

ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL (ORC)

Dec 4-5, 2015

Report by: Danny Price, Lisa Contini and Jessica Ridgwell, Ontario Council Delegates

The Ontario Regional Council started off with an Aboriginal smudging ceremony by Candace Lavalley. We then watched a video and slide presentation on “2015 in Review” with all the great events/campaign’s UNIFOR members have accomplished and fought for.

Katha Fortier delivered her director’s report. She thanked and congratulated delegates and members on their work over the past year, including defeating the Harper government. One million more Ontarians voted in the 2015 election than in previous elections. Voting on First Nations reserves also increased 70%.

Fortier also mentioned that 61 UNIFOR families have stepped forward to help Syrian refugees settle in Canada. “This is a project that can really change lives: not only for the refugees, but for those who help them.”

Despite the successes, there are still ongoing concerns. Topping the list is the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the challenge it poses to good jobs, particularly in the auto sector, as well as concerns about supply management, drug patents, Canadian media content and investor rights.

Chris Buckley, the new president of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), addressed Council delegates. He is calling on more UNIFOR locals to join him and his new team in uniting the labour movement in the province. “My goal is to unite the labour movement across Ontario.”

Buckley thanked the national leadership of UNIFOR, the executive to the ORC and delegates from across Ontario for their support during his campaign to be president. He particularly thanked UNIFOR Communications Staff Representative Shannon Devine for her work, announcing that Devine will be his chief of staff at the OFL.

Buckley committed to improving protections for contract workers, making it easier for all workers to join a union, first contract arbitration, making employers responsible for temp agencies and closing the gender salary gap. “For years a huge cloud of uncertainty has hung over working people. We are going to push that cloud aside and finally let some sunshine in for workers in Ontario.” Three areas that Chris will

address are: Changes to the Labour Act, it hasn't been modified or updates for 25 years, long overdue. The gender pay act, pay equity hasn't improved since 1987, 31% of women are still being paid less than their male counterparts and the WSIB, he will work on eliminating the red tape that is making it harder for workers who are injured in their workplaces,

He encourages locals that are not yet affected with the OFL to join and be both a part of these efforts and a united house of labour.

After lunch, we showed respect for all our UNIFOR retirees with a small rally. Retired from the job, but never the fight or our union. Over 450 retirees were in attendance. Retired worker, Gary Parent, spoke on behalf of the retirees. Their sacrifices paved the way for young workers. "It's time to pay back the retirees! Pension COLA, FCA, Ford & GM we want it back!" The retiree's dedication and continued activism is greatly appreciated.

We were then pleased to hear from Katrina Miller about the campaign to defend Hydro One, @KeepHydroPublic. Eighty-three percent of Ontarians support the call to keep Hydro public. Have a say and add your support by signing the petition at keephydropublic.ca. #KeepHydroPublic is our common cause and together we can win this.

There was a short tribute to Jim Stanford, UNIFOR Economist, who is leaving to move to Australia with his family. "Jim we're really going to miss you. Jim we promise not to diss you. Jim the best is what we wish you. Cuz you made our Union strong" bellowed through the halls as we sang him a parody to Solidarity Forever.

UNIFOR is proposing sweeping changes to Ontario labour laws to better reflect the reality of modern work in an era of precarious, low-paying part-time jobs, and to make the process of forming a union more fair. Jim Stanford presented the submission to the Ontario Changing Workplaces Review. UNIFOR is making 43 recommendations that together would make a significant positive difference in the functioning of Ontario labour market. These changes would also improve the lives of working people while boosting the economy as a whole. The proposed changes fall into three main categories:

- Modernize employment standards to reflect today's increasingly precarious workforce.
- Bringing greater fairness to the ability of workers to speak with a collective voice.
- Expanding the tradition of sectorial employment standards to address the specific needs of unique industries and sectors of the economy

The changes proposed by UNIFOR would improve the lives of working people in Ontario. The province as a whole would benefit from such changes, both economically and socially.

The second day of Ontario Regional Council started with a speech from Ontario Minister of Labour, Kevin Flynn. Ontario labour laws are out of date and need to be updated to reflect the realities of today's workplaces. He mentioned that women don't have the same opportunities or make the same money as men and it's past time. "Closing the gender wage gap in Ontario is an act to help end violence against women. It is not simply a women's issue; it's a workplace and societal issue. Ontario should be a province that meets its obligation to address the gender wage gap. Mr. Flynn acknowledged UNIFOR for the dedication we have shown to workers' rights. "We are making progress thanks to you."

Our next guest was Author and Social Justice Activist, Angela Robertson. There was a mixture of sadness and anger here on the eve of Dec 6th. Angela Robertson started her talk with stark stats and analysis; that 1 in 2 women in Canada have experienced a violent act. The cost of violence against women and the resources spent are being done in the wrong place. Violence against women is a silent war. We need government accountability and look at poverty reduction and raising minimum wage. Not just remember, but act. Violence against women is not something happening in someone else's country. It is happening here. Resources should be spent in prevention. Community free from violence is what we should all strive for. Things that can help women leave violence: childcare, better pay, pressure on government who have committed to act.

Next, Jerry Dias addressed the Ontario Regional Council. "There's a little more sunshine since Oct 19th." But that doesn't give us a free ticket to sit back and relax. This is now our time. We need to push for progressing change. We can't take our foot off the gas pedal and gains may now be possible; it's time to play offence for change. It's our collective responsibility to change the Nation and we need to acknowledge how far UNIFOR has come. "We may still be young but we are definitely respected. "Our members have generous hearts & practice solidarity by responding to the Syrian refugee." Dias said to the 61 people/families that have volunteered to assist with the refugee migration. Jerry was at the Paris climate change conference and the sense of urgency was felt in the streets. We need to listen and act on climate change. It's our responsibility to ourselves, our kids and grandkids.

UNIFOR member and newly elected Tracey Ramsey, MP for Essex Windsor was the next speaker. Fresh from her first day in the House of Commons. Tracey graciously thanked all her UNIFOR brothers and sisters for their tremendous support during her campaign. Tracey was selected to be the Trade Critic and pledges to debate on the TPP agreement as a voice for all of labour.

The next speaker was journalist and author Susanne Delacourt. Susanne spoke about her experience writing an e-book about Justin Trudeau, while he was on the campaign trail. Susanne also spoke about the election results, stating that Facebook was a huge part of the election, and the liberals were using it the most effectively. Also Google was keeping track of what people were interested in the campaign, which is the new way of telling and predicting how trends will turn out. With 3 million new voters this year, social media played a big part Susanne stated. And the voters have decided that they aren't consumers.

The last speaker of the conference was the mayor of Oakville Rob Burton. Rob started off by saying his 2 cents about the TPP "The TPP really looks like a prevention regulation and it takes away people's rights" "I hope to hell it does" We need a policy that advances Canada's manufacturing/industrial power.

There were several resolutions and recommendations that were passed. A list of them is attached.

We have also attached a copy of the petition to Keep Hydro Public.

In Solidarity,

Danny Price, Lisa Contini and Jessica Ridgwell