

Crisis in the Canadian Labour Movement

On Monday February 5th, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) held an emergency Canada Council to deal with the decision of Unifor to disaffiliate from the CLC and launch raids on other affiliates. Unifor is the largest private sector union in the country and this decision represents a major internal crisis for the labour movement.

What is raiding?

Raiding is when one union tries to sign up members from another union. This is a banned practice in the labour movement because the results are never good for workers. It is difficult for unions to build solidarity and work together if they are constantly worrying about being raided by one another. Unions should focus on fighting the boss, not each other.

The big danger here is that the labour movement could descend into a tit-for-tat raiding war, launching raids and counter raids on each other. This has happened before in our history. In the end, nobody wins this war. Unions fight each other instead of fighting the boss, and unorganized workers don't get organized. The decision of Unifor to launch raids on Unite Here threatens to make this situation a reality and has plunged the labour movement into crisis.

CUPW is fundamentally opposed to raiding. We call on Unifor to cease this behavior and give Unite Here our unreserved support.

Canada Council Decisions

The Canada Council is the leading body of the CLC between conventions and is made up of leading trade unionists from across the country. The first question the council was faced with was whether or not to uphold the constitutional interpretation of the president, that Unifor members could maintain their elected positions within the CLC, provincial federations of labour and labour councils, provided that they find membership in another union.

While our union opposes so-called "memberships of convenience" and our constitution does not provide for such memberships, it is clear that the CLC constitution does allow for this. There are previous interpretations from past presidents on the same question. On this basis, Brother Yussuff's interpretation was upheld.

Constitutional interpretations should not be made on the basis of politics. As president of CUPW, I often make constitutional rulings that I do not like. But these questions are guided by the text of the constitution and past interpretations, not the political leanings of the individual making the ruling. Otherwise, constitutions would be meaningless and unions would be dictatorships.

Democracy is the Only Solution

Had the challenge to this interpretation been successful, we would have ended up with the Canada Council picking a new president of the CLC. Such questions should not be settled in back rooms by twisting constitutions to fit the desired outcome. The place for these decisions is convention.

This is why I called yesterday for a special convention of the CLC. The crisis unfolding in the labour movement is severe enough that it deserves to be considered by the membership, in a duly constituted convention. There are provisions in the CLC constitution to do exactly that.

In solidarity,



Mike Palecek
National President

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