people) and what’s going on up there ain’t good and maybe worse than it’s ever been.”

Jerry Dias looked back at the past three years of when Unifor was formed, he made mention of past bargaining gains and also of the current Detroit 3 bargaining. He said corporations do well in Canada, they should also have a commitment to Canada. Jerry reminded everyone that it’s been 5 years since Jack Layton passed away, it was Jack who started the white ribbons campaign to stop violence against women. He made a commitment that we will continue to promote ending violence against women.

A Financial Report presentation was given showing the state of funds since the formation of Unifor, the report had shown there was a deficiency of funds in the General Fund while a growth was shown in the Defence/Strike Fund. In order to prevent a continuation of deficiency of funds in the General Fund, there was a constitutional resolution to redirect 2.5% of funds from the Defence/Strike Fund into the General Fund for a period from September 2016 through to September 2019. This arrangement will be reviewed at the 2019 Convention. There was quite a debate on this issue with pros and cons, at the end a vote was taken and the resolution was passed.

49 Constitutional Resolutions were presented which required a two third of support in order to be passed.
22 Regular and 21 Skilled Trades Resolutions were presented which required a simple majority to be passed.

All the resolutions along with convention agenda can be found on the Unifor National website and in our union office.

A full document was presented on Bargaining about raising standards and hope. This was based on the state of economy, the labour market, low wages/precarious work, two tier wages, equality, human rights, contract terms, pensions and retirements. This can also be found online and a copy is available for all to read in the union office.

On Wednesday August 24th 2016 there was the nomination and elections of the Officers;
President – Jerry Dias, Secretary Treasurer – Bob Orr (replacing Peter Kennedy), Quebec Director – Renaud Gagne (was already elected at the Quebec Council but still had to be affirmed at this Constitutional Convention), Western Regional Director – Joie Warnock, Ontario Regional Director – Naureen Rizvi (replacing Katha Fortier), and Atlantic Regional Director – Lana Payne.) All Officers were elected by acclamation.

In between going through the resolutions and elections there were some guest speakers as follows;

Sharan Burrow (General Secretary – International Trade Union Confederation) spoke on Tuesday August 23rd and said that globally there are 50% of people in precarious work, 45 million are in forced labour (slavery), since the 80’s the rich are three times richer but the poorer working people are fighting for a minimum working wage and that unions are not opposed to trade but in fact the current models which exploit. She said a simple test for CEO’s would be if you don’t want your sons and daughters to work in bad conditions then why would you allow someone else’s sons and daughters to work like that?
Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister of Canada) spoke on Wednesday August 24th saying the labour movement is a solution and not a problem which holds employers accountable. He said that the fire at Fort McMurray devastated community but the generosity and compassion shown was a model of all Canadians, he praised Unifor for its members’ involvement raising money and helping the communities. Trudeau said his government will be looking at reducing the E.I. waiting period from 2 weeks to 1 weeks effective January 2017. Also bring back the Old Age Pension eligibility to age 65 from 67, this fall they will be bringing up Bill C4 which is a Bill that limits the rights of workers to refuse unsafe work and doing away the independent health and safety officers. “After a decade of neglect by governments, the labour movement deserves respect.” Jerry Dias commented on the respect shown by Justin Trudeau saying that after getting elected the first group of people he met with was not the business leaders but with the labour movement.

Rachel Notley (Premier of Alberta) – Gave a big thank you to everyone for the tremendous support given for the Alberta Fort McMurray fires, this support was not just monetary but also hands on by Unifor members who helped those who were less able to help themselves. She said it had been 43 years of conservative reign in Alberta but the people spoke and voted in the NDP, a government who stands up for the working people. She will work hard at raising the minimum wage to $15.00 and improve health and safety laws for the province. One of her governments first move was to apologize for the residential schools and they are cooperating with the national enquiry into the murdered and missing aboriginal women.

Hassan Yussuff (President – Canadian Labour Congress) – spoke and thanked his own union Unifor for helping him get elected as the CLC President. He said he has been actively engaged with the labour movement and governments in the interest of working people. In February 2015 the court ruled that the right to strike is a fundamental right and the right to join a union is also a right which he wants to have in the constitution. He said 11 million Canadians do not have workplace pensions and welcomed the raising of the CPP pension after over 50 years. He spoke about lobbying governments to stop the TPP agreement which caters to businesses, he also said that he will push governments to legislate banning asbestos (importing and exporting) which is a known carcinogen. Corporations are taking advantage of undocumented workers and wants to push to make them legal so they can work and pay taxes.

Regional Directors Reports;

Atlantic Region Director Lana Payne said Unifor helped beat the anti worker laws which included Bill 1 in Nova Scotia and Bill 24 in New Brunswick both of which were directed at stripping away collective bargaining rights.

Western Region Director Joie Warnock said our Union is committed to ensure the Notley government in Alberta fulfils its campaign promise to support workers. She also spoke of the struggles of the workers of Local 2301 locked in battle with mining giant Rio Tinto who has refused members the basic respect in the workplace including access to a washroom at the job site. “We don’t go looking for fights, but we don’t back down from one either,” Joie said.

Ontario Region Director Katha Forthier said the far right conservative Tim Hudak was defeated, labour law reform is underway, there is a $15.00 minimum wage campaign and support for long term care and healthcare workers. Katha announced she will not be running for elections for this position and has been assigned as Assistant to the President.

Awards presented were as follows;

Neil Reimer Award – This award is given to a Canadian Citizen or Institution to recognize an outstanding contribution to the public good. The recipient of this award was Cindy Blackstock (Executive Director of First Nations Child and Poverty Caring Society of Canada), for her involvement in bringing to light the racial discrimination of aboriginal children. The services and education provided for these children are far less than other children of Canada, governments have known about the problem but failed to do anything. Cindy turned
the stage over to several children who showed a musical video they had produced in recognition of aboriginal children (the video can be viewed on YouTube titled “Important to Us”). The children gave speeches which moved everyone because they were well spoken for children of such young ages, Mabel Toman-Harvey summed things by say “people can change, and the issues of our past should not determine our future, our skin tone is different but we are all the same on the inside.”

**Nelson Mandela Award** – This award is given to those who have made a significant contribution in advancing human rights and social justice. The recipient was Murray Sinclair (Canadian Senator and former judge). He is the first Aboriginal judge appointed in Manitoba and Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission “Reconciliation will take a long time. We need to be committed to it and we need to persevere,” Sinclair said.

**Bud Jimmerfield Award** – This award is given for a member to recognize their outstanding work on health, safety, environment or workers’ compensation. The recipient was John Millholland from Local 848 based in Sarnia, he said that there are no safe exposure limits which should be zero. John said if he administers poison in very small doses to someone, he will be sent to jail, why then is it not the same when corporations expose workers to hazards does it not apply to them? So if a worker is killed then those responsible should be sent to jail!

A presentation was given about the Social Justice Fund and the work and assistance the fund has provided. There are over 1100 projects in Canada and worldwide which provide help to the under privileged, about one third of our collective agreements have negotiated the fund. We recognize our share to humanity for the youth, women’s shelters, homeless, food banks, disaster relief, Red Cross, etc. At the convention as special guests were two Syrian families who had sought refuge in Canada and had been sponsored by Unifor. We needed 25 volunteers and had received 70 who wanted to help, the assistance will be to help these people settle into our society and was all possible because of our Social Justice Fund.

Unifor members on strike spoke about their workplace Delastek based in Quebec, there’s about 50 members of whom 50% are women and been on strike since April 2015. The employer has openly bullied and threatened workers who say the working conditions are bad and the starting wage is only $10.00 per hour. A collection was arranged from amongst all the delegates in order to help these members get through the tough times.

An emotional speech was given from the Executive of Local 34-O from Ottawa about one of their members Chris Giles who had been terminated and has terminal cancer. Chris had an injury which resulted in him being prescribed pain medication. This medication over due time resulted in Chris taking time off from work and also getting mood swings, the employer Bell terminated his employment and it was found that there was cancer developing within Chris. This has now fully surfaced and he is without any benefits or coverage and is in need of monetary help. His Local has been helping Chris but has come to a point where they no longer can assist him. His executive made a plea for help and a collection was taken which amounted to $15,000.00. Jerry Dias placed a call to the CEO of Bell and explained the details of Chris’s health and termination. After listening to Jerry, Bell has agreed that effective immediately Chris Giles will be reinstated with full benefits.

Thank you for electing me as your Unifor Constitutional Delegate.

In Solidarity,

Jaspal Brar