

CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee
Report to Convention – April 2017

It has been another eventful year for CUPE BC's International Solidarity Committee. The Committee continued its work with the support of the CUPE BC Executive Board to strengthen existing projects and expand our global justice relationships in BC and internationally.

CUPE BC's IS Committee established the following priorities at the One Big Committee meeting in October 2015. Those priorities are:

- Fending off privatization and maintaining public services
- Defending human rights/workers' rights
- Promoting climate justice
- Monitoring international trade and investment agreements
- Raising awareness about unjust migrant and temporary foreign worker programs
- Promoting world peace

These priorities are reflected in the Committee's outreach to workers and community organizations. CUPE BC supports projects that reject the charity model of "international aid", preferring to "walk the walk of international solidarity".

The current International Solidarity projects supported by CUPE BC are:

CoDevelopment Canada

Since the establishment of the Colleen Jordan Humanity (CJHF) Fund in 2005, CUPE BC has partnered with CoDevelopment Canada (CoDev) to support worker-to-worker projects in Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Honduras. CUPE BC and our Latin American Partners share a commitment to creating a fairer society that values people over profits, worker rights over corporate rights, and human rights for all. Our Partners' achievements over the past year reflect those shared values. In Colombia, NOMADESC continued building its Intercultural University of the Peoples (UIP). The

UIP brings together activists from diverse sectors including labour, women, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian social movements to build a broad-based movement for alternatives to the neoliberal development model. The Honduran Women's Collective successfully fought to have workers who had been illegally laid off due to workplace injuries reinstated to their positions by taking their cases through the Supreme Court of Honduras. In Nicaragua, the María Elena Cuadra Movement (MEC) trained hundreds of workers on basic labour rights, led diploma courses in Feminist Economies, and incorporated more than 100 women into their network of labour rights promoters in the sweatshop sector. In Cuba, where new labour legislation was introduced in 2014, the National Union of Public Administration Workers in Cuba trained more than 1,500 leaders and rank and file activists on the changes to ensure workers continue enjoying their rights and benefits.

In May, Sister Kirsten Daub led a delegation of 10 labour leaders and activists to Nicaragua and Honduras to meet with Latin American Partners MEC and CODEMUH. The delegation included participation by two CUPE National Representatives as well as other Canadian Partners who support MEC and CODEMUH. Delegates met with leaders and activists from these organizations and learned about their work to organize workers, defend labour rights and improve occupational health and safety in the maquila sector.

In December, Sister Daub visited CUPE BC partner NOMADESC in Colombia and learned about the efforts of grassroots communities in southeastern Colombia to defend their human rights. Sister Daub and labour activists from Canada met with communities defending against forced displacements, women seeking justice for the disappearance and murder of their family members, and education and municipal union leaders and activists defending their right to collective bargaining in the face of death threats for their efforts. The ability of grassroots communities to organize to defend their rights is a testament to the impact of NOMADESC's human rights education programs, work CUPE BC has supported for over a decade.

Stephen Lewis Foundation, SEVA Canada

CUPE BC continues to support the work of the Stephen Lewis Foundation on HIV/AIDS issues in Africa, SEVA Canada on eye care in Ethiopia, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International and Oxfam Canada, raising awareness with CUPE members about various human rights initiatives.

Just Film Festival

The Just Film Festival is arranged by CoDevelopment Canada, Amnesty International Vancouver, Village Vancouver and Vancity Theatre. CUPE BC co-sponsors the festival with several other organizations. This year the festival features compelling stories about social justice and human rights with themes ranging from the migrant crisis to the human toll of the actions of extractive industries in developing countries.

Philippines Delegation

In July, Brother Kamal Gautam joined a CUPE National delegation to the Philippines and met CUPE National Partners, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), and the Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE). The delegation learned about their struggles for labour rights and their work with indigenous communities to support their efforts against forced displacements and other human rights violations.

CUPE National Global Justice Committee

Brother John Hall and Sister Daub continued participating in the CUPE National Global Justice Committee, which met in November 2016 and February 2017. The Committee focused on training on privatization, the right to dissent, and refugee and migrant rights. There were presentations from the Trade Justice Network, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Council for Refugees, and the Council of Canadians, as well as CUPE National Staff and CoDevelopment Canada. Blair Redlin, former CUPE researcher, discussed the threats to public services posed by the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA). In the context of increasing numbers of refugees from Syria and the

attacks on refugee and migrant rights in the US, the GJC recommended CUPE National join the Canadian Council for Refugees.

Urgent Actions

CUPE BC put solidarity into practice by participating in several urgent actions to support individuals and organizations whose rights were under attack. In April, NOMADESC and several other labour and human rights defense organizations received a series of death threats from a paramilitary organization. Shortly after, state forces attacked peaceful protesters leaving 179 wounded and three people dead. In Ecuador, the national government decertified the National Union of Educators in an attempt to quell their opposition to the privatization of public education. CUPE BC added their voice to international calls to end these attacks and respect constitutionally guaranteed rights to a life free of violence and the right to freedom of association.

Committee Meetings

Since our last convention, the CUPE BC IS Committee met on June 4, 2016 and January 23 - 24, 2017 for training, Partner updates and convention preparation.

At the June 4 meeting, which coincided with the annual CoDev dinner, the committee heard presentations from CoDev, SEVA Canada, Sanctuary Health, and the Migrant Worker Dignity Association. An update of the CoDev report is included above.

SEVA Canada reported that CUPE BC's funding goes to program development and training of an ophthalmologist and support staff in Bahir Dar (Ethiopia), surgical and related costs to treat the poor, glasses, medications and consumables.

The mandate of the **Sanctuary Health** movement is to ensure access to health care for all people, regardless of citizenship, refugee, or immigration status. It is also working to remove the fear of deportation or communication with the Canadian Border Services Association (CBSA) if people need to access medical care or other services. One major problem for refugees and Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) is the "implied status" of

babies born here who are 'citizens without rights'. Because they are dependents of non-citizens, babies and children are unlawfully denied access to MSP and other services.

Representatives from the **Migrant Worker's Dignity Association** (MWDA) also made a presentation at the meeting. MWDA is a non-profit organization that works for the rights and dignity of temporary foreign workers in Canada and has a particular focus on farm workers, as they represent one of the most abandoned and discriminated populations. The organization's representatives provided background information on the Association and on how Canada's Temporary Foreign Migrant Workers program works. The Association organizes and delivers health and safety training to TFWs, and informs them about their labour and human rights in Canada as well as their responsibilities as members of the community. In addition, a Temporary Foreign Worker described working and living conditions on the farm he works at in the Fraser Valley. Descriptions of other TFWs are provided in a report published by the association called *Beyond our Plates: A Brief Report of the Lives of Migrant Agricultural Workers in BC*. The report can be accessed at the association's website.

At the January 23 - 24, 2017 meeting, Sister Kelti Cameron piloted a new International Solidarity Workshop with the committee. The six-hour course is being finalized and will be offered by the CUPE Education Department in the near future. During the meeting, Sister Daub provided a CoDev update and CUPE BC Secretary-Treasurer, Trevor Davies, advised the Committee of funding changes to the Colleen Jordan Humanity Fund resulting from a CUPE BC constitutional amendment in 2014. As a result of the amendment, and the fund balance reaching an excess of \$1,250,000, fifty percent of all further revenue to the fund will be redirected to the CUPE BC Defence Fund. There was a thorough discussion with Brother Davies and Committee members. The Committee has put forward a constitutional resolution to this year's convention to address their concerns. The Committee also submitted other resolutions addressing its priorities. There were two recommendations to the CUPE BC Executive Board:

- Join the Canadian Council for Refugees. This was discussed in the context of increasing numbers of refugees from Syria and the attacks on refugee and migrant rights in the US.
- Join the Canadian Council for Corporate Accountability. The council advocates for policy and law reform, monitors government policy and provides advice to ensure that both government and business uphold Canada's international human rights and environmental commitments.

Finally, Committee members discussed the importance of solidarity here and around the world, given the shift in world politics and attacks on refugees, minorities, migrants and women.

Want to learn more? Check out these links:

CoDevelopment Canada: www.codev.org

CUPE Global Justice Committee and Fund: <http://cupe.ca/global-justice>

Migrante BC: www.migrantebccom

Seva Canada: <http://www.seva.ca>

Stephen Lewis Foundation: <http://stephenlewisfoundation.org>

Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba: www.vancubasolidarity.com

World Peace Forum: www.peaceforumteachin.org

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April 2017

