

Unifor National Constitutional Conference Aug 22-26

On Monday, **Peter Kennedy our National Secretary-Treasurer**, who is retiring and was replaced by Bob Orr, spoke about the theme of the convention **"Its Time."** This is our first Constitutional meeting since our founding convention 3 years ago and Unifor has been on the political offensive ever since. Peter Kennedy stated "I am not retiring just aging out, ok retiring from the job but not the struggle in the work that we do." Monday also marked the passage of Jack Layton 5 years ago who co-founded the White Ribbon campaign of violence against women.

National President Jerry Dias was acclaimed and is ready to continue to lead the fight for working people because that's what Unifor does. Jerry spoke about how we organize and build solidarity and use this collective bargaining to show our members our ability to build power in the political realm and use this power to make a difference in the life of our members. In the last 3 years we have gone through over 1 thousand rounds of bargaining. "Corporations that are making large amounts of money in Canada are forced to put back money into our country through our bargaining process. We have 67 new women's advocate positions and training opportunities for aboriginals in the shipbuilding industry. We have fought for pay equity, safety, pensions, wages and preserving jobs in our communities. This is the struggle Unifor is in currently with General Motors of Detroit who want to walk away from job commitments in Oshawa and St Catherine's.

Jerry spoke about how our going on the offensive played a key role in preventing a popular Tim Hudak and his conservatives from bringing anti-worker laws into the province of Ontario. (Tim is now a lobbyist for the real estate industry) Unifors fight with Prime Minister Harper's Conservatives was a crucial victory in removing the "the Bad Man" and giving hope for working families. (Harper is now officially on various corporate boards and co-created his own corporate consulting firm) It has since been revealed by Conservative insiders that the formation of Unifor influence the Conservatives to have an early but longer election, fearing the role of our "Kick Ass Union." Jerry stated, "Do not ever be afraid to fail, be afraid not to try." "We can accomplish anything we want because we have the heart, soul, courage and the wisdom to accomplish this."

Jerry reminded the delegates we are not here to rest on our laurels but attack the status quo because **"Its time"** for a new national Health accord, national child care program, National pharma medicine care program, and universal access to post-secondary education. We need to put 2 million Canadians back to work and rein in the tax dodgers that hid some **\$108 billion dollars** between 2008 and 2015. None of what I just listed is achievable or sustainable if we continue to embrace and ratify corporate investment deals like T.P.P. The Trans Pacific Partnership is designed to engineer global low wages and trap people into precarious work.

Sharan Burrow the General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation addressed Unifor delegates, describing the modern slavery tied into our supply trade systems. Prison labour (china/USA) Child labour (Africa) Exploited, trapped and disposable unpaid migrant labour (South Asia/Middle East). Yes we have it all and Canadians support this through various imported consumption and lack of political will to disengage from trade with corporations and countries that thrive on economic slavery. The economic slaver's capital gain will continue to undermine all of what we cherish as Canadians. Sharan asked would the Samsung CEO's ask their children to work with the unidentified chemicals that are causing mass cancer to Samsung Phone sub-contracted workers?

Shane Wark, Assistant to the President, stated that Canada continues to have a weak recovery since 2009 with Conservative austerity, the collapse of commodity growth and an already reduced manufacturing base. “Canada has record trade deficits and Canadian workers are losing ground through inflation.” Yes 1920 level inequality has returned. The global economic model is broken yet where is the vision from our leaders to strike out on a different path?

I participated in a protest march from our convention to Parliament Hill in support of the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations, where much of it is born out of the 1960’s scoop of native children and cultural suppression. Here in Ottawa you can see the city preparing for our next year’s 150 confederation anniversary. **Cindy Blackstock**, Director of First Nations child and family caring society of Canada stated Canada can truly celebrate 150 years if we turn past the dark colonial chapter of our shared history. Why do Canadians look away at native injustice? We have been trained to believe aboriginal people receive more when actually their children receive only 70% in education & health, then what non-aboriginals receive. Incremental inequality still rules federal government as they conveniently ignore Human Rights Tribunals that have determined structural racism exist in Canada. Cindy wants to “bring this into sharp focus and not turn away from the hard choices that governments make so that others go without.” I agree when Cindy stated “patriotism is lifting the country up by its pain and not painting the flag on your face.”

You may have heard **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** addressed the Unifor convention for some 20 minutes. We went from a Prime Minister who divided Canadians while trying to crush the collective voice of union members to one that made it a priority to visit with the Canadian Labour of Congress first before meeting with the Banks & Chamber of Commerce after his election. Justin Trudeau stated he “valued working with Jerry Dias, who wears his values on his sleeves and we are glad to be a solid partner with workers.” “We share common ground with Unifor for labour is a solution not a problem.” “Our larger relationship is built on bed rock of common goals, frank and honest discussions and never forgetting who we are fighting for.” **“Better is always possible.”**

When **Premier Rachel Notley** of Alberta spoke at the convention the quote “hell would freeze over before a NDP gov’t would get elected in Alberta” came to mind. When the right of center vote split, it allowed a strong progressive Women to end 43 years of Conservative rule. Rachel Notley thanked Unifor for our political support and our generous funds (\$667,000) toward helping the people of Fort McMurray after the fire storm. Alberta has passed the toughest controls on pay day loans (let’s hope other provinces follow) and the first provincial government to commit to a living minimum wage of \$15. Energy workers are now covered under all Provincial Health and Safety laws and Workers compensation. The NDP are ending the regressive flat tax and their business strategy is to ship less raw resources in favour of more finished products. Rachel Notley stated “Alberta needs to become a climate change leader and through economic diversification we are getting out of coal and investing in renewal able energy.” It’s time for us to act on protecting working family’s economic hope in conjunction with protecting their water, air and land.”

There was so much more discussed and demonstrated during this conference that I would always encourage our members to make monthly visits to the National www.Unifor.org web site.

In Solidarity

1st Vice President Maurice Kenny