

CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee

Report to Convention – April 2018

CUPE BC's International Solidarity Committee continues to focus on issues of global justice with a mix of new and seasoned committee members for this term. The committee established an action plan at the One Big Committee meeting in October 2017, which includes the following:

- Promoting sanctuary cities with a focus on Sanctuary Schools.
- Participating in the Canadian Council for Corporate Accountability.
- Continue with ongoing support and participation in partnerships through CoDevelopment Canada.
- Reviewing the Colleen Jordan Fund commitments in conjunction with the CUPE BC Executive Board.
- Working to create and distribute an updated document on Palestine.

Our goal is to participate in creating equity within our movement and around the world. The struggles, we as a union face, pale in comparison to what others face on a daily basis.

The CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee is also focused on a few local issues that we, as front-line public sector workers, can address to create equity within our communities.

Sanctuary Schools

We know that basic services such as health care and education should be a fundamental human right. Unfortunately, this isn't the case for all, as even within our own communities these rights are not always provided.

We know that there are children not provided with schooling due to their parent's fear of deportation, even though the school act states "any child who is of school age and resides in that school district" must be enrolled. This is where we can help.

CUPE has over 26,000 members in the K-12 sector in BC, and CUPE BC can support the work of Sanctuary Schools to convince our School Boards to adopt Sanctuary Schools policies and ensure all children have access to education.

The CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee will be releasing information in the future to let you know how you and your local can assist and participate in these programs, so we can show our strength and solidarity with our neighbours that need our help.

Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability

The Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability (CNCA) was formed in 2005 to bring together environmental, human rights, religious, labour and solidarity groups from across Canada to ensure that Canadian mining, oil and gas companies respect human rights and the environment when working abroad. At last years convention, a resolution was passed to endorse and support the CNCA's "Open for Justice" campaign. At the core of the campaign was the demand to create an ombudsperson to handle the grievances of people affected by Canadian oil, gas and mining companies abroad. After 11 years of campaigning for greater corporate accountability, the Federal Government recently created a human rights ombudsperson position regarding the overseas operations of Canadian companies. The campaign also promotes access to justice in Canadian courts, regulations for Canadian companies with overseas operations and that Canadian mining, oil and gas companies pay their fair share through taxes and royalties. Since the convention last year, the CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee has recommended that CUPE BC join the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability.

CoDevelopment Canada

CUPE BC continues to partner 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, the NOMADESC human rights organization graduated the first group of 25 students from its Intercultural University of the Peoples (UIP) in December 2017. 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. Unfortunately, one of the students, twenty year old Viviana Trochez Dagua, was killed the day after the graduation ceremonies in a cross-fire between armed groups near her home in Cali.

Perhaps the most exciting achievement in the past year related to the work CUPE supports with NOMADESC is the successful three-week long civil general strike in Colombia's principal port city of Buenaventura. After months of training in negotiation skills and community-based decision making from NOMADESC, the neighborhoods of Buenaventura rose up to demand an end to the evictions and paramilitary violence, and access to health and education services and basic utilities. The citizens of the port withstood three weeks of attacks from state security forces before reaching a negotiated agreement to improve conditions for workers and residents.

The Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH), which works closely with sweatshop workers in the county's export zones, achieved significant advances in its workplace health and safety campaign this year. They assisted shop floor representatives in filing 96 complaints to the labour board, of which 66 have been successfully resolved. The group has also made important advances in the reinstatement of 25 workers at Delta Apparel's factory and six at the Canadian-owned Gildan factory, who were fired after complaining of health and safety conditions. However, CODEMUH's work has been complicated by the widespread repression following the November 26, 2017 electoral fraud, and the subsequent militarization of the export zones where CODEMUH works.

In Nicaragua, with CUPE's support, the María Elena Cuadra Movement (MEC) trained hundreds of workers on basic labour rights, graduated 30 sweatshop workers from their diploma program in Feminist Economies, incorporated 55 more women into their network of shop floor rights promoters in the sweatshop sector, and provided legal support to more than a thousand workers.

In Cuba, CUPE's partner is the Havana province section of the National Union of Public Administration Workers in Cuba. This year's project gathered supplies and equipment that the union is unable to purchase in Cuba (due to the US embargo), and sent the supplies and equipment by ship from Vancouver to Havana. The materials included many parts for the union's car, as well as computers, printers, toner and other scarce supplies important to the operations of a union.

In February Sister Wendy Santizo visited CUPE BC partner NOMADESC in Colombia and learned about the efforts of grassroots communities in southeastern Colombia to defend their human rights. Sister Wendy and other Canadian labour activists met with communities fighting forced displacements, women seeking justice for the disappearance and murder of their family members, and labour leaders facing death threats. The delegation met with the Buenaventura strike committee only days after the assassination of its key spokesperson Temistocles Machado. Sister Wendy reports a strong sense of fear in the port and a need to raise international awareness of the threats to the communities in resistance there.

Aids Free World- Stephen Lewis

CUPE BC continues to support the work of Stephen Lewis with the Aids Free World organization. AIDS-Free World Canada works for a more just, urgent, and effective global response to HIV and AIDS.

The organization seeks targeted and broad alliances for effective, timely action on a range of issues related to HIV and AIDS, including stigma and discrimination, access to medicines, gender inequality, sexual violence, and disability.

Ten years since “The Wall Must Fall”

CUPE BC has taken a strong position in support of Palestine through its paper “*The Wall Must Fall*” calling for an end to the occupation and violence in Palestine. The Committee felt it was time to review the problems in the region as they have changed and intensified over time. The US moving their Israeli embassy to Jerusalem and the Canadian Conservative Party Leader committing that Canada will do the same if they get back in office highlight the growing threats to Palestine.

CUPE will be sending a delegation to Palestine this year. Information gathered on that visit will be used to share the first-hand experiences of the delegation. Issues such as Israel’s practice of imprisoning children and lack of access to utilities such as energy and water will be areas that the delegation looks to gain more information on.

CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee Meetings

After the development of the Committee Action Plan at the One Big Committee meeting held in October of 2017, the committee met again on February 1, 2018.

At the February CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee meeting, two representatives from Sanctuary Health based out of the Metro Vancouver area, made a presentation. Byron Cruz and Alejandro Lopez Bravo provided information about the grassroots collective and specifically talked about the work done with the City of Vancouver, Transit Police and the New Westminster School District. The main focus of the collective in the Metro Vancouver area is the “*Access without Fear*” Campaign which focuses on health care and education supports for non-status migrants, many of whom are children.

The Sanctuary Schools policy ensures all children have access to education regardless of their immigration status. When asked what the CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee could do to support the work of Sanctuary Health and Sanctuary Schools, both Byron and Alejandro provided the following:

- Work with CUPE BC to lobby the Provincial Government for access to Provincial services for residents with uncertain or no immigration status;
- Assist with training to workers in the K-12 sector about Sanctuary Health and the *Access Without Fear* campaign;
- Make presentations in conjunction with Sanctuary Health to School Districts who are considering adopting Sanctuary Schools policies.

Steve Stewart also provided a report on CoDev activities and projects. The full report is included in the CoDevelopment Canada section of this report. Lastly, the Committee discussed convention details, developed resolutions and committed to sponsoring a booth with CoDevelopment Canada at the CUPE BC convention.

Respectfully submitted:

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