



BC/YT NVP Report

The 2019/2020 year has been active for CEIU BCYT. We have held training, the first joint presidents conference with our CEIU Western regions, and filed a lot of grievances on a variety of issues.

Increasingly, during the last year we are facing unprecedented attention on our workloads, on our ethics and our capacity as activists. The Employer continues to focus their attention on what they deem are behavioural issues without addressing the culture that they created which fosters the environment we work in. They fail to trust our members and as a result our workplaces suffer low morale.

We face continued disrespect in bargaining and with Phoenix. We have now surpassed the four year point with Phoenix and we are no closer to having the issue fixed than we were when the system launched. To add insult to injury this governments response is to consider Ceridian as a viable option to replace phoenix. It is unacceptable that despite the fact that our members go to work each day, they still have the ongoing stress as to whether or not they will be paid accurately, on time, or at all. Payday Mondays became a game of Russian roulette. If the system is even available for us to check our pay stubs as the rest of the country attempts to do the same. By the time BCYT is logging on the system is often barely operational. Countless grievances have been filed on Phoenix in BC. These continue to make their way through the grievance process with limited success.

Across all three departments we have seen increased levels of threats, whether they are verbal or in person. The Employer regardless of department has been woefully slow to respond and in may cases incidents have shown how vastly underprepared we are across the country for threats of, or acts of violence. These issues have been discussed with the Employer regionally and nationally as we recognized the true risk to our members working the front line.

Health and Safety continues to be a focus regionally. We are dealing with the ongoing challenges of threats issued, whether it is over the phone, in person, or simply with unannounced acts of violence. All our Departments have been woefully unequipped for the situations that have arisen in the last few years. As we have pushed at the health and safety committees and union management

meetings we have seen a shift in focus from reaction to the process of prevention. This is critical as we begin to better understand the impacts of migration patterns and air travel on the globalization of illness. I continue to advocate to ensure that our members are safe in their workplaces. Whether that is the airport assisting with landings, on the front line in an in person center or interviewing and assisting with refugee applicants. The work our members do is vital and they deserve to be safe doing so.

The corona virus has once again brought this concern to the forefront. Nationally there has been ongoing discussions on how this will be addressed. The changing information has resulted in changed policy and it is the hope that from this, protocols can be established as to how we best deal with these real concerns as they arise.

The Duty to Accommodate process remains a difficult process for our members to navigate and it often seems like “no” is the go-to answer before “yes” is ever explored. It’s a continual process to educate our employers on their obligations. Accommodations for those with mental health concerns continue to be some of the most difficult to get in place. A lot of the time the functional limitations of mental health concerns do not fit well on forms. They change depending on stressors and it’s difficult to quantify what a functional limitation of depression is. Numerous grievances have been filed in 2019 on this issue. In most cases we have been able to resolve the DTA requests once these have been filed. Often the grievance has become the catalyst for the Employer to focus and put a concentrated effort in to looking at what was happening in that office and how it can be fixed.

At the Service Canada Regional Labour Management table we are scheduled for joint training on the DTA process in mid-March. The hope is that by having this training we will be coming to a joint understanding of the DTA process, how it is working in the WT and what each of us can do to improve the process for the members.

Mental health continues to be a focus of each of the Departments nationally but often the policies implemented are not reviewed with a lens of impact to our members. So, while we modernize and focus on fast production there is little to no focus on what the actual effect on our members are. Seemingly small changes, like workloads that auto populate with more work as soon as you complete items take away sense of accomplishment leading to feelings of depression and futility.

When they are pressured for more work, when they are told to talk to colleagues less, when they are reduced to inventory reduction mechanisms there is little question why mental health concerns are rampant.

From staffing to office renovations and relocations, we have seen all our immigration departments grow and continue to meet the needs of Canadians despite significant concerns around staffing, health and safety and workloads. In this region we have seen Earthquake kits decommissioned, deemed unnecessary by IRCC NHQ, we have seen increased workloads for both IRB and IRCC and pressure for overtime. We have seen the implementation of shift work, and blatant disregard for the staffing processes that should be being followed. All while exponentially increasing the workforce as we deal with the effects of the global climate and anti immigration sentiments south of the border.

At Service Canada we have seen the implementation of desk sharing where our CPP OAS office has over staffed to the point where we have an extra 50 people without official desk space. As EI once again ramps up hiring we will see that there as well. We continue to see increasing backlogs, increasing overtime and pressure to perform on our members. Implementation of new systems, new processes and attrition rates of over 18% continue to plague Service Canada as we continue to pressure the Employer to increase staffing levels.

However, it is not all bad news. We have had some wins this last year, both formally and informally. We have won grievances on the denial of overtime, on the payout of leave, and the failure to provide a safe workplace. We have been able to negotiate settlements to members satisfaction which has resulted in leave credited back to members, and payment of monies owed to them. In December 2019 a case from BCYT was heard at arbitration. This was a file that Dave Saba had worked on. For those of you who have not had the chance to read the YEO decision please take the time to do so. It was an issue of performance management and the employer acting in bad faith with the intent to simply terminate an employee and not with the intent to make succeed. This was a huge win for our members and for CEIU.

Our RUO staff continue to work tirelessly for each member. They continue to be busy with inquiries, training requests and grievances – the more we file the more they receive at the third level. Each of the training packages have been updated by the NURs across the country this year and they are ready to be implemented now. This was a huge undertaking and it will mean more relevant information for

our members. The region would not be the same without our staff support and the work that they do for our members and to support each activist in the room.

Over the last two years I have been working with the Canadian Labour Congress on behalf of the PSAC on their EI committee. I have been able to advocate and speak on the realities facing our members in our workplaces. The threats of termination for not producing enough, the messaging to not go above and beyond because people fear being accused of preferential treatment. I have met several times with the EI Commissioner for Workers and am working on a document which will be used to lobby parliament for change on behalf of our members. I have been able to assist CEIU in the forging of community partnerships which have led to a greater understanding of our work, and our members. We have engaged with members across the country and community partners, legal clinics and EI advocates. In unprecedented solidarity this group has come together to work for workings accessing the system and as a part of that there was a real recognition that the working conditions of our members at Service Canada are inherently a large part of that system.

Our members continue to fight for all Canadians, new and old, and I have been incredibly honoured to have been chosen to stand with all of you and fight alongside each of you.

None of the achievements we have gained could have been done without the support of our members. So, thank you to each of you for the ongoing sacrifice you have all made for CEIU and for our members. Thank you for taking the evenings and weekends away from home.

We are stronger because of each of you.

In solidarity,

Vanessa Miller
NVP BC/YT