

Workers Under 30

Spring 2010

OFL WU30 AGGREGATE MEETING



The OFL WU30 Committee held its first ever Aggregate meeting on April 9-10, 2010 at the OFL Building in Toronto. This meeting followed up on the resolution passed at the 2009 OFL convention.



Twenty representatives of young worker committees from UFCW, OPSEU, CAW, SEIU, COPE, CUPE, PSAC, CLC and the Toronto Young New Democrats met on the Friday evening and all day Saturday to share their experiences and strategize on advancing the interests of young workers in our unions and in society.

OFL VP Representing Workers Under 30 Matt Dumas and Alternate Krista Maracle (pictured here) welcomed the delegates and spoke about the importance of the OFL WU30 Committee. The delegates outlined the history of their committees and reported on how their committee fits into the structure of their union.



Julian Benson (OPSEU) seated, Tricia Brown, John MacDonald and Stephan Cronin (CAW)

The delegates shared their experiences in starting and maintaining young workers committees, and the obstacles that many of them encountered. These included the lack of succession planning within unions, a generational divide between young workers and those more senior, and a lack of understanding by young workers of the structure and politics of their own organizations. Young Worker committees face one additional challenge in addition to those faced by other equity committees. They “age-out”, leading to constant turnover of their committee membership.



Leanne Wilkins and Amanda Atwell (UFCW)

OFL President Sid Ryan dropped in to talk with the delegates on Saturday afternoon. He discussed the problem of aging union membership and staff, and took suggestions from the group on how the OFL can help support young workers committees. He outlined his plan for opening up the OFL to community organizations to make it a crossroads for unions and community to come together, and to try to help make labour councils the

crossroads in the communities. He explained that his immediate focus is on building relationships in the labour movement, and in particular with the CLC and labour councils.



Actions arising from the meeting included: building a young worker activist database, and establishing a Google group for the members of all affiliate young worker committees; helping mobilize for Union Rocks at the Warped Tour and other youth events to get the union message out to young people; reviving SolidarityWorks! and the OFL

Speakers Bureau to get more union information out to young people in the schools and the community; holding another aggregate meeting in November 2010, and working toward organizing a conference which would include both affiliate and community youth.



Teison Sammy (CUPE), Mary Jeyanathan (PSAC) Ben Mills (PSAC), Kimberly Samnang and Casey Oraa (COPE)



Aggregate Meeting Participants:

Back row left to right: Julian Benson (OPSEU 5108), Ayla Umac (OPSEU PYC), Stephan Cronin (CAW 88), James Taylor (CUPE 3906), John MacDonald (CAW 222), Tricia Brown (CAW 1285), Dayn Gray (CUPE 4207)

Middle row left to right: Marjorie Savoie (COPE 491), Ben Mills (PSAC 802), Mary Jeyanathan (PSAC 258), Matt Dumas (COPE 343), Sandra Clifford (OFL), Krista Maracle (OPSEU PYC), Enver Harbans (UFCW National), Leanne Wilkins (UFCW 1000A)

Front row left to right: Casey Oraa (COPE 343), Teison Sammy (CUPE 2191), Toni Karner (CUPE 4207)

Absent when photo was taken: Amanda Atwell, (UFCW 1000A) Sean Doucette (SEIU Local 1) Kimberly Samnang (COPE 343)

YOUTH AND MUNICIPAL POLITICS by Enver Harbans



Enver Harbans, UFCW National

Municipal elections are fast approaching and the need for progressives to support and encourage young candidates is becoming more and more important.

Though apathy in municipal politics is very high (only 20% voter turn-out), municipal politics have a huge affect on our lives. Many of the services we depend on most and use in our everyday lives are funded and debated at our city hall. Our libraries, community centers, police, paramedics and even our public housing budgets are governed by city politics. These are huge areas and as progressives and trade-unionists we need to have a voice on these political issues. Furthermore, as youth and racialized workers our voices and analyses have to be a part of shaping the politics at city hall. In fact, forty seven percent of Torontonians are racialized people, yet we account for only thirteen percent of the seats at city hall. Clearly city hall does not reflect the diversity of its people.

As a progressive young worker I am becoming more and more concerned about the right leaning political developments in our city. I am concerned about a police budget that has ballooned to over a billion dollars, and a police force that is unaccountable to the public when they commit crimes of their own. As a community activist I am alarmed at the amount of influence commercial developers have on our city at the expense of people. Revitalization schemes have effectively sold off public land for private profit at the expense of thousands of workers who depend on the affordability of social housing.

Not only has the right attacked working-class communities at home, the assault on union members has been sustained and increasing on the shop floor. Union members in the public sector have seen their collective agreements attacked as right wing forces in city hall become more powerful. Members are met with concession after concession at the bargaining table while the corporate media leads an anti-union frenzy among the people.

I believe city hall has to change its politics and it starts with a grassroots approach to organizing and education. A committed and informed workers' movement is the only alternative to the problems people face. Progressive politics has its role to play but only if it takes its direction from the workers in the community. Municipal politics is a great place for progressives and youth to organize because the issues are local and affect people at the everyday level. It's a great place for people to learn about issues and learn about what people are doing to make their communities conscious and mobilized. This is why municipal politics is important to me and this is why I believe young people need to be engaged in this process.

THE CAW YOUTH NETWORK: A SHORT RETROSPECTIVE by Jesse Forbes



Jesse Forbes, CAW 222

It started out with seventeen young workers at a meeting in Toronto, a few whose faces I can barely remember...

Some of us grew up in union families. Some were there because they believed in the social movement. Others because they felt isolated or unaccepted in their communities and at work. The CAW Youth Network would be a place of inclusivity, built on the pillars of communication, education and mobilization. It would be a place for young workers to share ideas, learn about their union and become active. Online communication transcended geographical boundaries and engaged many of our members. No matter where we came from or where we were going we knew that equality, peace and sustainability would be needed to shape our society and that the CAW and our Youth Network could provide us with the means to build and achieve these objectives.

One Youth Committee at a Time...

As the first members of the CAW Youth Network, we resolved that our group should facilitate the development of youth committees in local unions. These committees have served our union well over the years, helping to develop the next generation of activists. Youth committees, and by extension the Network, is intended to create a safe place to learn, a spot where questions can be asked without feeling ignorant or out of place and where young workers can feel free to convey ideas for positive change. We certainly aren't the first generation to feel this way and we won't be the last.

Solidifying Our Presence



Every rally I attend, whether in the blazing heat or out in the bitter cold and every social justice battle I fight there's always a feeling of comfort and strength knowing that I have the CAW behind me, around me, and in my heart. It's a great feeling knowing that 225,000 brothers and sisters are on your side. Our union takes on many forms... and has found a voice within its ranks from many different groups of workers to share their struggle and to fight back. One of the first tasks we undertook as a Network was to solidify our presence with a CAW Youth logo. Our logo was to be a touchstone to further help young workers feel a part of our great union. We needed this to be more than a badge. It had to be a symbol of strength, diversity, sustainability and inclusion - a tribute to every worker that came before us, every leader who fought to build safer workplaces and better communities for us and every member that will come after us. It was to express our commitment to fight for social justice. On October 26, 2007, over 100 young CAW members from various locals and sectors gathered in Port Elgin for the 3rd CAW Youth Conference. With our Network in place, and swarms of eager young activists waiting to get engaged, this conference was a springboard for youth mobilization. It was an opportunity to reach out directly to young people with our message and purpose. Our Network membership ballooned almost overnight. What started with 17 members has now grown to 175. It didn't take long for young members to express a variety of opinions on a diverse range of issues - whether about two-tiering, minimum wage laws, environmental stewardship or union structures. Not surprisingly, one of the most common discussion threads has been about economic insecurity and the threat of job loss, only made worse by a devastating economic crisis. We heard about it firsthand. Workplace closures, employer lock-outs and other bitter disputes had directly impacted our fellow brothers and sisters. For many, they grapple with the question 'what comes next?' For those with young families, they struggle to make ends meet with little direction and rely heavily on the union for important EI, severance pay and transitional training supports. With little seniority, young workers are often left bearing the brunt of these economic downturns. But we also heard stories of resilience, stories of worker resolve and inspiration. Stories about young members, from across the country, standing with their brothers and sisters, in the fight for EI improvements, severance pay, pension protections and workplace justice – each of which give us reason to believe that by fighting back there is hope for a brighter future. Young workers who have lost their job still remain within our CAW Youth Network ranks, and contribute actively to our discussions and debates. It is a testament to the strength of our Network and the determination and engagement of young people.

For more information about CAW Youth visit: <http://www.caw.ca/en/services-departments-youth.htm>

Jesse Forbes is a member of CAW Local 222 Oshawa, Ontario and a founding member of the CAW Youth Network. He is an executive board member of his Labour Council and a Trustee of the CAW Durham Region Environment Council.

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