

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT TO THE OCTOBER 2020 NE MEETING

Dear members, colleagues, and friends:

As the isolation, working from home and physical distancing continues under various public health guidelines across Canada, it has now been many months where we have been unable to see one another face-to-face.

With the 2nd wave upon us in some provinces and which will most likely be worse than the 1st one, will we be asked to again, go back to where we were in March, were we isolate in our homes and where non essential businesses will be shut down. I hope it won't come to that, but everyone needs to be mindful that this pandemic is not going away anytime soon.

What is clear is that our work has been critical in this global crisis. Despite shutting down its borders, Canada still pursues immigration, including international students and migrant workers and has a responsibility towards asylum seekers – work that relies on our members. Despite a global pandemic forcing the temporary closure and restriction of in-person services for Service centres, EI, CPP, OAS and other programs delivered by our members, it has been proven to be essential parts of the social safety net, and our members are there doing the work everyday. Despite a massive, sudden, and unplanned shift to remote work, our members in call centres, on the front end, and throughout the departments are there, delivering services to Canadians.

At this time, we would have had our Convention where we were gearing up to see one another and gather in solidarity, envisioning a new cycle for our union and what that would mean for our working conditions, our rights and how we organize more broadly for social justice.

However, we have had to take a major step back in delaying the CEIU Convention until August 2021 – but as I'm sure you all understand, this was a necessary step because ultimately the health and safety of our members, our staff, our workplaces and our communities depends on it.

Instead, we are preparing for another year in this holding pattern, facing the fears that the pandemic brings and all the hopes and dreams we had within the labour movement; postponing Convention doesn't have to mean giving up but it does mean rethinking how we'll organize around the new issues that arise from unexpected long-term telework, from maxing out 699 leave, and gradually returning in some of the workplaces, as well as mental health issues that members may be facing. The myth of the cushy public service job seems stark in comparison.

It has been a hard setup for many unions across Canada to face the postponement not only of the structure of our democratic process, but also of our opportunities to see one

another, get together in the same space and have meaningful social exchanges in person that have historically helped us build our movement.

This is a setback for sure! But like many setbacks, it can allow us to sharpen our focus, revisit our objectives, shift our trajectory, and of course, regroup so that we can continue to be Stronger Than Ever!

The employer continues to take advantage of the ongoing devotion of the public service. A workforce that is still affected by pay issues, that still shows up to work with or without adequate PPE, with guidelines not always respected by the public. With plans of integration of worksites, we must continue to raise questions, which your national leadership is doing at every opportunity when we meet with the employer, now more than ever. This pandemic has no known time of when it will be over, if ever.

The decade following the Spanish Flu was among the most progressive in Canadian history and it is a time when we witnessed a flourishing of the labour movement. We hope that this movement will involve all the intersections that we need to address for true solidarity and allyship. But with everything happening with this pandemic, it does not end here.

The upsurge of outrage and resistance in the face of police brutality and the widely publicized murder of George Floyd has not only driven home the point that Black Lives Matter, but further shown us how evident racism is, and how important it is that we not be complicit of that within our movement. Your leaders have spoken out with a solidarity statement and the HRRR Committee has also made a point of ensuring that we do not remain silent on this issue. Our colleagues' lives and well-being depend on it, and the work we do to defend our members' rights is intimately linked to our work toward social justice. We must continue, we must remain committed to ending racism and all forms of oppression. We have a lot of work to do. We need to follow and support the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Take cues from Black people and offer them support and be part of the solution and not part of the problem. The unfairness, the hatred, the injustice and the inequity must stop once and for all.

The chaos happening within our very own PSAC house has been in the news. Addressing systemic racism starts within. Real or perceived systemic racism should not exist. The PSAC National President, Chris Aylward, in a statement wrote that he is committed to putting the union on a path that will start a process of healing. He also added that the PSAC will create a properly staffed oppression prevention team to bolster the work of the current Oppression Prevention Coordinator. This, he says, will lead to more training and education. He also stated that that the union will also create an 'anti-racism committee'.

Each and everyone of us must and can be part of the solution. We need to educate ourselves, identify as anti-racist and make it clear that we will not tolerate any form of racism, including racist jokes and slurs.

With the resignation of the PSAC NEVP Magali Picard, the PSAC Alternate NVP steps into that role. And with that, CEIU now has one of its own at the reign of the PSAC. Our

very own Sister, Sharon DeSousa, a CEIU member, and past Regional Executive Vice-President for Ontario, becomes the PSAC NEVP.

On behalf of the National Executive and the CEIU membership, I would like to welcome Sister DeSousa in her new role, which, without a doubt, I know that she will be a great asset. With her knowledge and dedication, the membership will continue to be well represented. I also wish to thank Sister Picard for her activism and hard work in different roles in the union for so many years and wish her the very best in her future endeavours.

The announcement by the government for a universal childcare program which is something that unions have been fighting for so many years, is never too late to implement. Such program would offer a much-needed break to families with young children. There are numbers of single mothers out there raising their kids, as well as single fathers, and for them, as well as for the 2-parent families, such program would be a huge relief and could not come soon enough.

After more than two and a half years of negotiations, the PA agreement has been ratified by the membership. The monetary compensation that this new agreement brings is not the only important piece of the puzzle. The agreement provides for crisis intervention for call centre employees, a new caregiving leave provision and domestic violence leave. The establishment of a joint committee to review the use of Indigenous languages in the public service is also welcomed. Thank you to all the members that have voted.

The pandemic has shown us the true character and strength of our members' work and the value of that work. When the pandemic hit, the first thing that happened was the increase of workload for our members within EI programs with the influx of applications from Canadians. Our members have dealt with a higher volume of calls in call centres than ever before and have found themselves on the front lines of a pandemic that is both historically unprecedented and has socially catalyzed us to push the envelope.

This Union is very lucky to have such amazing activists and leaders among us. All the union officers, and elected leaders have worked around the clock and throughout the pandemic, ensuring that all our members' concerns are heard.

Our staff has also shown yet again their devotion and dedication to CEIU, and I would like to thank all of them for their ongoing work and going above and beyond during this unprecedented time while adjusting to a shift to remote work.

Thank you as well to all the members who shared their concerns; we could not do this work without you.

We cannot gather, but we can connect. We cannot meet, but we can organize.

When the decision was made to be more transparent and accountable to our members, and create a national newsletter at CEIU, we did not anticipate that it could be a vehicle for communications that could ever replace conversations at work, AGMs or other ways

of getting together; and it doesn't. However, little did we know that those structures would be altered by the pandemic. With the lost of our Political and Communications Officer, we are hoping to resume to writing a newsletter in the near future in order to reach out, spark conversations, and let you know that your union is here for you

Your union is a family, and what matters to you matters to us. Please reach out to your local, to your union officers, to your union representatives and your union leadership. We want to hear from you. Because, without its members, the union would not exist! And without our membership, CEIU would never be Stronger than Ever!

I could not write this report without thanking the National Executive for their devotion and commitment to the membership. We all work hard and give number of hours of our time to ensure our members are well served and I want to thank every one of you for that!

And to my sidekick, Sister Warner, I want to end by saying that we may have our ups and downs, and do not always agree on things, but we are both there for the betterment of our membership. You devote a great deal of time to ensure that our members are well served and for that I want to thank you.

Be safe everyone!

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eddy Bourque', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eddy Bourque
National President