

## 2009 CEP Western Region Conference

By Pearl Bainbridge

I thank the membership for sending me to the 2009 CEP Western Region Conference, September 14 to 16 in Winnipeg. The conference was themed 'Building Solutions'.

Actually, events began on September 13. On the foggy and soggy grounds of the Kingswood Golf Course at the annual CEP Spina Bifada –Hydrocephalus golf tournament, where brothers and sisters from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C , as well as the law firm of Myers Weinberg and guests raised approx. \$9000 to help those suffering of Spina Bifada and Hydrocephalus in Manitoba.

The workshop I participated in named 'Building Strategic Power' focused on development of an organizing culture at the local level - How to set up an organizing training program – as well as an organizing campaign based on 'Ten Principles'. These include one on one communication, attention to detail, a large active inside organizing committee, a strong understanding of workers' issues and importance of a clear unified message as well as 'inoculation' against company tactics – answering the 'tough' questions.

The tenth principle, which reads, "Building a union doesn't end with winning the vote" made me think of our Canstar brothers and sisters not represented on the executive board. I suggest the board work toward their inclusion.

### GUEST SPEAKERS AND NATIONAL ADDRESS:

During opening speeches September 14, several statements by speakers such as Julie Grand U of M, Labour Studies professor spoke on the subject of organizing workers. She said that we as unions have failed to organize smarter. She said full time workers, forced from real jobs into temporary and self-employment jobs, because government policies have isolated workers and encouraged growth in the employment of precarious jobs. She suggests we put more energy into fighting against neo-liberal policies, organize the marginalized, specifically the youth and precarious workers. She added precarious workers have replaced the so-called 'unorganizable' and that we are reverting to where we started in the 1920's when industrial workers were marginalized.

President Dave Coles echoed in his address. Workers have lost JOBS, HOMES AND PENSIONS and with that, we have lost credibility with our membership. Our union has no choice but to become involved in the political struggle and we must communicate this to our membership because the political STRUCTURE OF OUR SOCIETY is JUST AS IMPORTANT AS DEFENDING OUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS. Brother Coles said; WE

KNOW HOW TO ENGAGE IN THE BATTLE AROUND THE TABLE", but without the economic influence "WE HAVE TO CHANGE FOCUS AND ENGAGE TO BECOME PLAYERS IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF CANADA."

He asked us "How did it happen that we bought into the economic model where we allowed companies to run with our pension plans. We let the market decide. Sixty percent of our Western Pulp and Paper workers work for companies that are under bankruptcy protection. Pension plans underfunded by some 1.4 Billion dollars and members 20 years into their retirement await potential cuts to their pension.

About bargaining collective agreements, Gaetan Menard, CEP, Secretary Treasurer insisted wages are not the cause of companies having to close their doors, yet companies use the economic crisis to propose such bargaining cuts. A worker is not responsible for the economic crisis, but it is our collective responsibility especially on the local level to organize the unrepresented worker. It is the lifeblood of our union.

I appreciated Premier Gary Doer's commitment to speaking at the conference, in light of his tight schedule following his appointment announcement in Washington. What especially impressed me was his patience and respect for the panel discussion in progress, waiting and listening until the panelist completed his presentation.

In his address, Mr. Doer said he was proud to be able to raise the minimum wage every year they have been in office. About the media in relation to consumer habits in this economy, there is great concern. He said this government supports the CRTC in giving back to the media in exchange for keeping local media open. Concerning print media Mr. Doer said, "We get hell for advertising too much and we get hell for not advertising too much. "

With regard to workers compensation laws there is progress. He said it used to be when a worker washed windows on the outside, they were not covered and when they worked inside the building, they were covered.

About health and safety in the workplace, Gary Doer said there was great concern when they first came to office. Now health and safety inspectors in Manitoba are triple in number. Another accomplishment the Premier was very proud of was farmers' inclusion in the Employment Standards Act.

#### PANEL AND WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS ON BARGAINING LAWS AND ORGANIZING.

Participants on the 'Bargaining' panel said, there is no point to be in a hurry to bargain in these economic times. With similar sentiment, Professor, Julie Grand spoke on the importance of militancy in bargaining. It is important because it is a fact that unions

seeking peaceful compromise strategies receive less in comparison to those who choose militant strategies.

Currently CEP is working hard to become the alternative union of choice for construction workers, because 80% of those workers are unorganized. In Toronto Amanda Frystuck one of 8 young workers (30 and under) is proof that with a solid understanding of workers issues and laws, organizing call centre workers is possible and CEP is proving to make these drives successful.

About an organizing culture at the local level, we can take example from brother Otto of local 433 on ideas of how to engage the membership. As well as training three organizers, they have set up an Organizing Incentive program that pays anyone a substantial amount for providing a tip on potential organizing targets. Organizing is on the agenda of every union meeting and mentioned in all their newsletter and website publications.

In addition, a brother named Dave had this to share with us during discussion in the 'building strategic power' workshop. When electing delegates to conferences their local makes sure, they choose a brother or sister who has not been active in the union and/or even attended a union general membership meeting. As well, every new worker at the start of their employment in the union shop is educated on whom they should look to for as well as the CEP historical record of accomplishment. We should take example.

In conclusion, as the e-board needs to reflect 'young' workers in the demographic make-up of our union, I resolve that we propose local 191 set up a Young workers committee and/or special representation on the e-board by way of a new article in our local's constitution.

Respectfully submitted,

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