

Friday, May 25, 2007

Put money behind Women's Task Force Recommendations

Speakers on the floor were unequivocal that a commitment to fund the National Women's Task Force recommendations must be made for the work of the committee to have a lasting impact. Many also pointed out that the initiative must not only build power for women, but build power for the full diversity of women including women of colour, disabled, transgendered, queer and young women.

The recommendations call for two new national officer positions and four new regional VP positions to ensure minimum representation of women on the National Executive Board. However as one delegate said: "This is just the starting point to ensure there are women sitting at our provincial and federal boards. Once that occurs, the real work will begin."

Speakers from the floor made a number of recommendations, including the setting up of an audit to measure progress, a model for smaller locals to implement the Task Force recommendations, and firm direction on how CUPE can campaign for effective legislative changes to address rights issues in workplaces.

The Task Force launched its survey work on International Women's Day in 2006. Over 4,653 CUPE members responded to the survey, making it the most extensive consultation ever held by CUPE. When asked why he was a co-chair of the Task Force, CUPE National President Paul Moist responded that his role has been to provide resources and put the full weight of the union behind the work of the Task Force.



Members of CUPE National Women's Task Force

Hampton: Vote for politics of hope, vision

Ontario New Democrat leader Howard Hampton showed delegates why his party has got to be the choice of working people who believe in public health care, a cleaner environment, a new school funding formula, the ability to engage in collective bargaining without intimidation and a halt to the downloading of public services.

"I believe this election is going to be about fairness for working families," said Hampton. "The Liberals are out of touch with working people. And with the Liberal and Conservative records on privatization, this election is also about public services, which are increasingly at risk."

On health care, Hampton said that people are paying for too many services out of their own pocket and that government funds should go into health care, not P3 hospitals and Bay Street profits. He said the Liberals had broken their promise to shut down coal-fired plants, and broken their promise to fix the school funding formula.

"And when it comes to municipal services, downloading hasn't ended, it is happening through the back door. Public services are just as much at risk under McGuinty as they were under the former Conservative government," he added.

See over for more

Young Workers Elected

Two vacancies were filled on the Young Workers Committee:

- 1. Dayn Gray, Local 4207***
- 2. Rob Deonarine, Local 3902***

Rather than buy into McGuinty's targeting of John Tory and the politics of fear, Hampton urged delegates to vote for the politics of hope and vision and support those New Democratic candidates who stand for everything that CUPE Ontario and its locals value.



Equality

Harper's anti-equality agenda must be stopped

Wielding the power of a minority government, Stephen Harper's Conservatives have wreaked havoc with the country's equality rights and must be stopped, says Sue Genge, of the Canadian Labour Congress's Women and Human Rights Department.

Speaking at a sold-out Equality Luncheon, Genge said that the shutting down of the Court Challenges Program has been a huge blow to equality-seeking activists. It provided funds for individuals to undertake challenges to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms such as the one that CUPE pursued with Nancy Rosenberg to challenge pension restrictions for same-sex couples.

The Harper Conservatives have abolished the Law Reform Commission of Canada, slashed the Status of Women Canada budget, cancelled child care agreements and stopped funding of women's groups that engage in research or advocacy. None of these actions were in Harper's election platform.

Genge asked delegates to imagine what more Harper will do if he is handed a majority government in the next election. "The Conservative agenda is to limit information and block progressive research, limit advocacy and access to government, and limit access to justice. At the same time, it is refusing to move on important programs like child care and pay equity." She added that people can track the Harper agenda at www.womensequality.ca

Aboriginal right to protest lost in media coverage

Onondaga Nation activist Lindsay Bomberry of Six Nations Eel clan says that Aboriginal people have the right to protest to defend their rights, something often lost in the biased media coverage of events.

"People want to kick us off the land in Caledonia because we are taking a stand," said Bomberry, a speaker at the Equality Luncheon. "Just as other groups have the right to strike and to protest, so too do we have that equal right. Our protests are done in a peaceful manner under the direction of our traditional government.

It has been one year since Aboriginal people moved to stop the development of land that was part of a land tract granted to Mohawks. Originally 675,000 acres, it is now 45,000 acres because "the land has been appropriated or given away by people without authority, namely colonists," said Bomberry.

"There is a lot of disinformation in these highly tense situations, mainly because media is the filter for information," said Bomberry. Reporters don't often take a very balanced look at what is happening. For example, the situation at Caledonia is not about the local residents; it's about our nation-to-nation agreements with the Canadian government."

Slavery here first recorded in 1628

Equality Luncheon delegates got a primer on the existence of slavery in North America, including this country's colonies before it became a dominion, from civil and human rights researcher Lowell Bowen.

Bowen, who is also a TV and film actor, said that the first recorded purchase of a slave was in 1628 in New France. The slave was a seven-year old boy. In 1783, loyalists brought 2,000 slaves to Canada and colonies of slave owners continued to grow in Upper and Lower Canada and the Maritimes.

"There were efforts by abolition groups to stop slavery but emancipation is a gradual process," he told delegates. "For anywhere from 10 to 25 years, you would still have to work for your master, and your children would be in bondage."

Bowen described how a series of papers written in 1712 by a slave owner named Willie Lynch became the manual on how to keep African people enslaved, both physically and mentally. "The condition of our people today is due to a scientific blueprint that allowed slavery to flourish. It bred mistrust, codes of silence and ways of resistance to authority that is hundreds of years old," he said.