It has been a busy year for BCYT. This last year we had committed to ensure that we trained up our activists in a variety of ways. The region was able to support 3 attendees to the CLC Convention in May. We were able to have 21 delegates at our PSAC BC Convention and 1 Delegate to the PSAC North Convention. This is a marked improvement in participation in both of these conventions from the last cycle. In addition many BCYT members took on positions on Regional Council for PSAC and or were elected as alternates. It was definitely evident to those around that CEIU was present and is engaged in the process.

We were able to support several women to attend the National Women’s Conference in November and as a result have seen increased engagement from our delegates and observers who attended. We also were able to support members to attend the CLC Pacific Winter School and a member to attend the Education in Action Social Justice Project in Guatemala. As a pilot project, I was able to negotiate with PSAC to have additional members added to their most recent advanced course – Advanced Representation Training for Stewards. We were able to add 5 members which resulted in CEIU BCYT having a total of 10 seats at the training. This worked very well for both parties and it has been agreed that it would be considered again for the Advanced DTA (Duty to Accommodate), LOAT (Local Officers Advance Training) and Advanced Womens courses in the fall of 2018.

We are seeing a trend of the main issue facing our memberships being Duty to Accommodate (DTA) issues. The region, our locals and myself at the NVP level have all face challenges getting DTAs in place for our members. This is especially the case for those requesting to be accommodated outside of the consolidated work sites. There seems to be a challenge in getting the Employer to recognize the needs of the employees, and there appears to be a lack of education around the issues of family status. Furthermore, when we are grieving, they will deny the grievance indicating that the situation does not meet the legal test, yet they will chose to accommodate when pressed despite the official denial.
As a part of the most recent Regional Executive Council Meeting in Kelowna BC Dave Saba provided a 1 day training on DTA to assist our REC with these issues and hopefully assist with the influx of calls our RUO has been receiving on this issue. Based on feedback provided it appears that the training was well received. Many participants have taken their workbooks back and intended to use it as a resource in their own office.

I continue to receive many Phoenix escalations each week. I am escalating these with some success through Chris Aylward and now Donna Lackie as well as our contacts within the department. Typically, the issues remaining on an ongoing basis have resulted from periods of leave, and issues around medical/dental coverage. We are having success with the medical escalations but ongoing pay issues continue to be a huge source of frustration.

The retro pay has resulted in several people throughout the region receiving no pay and arbitrary overpayments based on errors in input from the overseeing manager in the office, and or the pay center staff. Given the fact that the zero pay cheques are technically a result of an overpayment the employer at Service Canada has been refusing to issue ESAs. Similar messaging is being received from staff calling the pay center as well. Regardless of the fact that the amounts are incorrect, or not based on any action or leave by the member, ESAs are being refused. Further adding to the frustration is the fact that I am able to escalate issues and get them rectified, however, even in those cases, it would appear that there are issues again a month or two later, resulting in the member once again not getting paid or paid incorrectly.

At the recent Bargaining Conference from PSAC we have heard from the National President that we are to be grieving. We will be discussing this further in the agenda this weekend. I can appreciate how frustrating this has been for all of us, whether you are directly or indirectly impacted. It was never something that I thought I would be dealing with as an employee of the federal government and I am sure it was the same for many of you.

Throughout the last year I have been able to come and visit the vast majority of our worksites. I have attended AGMs and local UMCCs. The members spoke mostly again of issues with Phoenix, the impacts on their work and the impacts on their mental health and family lives. The impacts on their mental health are
severe. This has been a common theme across the region regardless of location, department or business line. The costs to people’s mental health with Phoenix is becoming devastating. The region has had members quit because of massive overpayments and underpayments. We are losing activists in the union because people do not want to risk taking leave without pay, and do not want to give up their annual leave time to attend meetings or conventions. With the implementation of the new Article 14 of the Collective agreement I am happy to report that there has been some progress on this front as there is no longer an interruption or input into phoenix for leave without pay.

Myself and several members of the REC had the opportunity to attend the Liberal Town Hall meeting at the University of British Columbia – Okanagan Campus. We were hoping to have the opportunity to ask Justin Trudeau and his cabinet MPs some questions on the decision to close the Vegreville office, and the failing attempts to fix Phoenix. However, he did not allow us to ask our questions despite our best efforts. We were able to get some photos taken by the media with the #FixPhoenix signs and the Respect Vegreville signs.

February 28 marked the two year anniversary of the roll out of phoenix. We had rallies and training sessions throughout the BCYT region. I know members participated in the occupation in Vancouver, the rally in Victoria, and lunchtime sessions in Kamloops and Whitehorse just to name a few. I want to thank each of you who came out and helped organize any of those events. It was very evident that CEIU was at the forefront of all of these events and they would have been arguably less successful without CEIU being there.

Regionally the OSH Committee has been not meeting as there has been an ongoing dispute over the membership of the committee. However, within our locals the OSH portfolio also continues to be a challenge. The Employer continues to fight the fact that mental health is covered under the OSH portfolio. While each department is better than others (IRB appears to have a good mental health committee and framework in place) ESDC appears to have decided that Mental Health shall never be considered within the OSH network and to the end that they have created a framework external but parallel to the OSH framework. We have seen successes in a few of our locals with the creation of mental health committees. These committees are separate from those that the Employer has
deemed to be wellness committees and do follow a OSH structure with both Employee and Employer representatives.

BCYT has experienced several incidents of violence in the workplace over the last few months. As a result of a threat of gun violence in Surrey we have had to file a complaint with Labour Canada under Section 127.1 of the CLC Part 2. The result of this was a finding that the protocol followed was insufficient as was the result of management. In response to this finding there has been training provided by Labour Canada and WT Security to one local Lower Mainland. We are in negotiations to have this same training provided to our locals throughout the region. Additionally, in several locations we are experiencing an increase in verbal violence and irate callers. While union and team leaders are advocating for staff to not have to complete these call WT Security is advising that there is not right to refuse this work. While this is going to be pushed at a regional level at the December regional OSH meeting it was advised that these are local issues only and that the security protocol is not insufficient. As we continued to push this regionally we will be doing a two-hour training session at this Presidents Conference on violence in the workplace and the right to refuse unsafe work.

As volumes increase in all three departments the toll is becoming very evident on the staff. At IRB and IRCC the adage of doing more with less appears to be remaining intact. These departments have seen massive increases in work with little to no additional staffing. While the term freeze has lifted in all of the departments now use of casuals and casual to term appointments continue to be an issue in the BCYT region. We have seen in several cases they have appointed people into term positions without advertising a process for that term position. We are continuing to see understaffing being managed by a 3 month rotation of casuals. This is predominate in our IRCC and SCC locations. We continue to push for improvements and additional staffing levels.

I hold the EI portfolio nationally I have been able to attend four meetings with the EI Commissioner for Workers and the CLC EI Committee. It has been evident that there is a lot of misinformation that is being shared. The perception around the work that our members do is very different from reality that the understood by other Affiliates, and it is not the same as what is being provided to the Commissioner by the department. As a result of the SST review the EI committee had the opportunity to meet with senior officials of Service Canada. This meeting
involved several affiliates and other advocacy groups. The Department continued to advise of how well they were doing to meet the needs of Canadians. However, as was brought forward their statistics are only measuring those first initial and renewal claims not the revised workload. It also fails to mention the tactics used to meet these targets like 20 hours of overtime per week and workload strategies that have staff working only on new files. The meetings with the Commissioner have been extremely fruitful and I am hoping to continue to foster that relationship between CEIU and that office.

Over the coming months BCYT will continue to ensure that we are committed to training our members. This includes planning a larger scale women’s training in late spring or mid fall depending on dates and costing.

On a sad note many of you may notice that we are missing representation from Yukon this year and those who were here last year may have heard a bit of Mike’s story. Mike Stanley had been our local president in the Yukon for over 6 years. In December 2017 he was advised that his term was not being renewed and that he was to leave the premises immediately. As a result of this, the entire executive in Whitehorse stepped down as they also feared the same retribution for their union involvement. We are in the process of grieving this situation, however in the meantime the office has lost all of its indeterminate staff to deployment, quitting or retiring. The office is currently being staffed by a term CSS, a term from Edmonton (temporarily) and a new manager. While Mike isn’t here with us this year I do hope that you all will keep him in your thoughts as he fought hard for his members and was always there to help whenever anyone needed him. He will be missed in this region.

Stephen and I have been working closely together in this region. I want to take this opportunity to thank him for all the work that he has done. He has been a support to me and to our members. For those who do not know, Stephen and I will be working together to transition to his leadership for a few months starting in June of this year. I will be taking approximately 3-4 months off as Josh and I will be welcoming a baby girl to our family in July. The intent at this time is for Stephen to be stepping in in late June with a period of overlap for support. I know the region will work with him and provide support as we move through this period of transition.
I want to thank our staff here in BC and at National for the ongoing support they have provided. None of this would be possible without their help. Suzanne is always there to assist when we have projects, communications and she has taken over updating our website. Kathy, Steve and Dave have all been there to guide me and provide technical advice to our region in a variety of forms. We have kept them busy this year with grievances, training and our need for Phoenix support. Each of them have been invaluable as we transitioned this last year to a new NVP and I know they will continue to provide that same support for Stephen as he steps in.

I could not be prouder of what we have achieved and the position CEIU holds in this region. Thank you to the spouses, partners and families. These are the people who help us all do what we do, and we would not be the team that we are if we did not have their support. They have sacrificed their time with each of you. This work is not always convenient, fun or exciting. Some days it is hard, and frustrating. However, it is always worth it. Each win we get for our members is worth it.

I want to thank all of you – Activists and Staff – for the work that you have done this last year. None of this would have been possible without an amazing team working together.

We are strong and I cannot wait to see what we can achieve in 2018.

In solidarity,

Vanessa Miller
CEIU NVP BC/YT