



Friends,

I need to start a little different this time, thinking aloud about everything that our members, staff, and this National Executive (NE) have lived through in our positions of union leadership, with so many unfortunate firsts, including emerging from a trusteeship, the closure of CPC Vegreville, navigating our members through the Phoenix pay system debacle, never ending collective bargaining with Treasury Board, and now a pandemic, I need to start my report by tipping my proverbial hat to all the activists and staff of CEIU. So many of you, struggling with your own pay issues, your own challenges, and yet stepping up in ways that leave us all in awe. Your tenacity, dedication, and empathy has taken advocacy in this union to another level over the past three and a half years. And when I look around (our virtual!) NE, I see that same dedication around the table. I do not know if in my lifetime I will again be honoured to serve alongside individuals who have been so committed to putting the needs of our members first. It has been a privilege to be a part of this union, and to stand amongst all of you.

My last report to the National Executive was in September of 2019. We meet in person every six months, and due to us missing our winter meeting as a result of Covid-19, the NE is only 'formally' meeting now. I had previously completed my National Executive Vice-President (NEVP) report for the last scheduled in person meeting of our NE. I want to clear up a misconception however I think many of our members have, some of you who perhaps are reading my report – while we are only scheduled to meet twice a year in person, the NE meets far more regularly via other means, and during this pandemic, has been meeting nearly every single week to discuss and strategize on issues affecting our members.

Over the course of the six months between September 2019 and March 2020, I endeavored in my role as NEVP to complete the commitments laid out to the delegates of the 2017 CEIU Triennial Convention. This meant focusing back in to complete the work being done by our staff on grievance backlog reduction, working collaboratively with the employer to complete (in some cases) decades long job description grievances, and moving forward on innovating new ways to engage and support our members at the local level. To that end, we have made significant gains on these fronts, by making progress on the backlog, introducing new training manuals for our members created by our staff, and offering new kinds of training and support to staff and activists alike.

Internally at CEIU, in my responsibility of overseeing the majority of our staff, I completed CEIU's first Working from Home Policy as well as made significant progress on our Employment Equity Plan – a follow up to our previously completed Employment Equity Policy – working collaboratively with our staff union, COPE. I am tremendously proud of the work being done in house at CEIU to improve working conditions for our staff. In addition to our previously completed Unionware Standard Operating Procedures Manual, we have also now introduced an Administrative Operating Procedures Manual for CEIU staff – an essential tool for new and seasoned staff alike to compliment the previously updated CEIU Policies and Procedures Manual – all of these new tools and resources that did not previously exist at CEIU to support our staff. It brings me great pride that we are successfully seeing through mandates that have been tasked to CEIU leadership going back in some cases to convention resolutions passed over 20 years ago.



I will not, as I have in some past reports, go over my activities list in more detail. There are, however, a couple of highlights that warrant mentioning from September 2019 to March 2020. Along with Debbie Morris, NVP for NFLD/NS, I had the opportunity to visit several worksites in her region. Whether it was getting lost navigating back roads or driving hours to visit a small group of members, or discovering delicious delicacies only available locally, this was one of the best experiences I have had in my role as NEVP. I know firsthand how much our members appreciate these visits, and that it is visits like this that have the most impact on me in my role. Seeing and feeling and experiencing the struggles in the workplace, right there on the shop floor, brings a lens to our advocacy that is invaluable. Thank you to Debbie for organizing this trip and for not getting too frightened as I got us lost throughout the province.

I also want to highlight the work that CEIU has been doing with the EI working group from the Canada Labour Congress. As a result of this partnership, in no small part thanks to Vanesa Miller's, NVP BC/YT, participation on our behalf on that body, we have re-established critical relationships with EI advocacy groups that have allowed us a solidarity with community partners that we have not availed ourselves to at CEIU in a couple decades. As one long serving EI advocate from the Prairies said, who has worked in the industry for over 40 years, CEIU is back. This relationship recently afforded us a platform with the respective ESDC Minister's to discuss impacts on staff of legislative requirements and gave us the opportunity we otherwise would unlikely have had access to, to advocate on behalf of our members politically, with many outside voices supporting us.

I am also happy that early this year, we came to an agreement on collective bargaining with our staff union, COPE. Many lessons were learned throughout this process, and we were pleased when COPE voted to ratify the agreement. Thank you to Jacques Perrin and Fabienne Jean-Francois for serving alongside me on behalf of CEIU at the table, and for the support of the National President and the entire NE throughout this process.

My final trip prior to the pandemic, was to my home region BC/YT for their Presidents Conference. I had many opportunities to speak with our members about the events occurring in the workplaces. We held a rally to support our bargaining team and had many long and involved discussions with our members about advocacy within the union and the needs of our locals.

And then I got back to Ottawa, and the whole world changed.

On my return home, in mid-March, as concerns with the pandemic grew, and uncertainty surrounded the risks, we made the decision to close down CEIU offices and have our staff work from home. We were the first PSAC component to ask our staff to work from home, implementing the decision even prior to PSAC. Despite many challenges, we moved quickly to address ergonomic and other needs of our employees, and to ensure that membership support would continue for our members. We have continued to work closely with our CEIU/COPE Health and Safety Committee – for which I co-chair on behalf of CEIU management – and with our staff to ensure their continued safety and comfort during this pandemic, and as we begin to discuss a return to the offices strategy.

While we felt comfortable and proud of our decisions internally on behalf of our staff, the same could not unilaterally be said for all of our members employers.



IRCC was the first to close shop and send employees home. The discussions with the employer at a national level, in all fairness to IRCC, were almost refreshing. Labour/management relations were struggling prior to Covid-19 because of a failure of required consultation on the part of the employer regarding a change to core hours leading to CEIU filing a policy grievance against the department. However, at the start of the pandemic, IRCC erred on the side of caution and put the safety of their employees first. Over the course of the past several months, many discussions with IRCC have been ongoing. They have had issues and delays getting necessary IT equipment such as laptops and cell phones to staff. There were some health and safety concerns regarding staff supporting asylum house initiatives. Presently, working with the IRCC NVP Paul Croes, the employer is consulting us extensively on re-opening plans (dates as yet to be determined). Additionally, as IRCC begins virtual citizenship ceremonies CEIU has requested a series of consultations to discuss some of our concerns.

The relationship with the IRB leading to Covid-19 was a bit different. For the first time in known history, the IRB was working collaboratively with us by forming ad-hoc committees to discuss multiple job descriptions and providing collaborative training with the union on job description content and classification. While concerns remain outstanding with respect to equity and ethics – in particular in relation to the protections of our PM-06's and our unanswered concerns in relation to uncompensated overtime, we did feel the IRB leadership was working with us in good faith. Thanks in no small part to the work of Christine Price, IRB NVP, we were also making progress on mental health and other important files. IRB however also chose to put the safety of its employees first and made a decision early on during the pandemic to send staff home. Currently we have been consulted thoroughly at the national level health and safety on the plans for a safe and gradual return to the workplaces, some of which has already commenced. Ongoing discussions about so called 'pilot' positions remain outstanding and will continue. We will also be engaging community partners who advocate for immigration and asylum seekers to discuss our concerns with virtual refugee hearings taking place at the IRB in the coming weeks.

This of course, leaves Service Canada. Prior to Covid-19, CEIU was working closely with the employer on addressing grievance backlogs, our numerous concerns with administrative investigations, and had an ad-hoc working group to address safety issues in Service Canada Centers (SCCs). We were stressing certain topics, like unfair and inequitable discipline of employees, equal access to flexible schedules, overtime distribution, and the necessity of safety measures such as plexiglass for front facing offices. We had begun discussions with the intention of forming more working groups to address internal harassment and conflict resolution.

And then Covid hit. Almost immediately, the security of our members working in client facing offices became heightened. Some offices reported clients getting into fist fights. In one office a Purel station was thrown. In others – too many – our members were being spat at by an increasingly desperate clientele as the number of Covid-19 cases increased, and with-it layoffs. And then the death counts. Many of our members, and staff, were touched with the death of loved ones. Some of our own members passed away in their homes, isolated from family and friends.



I think, going back to my earlier comments in my report, that a sense of responsibility and protectiveness came over so many of us at CEIU in a way that we hadn't experienced. I want to state, unequivocally, that in order to advocate for our members, our union became more agile and sophisticated than we have been in many years and we learned new ways to advocate for our members from a position of strength. From work refusals, to political pressure on Parliament Hill, to the President of the Treasury Board, our ESDC Ministers, right down to the ADM's and local management, our union operated as one voice in demanding safe working conditions for our members. If you had asked me six months ago if there was ever a time I thought SCC's would actually close, I'd have laughed.

I want to be clear on something – our union never asked for the SCC's to close. But we demanded safe working conditions. And those were not provided, leaving many of our members with no choice but to invoke their right to refuse dangerous work. And at some point, finally realizing their inability to keep their employees safe, it was Service Canada that made the decision to temporarily close the centers.

For the past several months, we have met on a weekly basis with senior ESDC management. We have demanded safety measures such as security and plexiglass before we agree that worksites are safe for re-entry. These discussions have not gone, I will say, ideally. But I am proud of the advocacy that our members receive. And we will continue to work with the employer to ensure the security of all employees and challenge them when transparency and consultation are not a priority.

We have just this month agreed to a new labour/management consultation table nationally for the remainder of the pandemic. Along with Cliff Groen, I will co-chair these meetings which will enable our union to revisit non-Covid related issues of importance to our members in a more timely way.

So too have we adapted to the new world internally at CEIU. Our staff have already delivered virtual training to our members. We are providing staff with the tools, training and resources needed to adapt to this new environment of engaging and training our activists. And while our offices remain closed, staff are working hard remotely for our members. This has not been without its challenges, but we have put in temporary measures to address issues until we can return to the workplaces.

Covid of course also had the effect of the PSAC and its components having to postpone our conventions. I share in the frustration and disappointment this has caused our elected incoming NVPs as well as our currently serving NE members, never mind Eddy and myself. I would argue that CEIU has been disproportionately affected by this situation considering that our mandate began early as a result of our special convention in 2014 to remove us out of Trusteeship, and the ways in which we alone elect our NVP's prior to our triennial convention. Please know that every option was considered and weighed in the best interest of our members. I want to thank everyone for their solidarity and understanding as we work through the next year together. Because together is the only way that we can move forward in the face of such unforeseen challenges on behalf of our members.

I want to take this opportunity to remind our members to escalate Phoenix situations through their RUO or NVP's as more serious cases emerge or arise. We must continue to pressure the employer on this topic.



In my role overseeing the majority of the CEIU national committees, let me take a moment to commend the National Women's Committee for their ongoing efforts throughout the pandemic to engage and support the women of CEIU. As well, I want to give an enormous shout out to the national, grassroots, AED working group. Your petition will be brought to the floor of the House of Commons thanks to your advocacy and hard work. Two of our employers have agreed to implement AED's and we are currently applying pressure at multiple points on the employer at Service Canada to follow suit.

Operationally, we continue to work on an updated handbook for local activists, and on our internal communications strategies, including our national newsletter and ongoing efforts with our websites.

There has been so much heart break in the world that some days it has felt like too much. From the shootings in Nova Scotia, to the RCMP shooting of an Indigenous man in New Brunswick, the shooting of an Indigenous woman by Edmundston police, and the murder by police in Minnesota of George Floyd, it has been clear that we as leaders need to step up. In response to a worldwide call to action in support of black lives, to anti-oppression, and to creating systemic changes, CEIU has a role to play that must go beyond a supportive dialogue. To that end, after spending time listening to the HRRR committee members, to many of our members and staff, as well as furthering my own exposure and education on these topics, we are working to create tangible changes at CEIU. We look forward to anti-oppression and anti-racism training, on an ongoing basis, that will be provided to all CEIU staff. I look forward to the development of new policies, both internally and politically, as well as resources and education for our activists, being part of our solutions. I will report further on this and make recommendations to the Service Delivery Committee of the NE.

In closing, I need to give special recognition to my amazing new Executive Assistant, Gina Corbiere, who was hired only days after a pandemic had hit, but who hit the ground running. Without Gina's constant ability to stay two steps ahead of me, I can guarantee I would be a far less effective NEVP. To Eddy, I can only say that no matter the topics we disagree on, at the end of the day, we continue to come together in the name of our members. Thank you for listening to me, actioning on my concerns, being open to new ideas, challenging me on my ideas, and for always stressing the importance of mental health on all of us here at CEIU.

My thoughts remain with our members, our activists, and our NE. Thank you for your dedication and hard work during these unprecedented times. Please do not forget to take time for yourselves. And stay safe.

In solidarity,

Crystal Warner
National Executive Vice-President