



REPORT BY CINDY GAROFALO

THE SOCIAL DELEGATE WORKSHOP



The workshop on the Social Delegate explored opportunities for members to extend a helping hand to coworkers beyond the structure of the collective agreement. The Social Delegate, also referred to as a Union counsellor, provides a referral service to family, friends and coworkers who are struggling with issues in their lives. The Labour Movement, and Union counsellors, have played a major role in having afflictions like alcoholism recognized as illnesses and health issues. Employers, many of whom were recovering alcoholics themselves, began to see the benefits of self-help systems within the workplace, and Employee Assistance Programs developed as a result.

While Union counsellors do not act as therapists or social workers, they are trained to help coworkers find alternative avenues for resolving problems in their lives. This is a way to build solidarity beyond the bargaining of collective agreements and grievance handling, and addresses members' welfare.

There are three major roles of the Union counsellor: listening, referral work, and prevention.

The male and female participants in the workshop discussed openly the issues they faced themselves, as well as the more prevalent issues that have surfaced in their workplaces. It was obvious that mental health and stress were high on the list of concern that people deal with regularly. The effects extended beyond the individual member to coworkers and family that had to deal with the consequences of the problem.

Respecting other people's choices and actions, and not judging, and by showing empathy to

fellow Union members for their plight, allows a level of relief and unburdening that may facilitate a more effective recovery. The key to success involves the early recognition of problems and Union counsellors are urged to develop prevention programs within their workplaces.

Beyond the workshops, delegates to the conference were treated to excellent presentations on globalization and bargaining for equality from Maude Barlow, Judy Rebick, Marie-Danielle Lapointe and Cecilie Counts. A dinner on Saturday evening provided good food and even better conversation and entertainment.

Many thanks to the rank-and-file members that elected me to attend this very worthwhile event.

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Garofalo