

Report on the PSAC PRIDE Conference Held March 30 - April 1 at Hyatt Hotel Vancouver BC

Theme “ Include and be Included”

I attended the entire 2 1/2 day conference and was very impressed with the entire event. The theme of the conference was “Include and be Included” and in this theme it dealt with the intersectionality of multiple oppressions. The compounding affect of experiencing multiple oppressions is motivation for each marginalized group to build alliances and networks with each other to have more power to affect the necessary changes. It is only through being inclusive that we will be included in broader alliances and together we can work on the social and legal changes necessary to achieve equality.

The conference started with a panel of speakers who all brought valuable insight to our work at the conference. In particular two speakers stood out for me, they were Alex Munter and Alex Mah. Alex Munter is a long time champion for social justice and equality issues and has sat on many boards at the Civic and Municipal level of Government in the National Capital Region. Most recently he ran for mayor of Ottawa as an openly gay man, doing extremely well although not winning. He worked tirelessly on the campaign for equal marriage as both bills went through parliament. Alex reminded us all that the road to equality is far from over, that now there is a need to do the work in the communities to help public opinion go from tolerance to acceptance. There is a unique situation where to a large extent the laws are more progressive than society. Alex left us with three main goals or objectives to work on this anomaly:

- 1] To participate in local efforts - local communities,
- 2] To support those who fight for the return and retention of public services which are quickly eroding, and
- 3] To build alliances/networks with others who also face oppression [based on race, ability, sex, gender, age, economic status...etc]

Alex Mah is a young transperson of mixed race and heritage. He very eloquently, candidly and comprehensively shared his own experience in society, as well as discussed other trans folks experiences. He is currently producing a documentary which follows the lives and challenges of 6 trans folk and the barriers our society and laws present on an everyday basis. One significant issue is around ‘official’ identification documents. It is a very humiliating and harassing experience for a transperson to be questioned at length over the fact that their ID document may state one gender and they present as the other. The current requirements to have official change of gender on ID is a long protracted, complex and convoluted procedure and in reality very few trans people complete all of the requirements to have an official change. Government offices are some of the frequent places where these embarrassing situations arise.

We must all as public service providers be more sensitive and aware of transgendered clients and co-workers. To assist in this a pamphlet with Trans terminology was provided [attached] to assist people who are unaware of the preferred language to use around trans issues and trans folk.

The other two speakers were Alison Brewin and Fo Niemi. Alison is the Executive Director of West Coast LEAF [Women's Legal Education and Action Fund] and is responsible for managing the organizations work in advancing women's equality through litigation, law reform and public legal education. She has two children who she co-parents with their other mom and biological dad. Alison spoke about the current status of the law around same-sex families and she discussed areas of future concern in the legal realm. Fo Niemi is the co-founder and executive director of the Centre for Research-Action on Race Relations. He sat for 12 years as a part-time member of the Quebec Human Rights Commission. During his term he chaired the Commission's public hearings in 1993 on discrimination and violence against gays and lesbians. He too advocated that work needs to be done in the communities regarding oppression of the GLBT peoples and we should be conscious of the extra burden on racially visible GBLT.

The panel presentations set the theme for our work in workshops which we then proceeded into. All of the participants took the workshop entitled "The Elephant in the Room". This was an examination of oppression in its many forms, internalized, external, systemic, personal, societal...etc. We looked at how big of an impact discrimination of all forms has on the ability of an individual to have freedom and equality of opportunity. For GLBT individuals having to be isolated and silent can be extremely erosive to personal happiness and fulfillment. We debated the benefits of creating alliances with other oppressed groups and realized the strength that comes with solidarity and cooperative struggles and work.

Following the workshop we met in Regional caucuses and strategized what types of work we can take back to our regions, locals and our communities to work at fighting against oppression of all forms. We talked about where we can build alliances within the union, the workplace and the community to strive for equality and freedom for GLBT. The GLBT rep on the regional council, Steve Houston, wrote down an entire plan which resulted from the discussions. The plan will be distributed amongst the self identified GLBT in the region and we will work together to affect change.

We then went into a second workshop and I specifically was in the "Taking the Lead" one on leadership. We discussed at length the qualities and attributes which make a good leader and why. We also looked at what characteristics make an individual a poor leader and why. It was very enlightening for anyone who has leadership aspirations or who just naturally, by good example is a leader. The course was motivating for me to get more involved in community and work issues around oppression and equality.

Late on Saturday afternoon we started to debate the resolutions which had been put forward. The BC HRC had put forward 4 of the 14 resolutions reviewed by the resolutions committee. The committee combined two of ours into combined resolution 1A which they recommended concurrence on. Essentially it calls for the PSAC and components encourage employers to develop action plans on GLBT issues to include: a declaration that their workplaces are "positive spaces" for GLBT people; distribution and production of GLBT materials which can be used in

the workplaces; and, a commitment from the employers to work with the local unions in establishing joint GLBT committees at the local workplaces. This resolution passed unanimously on the conference floor. One of our [BC HRC] other resolutions was on expanding the census survey to include self identification on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The committee recommended concurrence and the conference unanimously carried the recommendation.

Saturday afternoon was also the elections for the female and male representatives for the PSAC EO committee and their alternates. The lesbian rep is Charleen Patterson [from the North], her 1st alternate is Carol-Anne Grenier [NCR] and 2nd alternate is Carolyn Moffatt. The gay rep is Denis Roy, his 1st alternate is Julien Wilson and the 2nd alternate is Toufic El-Daher.

On Sunday we were addressed by the Canadian Labour Congress LGBT Vice-President, Victor Elkins. We proceeded with the resolutions immediately following. The final resolution which BC HRC submitted was to resolve the PSAC to lobby the Federal Government to amend the Employment Equity Act to include GLBT as another enumerated group under the Act. The BC CEUDA branch had submitted a different resolution to commence a study at this time to determine the specific needs from the GLBT members in order to support being part of the EE Act or to determine if it would not be in our best interests to amend the EE Act. The resolutions committee initially re-wrote the resolution but they had interpreted the intent of the study was to gather information in order to present a better case for supporting the amendment of the EE Act. The submitting branch requested a referral back to committee to clarify that a study could and should find out whether the data supports or doesn't support amending the Act. The committee amended the resolution as directed and recommended concurrence. After several people spoke to the recommendation the conference voted to carry it. Our resolution on going ahead with the lobbying for an amendment was subsequently tabled as the one on a study had previously passed. We dealt with the balance of the resolutions plus two late submitted resolutions and all of the resolutions will now go on to the PSAC National Convention for consideration there.

All in all it was a very successful conference and left me motivated and inspired to carry on the work needed in the community, at work and in the union.

In Solidarity
Kim Forster