

Report Back from Toronto and York Region Labour Council

Meeting date: December 06, 2012 – 7:00pm to 9:00pm

Meeting location: The Ontario Federation of Labour Building, 15 Gervais Dr., Ste. 407, Don Mills, ON M3C 1Y8

The Toronto and York Region Labour Council (referred to hereafter as the Labour Council) is a centralized body providing a venue for the myriad labour unions across Toronto and York region to socialize and inform one another of events, actions, and notices.

The Labour Council meets on the first Thursday of every month. Three member representatives from CUPE 3903 attended the October meeting. **The representatives in attendance were Faiz Ahmed, Peter Braun, and Yasin Kaya.** There were approximately 175 people in attendance.

The December meeting is organized to be an end-of-year commemoration of many of the struggles and victories of the delegates comprising the Labour Council. The meeting began with recognition of December 6th as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. A moment of silence was then held for: those killed in the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre; First Nations women who are victimized and missing; Women routinely oppressed by the systemic sexist and misogynistic character of our society; and concluded with a recognition of the 111 garment workers killed in a textile-factory fire on November 24th, 2012 in Bangladesh.

More information on the tragedy:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/25/bangladesh-textile-factory-fire>

The Labour Council's Women's Committee pledged to continue advocating on behalf of women and oppressed groups and publicizing their stories to the best of their ability.

Following this, we received updates and reports from a number of different union delegates. Judy Kopak, from CUPE 3902 Unit 4, which represents education workers at St. Michael's College (University of Toronto), announced that they've reached an agreement with the college administration. This ended a 5-day strike, and resulted in a 47 percent increase in those workers' wages and also included health benefits.

A representative from OPSEU Local 540, which represents workers at Homes First, the agency that operates the city's homeless shelters, updated us on their bargaining process. So far, their employer has tabled a total of 88 concessions, including an increase in hours of work without compensation (which would amount to a 6.5 percent pay cut), and a 68 percent reduction in sick-pay. Perhaps even more insultingly, workers at Homes First were

recently offered a \$150 "signing bonus" if they agree to scrap the majority of their current benefits.

Next, a delegate from Local 16 of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) informed the Labour Council that their Local had finalized a 'work-to-rule' day in response to the Liberal governments imposition of Bill 115 which is seeking to claw back retirement benefits and sick-day leaves for teachers across Ontario; and stated that there will be a one-day strike, set for this coming Monday.

A delegate from the Mr. Christie's Bakery on Lake Shore Boulevard reported on the story that broke on November 01, that the 550 workers at the bakery have been told, without adequate warning, that that plant – in operation for the past 64 years - will be closing down in the coming months.

The delegate from the plant told the Labour Council how over the past decade, workers were repeatedly assured that the encroachment of condominiums would not affect the business strategy of Mondelez Canada (formerly Kraft), which owns the factory. Indeed, many workers at the plant chose to purchase condos so as to be close to their workplace.

Despite their promises, Mondelez has now decided to sell the land to—surprise, surprise—condominium developers; so as to profit from the real-estate bubble in Toronto. Should Mondelez be successful in their efforts to have Toronto City Council re-zone the land on which the plant is, it will allow for the development of 27 condominium buildings.

The delegate informed us that, as of now, there exists unanimous opposition to rezoning the land on Toronto City Council. Although the plant will be shuttered, the delegate urged those in attendance to keep pressure on their councillors and provincial officials to keep the land zoned as "industrial/employment land". Delegates were urged to contact Ontario Minister of Economic Development, Brad Duguid, and ask him to intervene in the event that the land is re-zoned for condo development.

Minister Duguid can be contacted through his website:

<http://www.bradduguid.ca/Contact>

More information on the closure of the Mr. Christie's Bakery:

<http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/article/1281326--mr-christie-s-bakery-set-to-close-with-550-set-to-lose-jobs>

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/11/07/mr-christies-bakery-workers-at-centre-of-fight-to-keep-industrial-land-from-condo-developers/>

Following these announcements, Hassan Yussuff, the Secretary Treasurer for the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), spoke briefly about Bill C-377 – the so-called "Union Transparency Bill." If passed, this Bill would require all union

locals—including us at 3903—to submit their financial information to the Canadian government, which would then post that information online. (The Bill would also require all unions to indicate the “percentage of time dedicated to political activities.”) As Hassan pointed out, this Bill is only ostensibly about transparency – in fact, there are a number of provincial laws already in existence that ensure that union members can get access to union financial information. The Bill’s more fundamental purpose is to make union information available to those with anti-union and anti-democratic agendas. For us at CUPE 3903, Bill C-377 is especially threatening, since we have a long tradition of funding progressive political work and activism. Please contact your MP and let them know where you stand on this! Bill C-377 is an attack on the labour movement, made under the guise of “transparency,” and it won’t be tolerated!

Hassan also reminded us of the CLC’s Political Action Conference, which is being held this March from the 22nd ‘till the 24th. The conference is for both new and long-time union activists who want to hone their organizing skills. There’s limited space at this conference, so if you’re interested, it’s best to sign-up sooner rather than later. Here’s the website:

<http://www.canadianlabour.ca/news-room/events/political-action-conference>

The rest of the meeting was then devoted to reflection on the past year’s labour struggles. There were many speakers, but a few in particular stand out: Jake Moore, a Live Events Operator at Bell TV, spoke briefly about his experience helping to unionize Bell workers, and then being illegally locked-out only hours later – a lockout that ended up lasting 110 days. Despite these illegal tactics, Bell workers were ultimately successful in winning a new contract. Delegates from Ming Pau, Toronto’s largest Chinese-language daily newspaper, spoke about their efforts to unionize their workplace, and the difficulties they faced being one of the first workplaces to unionize within Toronto’s Chinese community.

Finally, a delegate from UNITE HERE! Local 75, which represents hotel and hospitality workers in the GTA, spoke about some of the difficulties they faced in dealing with their employer at the Novotel Mississauga. Although the battle with Novotel ended in an important victory for the Mississauga workers, the hotel chain—which is in fact the largest in the world—revealed their true colours throughout the process, employing all manner of intimidation tactics to dissuade their employees from supporting the union drive. In one particularly appalling case, they threatened to keep one of their employees—an immigrant mother—from visiting her child, who had been hospitalized with leukaemia. Of course, Novotel hasn’t backed down: efforts to unionize workers at the Novotel North York and the Novotel Ottawa have evinced similar kinds of employee intimidation tactics from the French multinational. In response, there will be a boycott of both these hotels—and all other non-unionized Novotel hotels in the province—starting immediately. Another interesting dimension of the Novotel corporations treatment of

workers is its international footprint. Delegates were told that Novotel is the largest hotelier in the world and is a signatory of the The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) sponsored agreement allowing workers to organize.

Lastly, we watched more than a few energizing video-adverts from public campaigns by various Locals. The "Taking Care of Toronto" adverts by CUPE Local 79 and the "Protecting What Matters" adverts by The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 113 (representing over 9,000 men and women who operate and maintain the TTC - North America's third largest public transit system - after those in New York City and Mexico City) are worth checking out. Here is one from the ATU:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7eG7Ye9w-U>

We also watched a really great animated video, which outlines some of the anti-labour legislation that's been passed during the first-year of the Harper majority government. We will post the link as soon as it is made available!

We are excited to have the opportunity to again represent CUPE 3903 at next month's meeting (January 03, 2013)! Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have about this report.

In solidarity,

Peter, Faiz, and Yasin

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