

the review

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Our delegates know how to put an end to the attack on quality public services!

Learning from the past



“Eye-opening” and “powerful” were just some of the words members used to describe yesterday’s address by Dr. Robina Thomas, an assistant professor at the University of Victoria. Dr. Thomas spoke about her own personal experience and stressed the importance of learning about Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples and their history.

In the human rights context, this history could be traced back to the very first Indian legislation implemented by the British Parliament in the late 1700s. It was intended to protect indigenous people’s rights, but after Confederation, the government started to make distinctions between who was and who wasn’t considered Indian in its efforts to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples.

In the 1880s, thousands of children were taken away from their families by the Canadian government, in an effort to strip them of their culture. Unregulated and unsupervised, these

schools were able to operate in abysmal conditions, often far away from prying eyes.

“School officials, desperate for enrolment to maintain their grants, accepted unhealthy students and then kept them in dangerous conditions, because the same poverty made it difficult to build and equip the schools properly,” explained James Rodger Miller in his book *Shingwauk’s Vision: a History of Native Residential Schools*. “Overcrowded dormitories, windows sealed to conserve heat, poor diet and inadequate clothing all combined to place the children in serious jeopardy.”

Tragically, thousands of children died in residential schools, often falling victims to a combination of malnutrition and infectious diseases.

These schools began being phased out in 1969, with the last one closing in 1996.

“We often like to think that residential schools are a thing of the past – but we are still being impacted by that,” said Dr. Thomas.

Nevertheless, she maintained that the most important thing is to believe in change and know that “we can learn from the past”, and “that we can go in a different way.”

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ON THE TWITTERSPHERE

@jenijealousy: Nothing like Taiko drumming to kick off day 2 of #UNE2014!

@psac20150: Dr. Robina Thomas on the legacy of residential schools and the roots of racism. Beautiful address.

@vwcanuck: Lunch break from the proceedings at Red Fish, Blue Fish...hummm happy belly! #UNE2014

@MattJGag: CLC president Hassan Yussuff delivers passionate speech to #UNE2014 delegates. Preaches positive engagement with our opponents #UNION

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Dreams of a better Canada

Responding to this government's unprecedented attacks on unions and their members, Hassan Yussuff, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, brought his message about how the labour movement is building a fairer society for all Canadians to convention delegates on Tuesday.

"This government is waging a war against working people. Many of the things we built in this country are being systematically destroyed piece by piece, little by little. Our foreparents did not fight to build this country simply to have these people destroy it."

The statistics support his position: 25,000 public sector jobs have been lost. The Harper conservatives overshot their target of 18,000 job cuts without giving any thought to the effect this would impact the delivery of services to Canadians or how this lost income would have on the economy. Recent employment statistics showing 48,000 lost jobs demonstrate that the government's policies are negatively affecting the private sector as well.

"In a systematic way, this government is dismantling the foundations of what made this country a great place to live," explained Yussuff. "It is an affront to our rights and our dignity as Canadians. As working people we can't accept this anymore. Give them another mandate and they will change this country forever. We will spend decades asking ourselves how did we get here, how did this happen to our beautiful country to change ourselves in such a fundamental way? The labour movement can't duck the responsibility to take up this fight."

With claims by the right that labour is simply a gang of greedy, self-interested trouble makers, CLC is countering with their Fairness Campaign.

"We have to take back some of that public space to tell Canadians about the good things we do," said Yussuff. "Seventy per cent of the workforce doesn't have a union. Where do their rights come from? Their rights come from employment standards legislation. Who fought for these rights? It's been the labour movement. We have to reshape the debate."

Our reporters caught up with Mr. Yussuff after his speech for an exclusive interview. The following is an excerpt



from this conversation. Please check our website (www.une-sen.org) at the end of the week for the full transcript.

UNE: *You talk about mobilizing and organizing for the next election. Do you have any specific suggestions for members?*

HY: We will organize political action conferences across the country to come up with a common strategy so we can get the message out about what the government action has been against workers. Get our members to recognize that they are not alone, that affiliates can work together. We have to train people about how we can carry on those conversations in the workplace – help them identify some of the issues that are going to be the ballot questions in the next election.

UNE: *I know in our union, many of our seasoned veterans – a few on our national executive, even – are retiring shortly. And many more will retire. Is the CLC concerned that these power-houses of the labour movement are entering retirement?*

HY: We are struggling with that in the Congress. It's a concern, but I am confident to know that there are a lot of bright young people coming along. It's not a detriment to the labour movement. I just think it provides some weaknesses because experience is invaluable as to how you struggle with these bigger challenges. In many cases we have people who have lived it and experienced it. But on the other hand, change is exciting. It can lead to renewal and different ways of doing things.

IN THE HALLS

A great deal of progress has been made on equity issues. In your opinion, where should we concentrate our efforts next?

"Mental health problems are among the next set of challenges to overcome. It touches everyone. We need to work on prevention and awareness – and we should train our members to avoid negative stereotypes and on ways to address problems in timely manner," declared Julie Dubois, Quebec.

"We should be in step with PSAC, with pushing for Trans issues. The PSAC has an active campaign; we're trying to get it into every collective agreement. I think getting it there gives us a better chance of getting the legislation sitting idle in the Senate passed. Then, we can look at the government and say 'this is obviously your stated opinion on the matter: why aren't you letting the bill pass?'" said Kate Hart, Alberta

"Water is a great issue to push. For humans, water is a basic necessity regardless of equity group and it's really too bad that [First Nations and Indigenous Peoples] are the ones that suffer," said Dona Alwis, Ontario



ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

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Comments? Send an email to: communications@une-sen.org

