



REPORT

April 11 & 12, 2014
Richmond, B.C.



Aboriginal Roundtable 2014

INTRODUCTION

BCGEU has 18 certifications that are considered aboriginal by nature due to their employer and service base. Most are in varying degrees of signing or voting on collective agreements.

The mandate set out for the Roundtable was to provide a unified voice for the diverse community of BCGEU Aboriginal members with the goal of increasing involvement at all levels of the union, empowering one another and advancing aboriginal rights within and beyond the bargaining table and our union.



The roundtable was tasked with addressing the barriers that hinder full participation and develop an action plan to produce recommendations to the union on how to promote and support aboriginal participation.

BACKGROUND

BCGEU has been developing a working plan on how to organize Aboriginal workers for a number of years. It's beneficial to build on this experience and continue to revise and advance strategies for building leadership, bargaining and future organizing in the Aboriginal sector.

The union should prepare for an influx of Aboriginal workers in the workplace and examine our union structure to determine the barriers for aboriginal participation, representation of aboriginal members in the workplace and enhancement of leadership in those workplaces.

The union faces a number of obstacles, some include a lack of understanding about unions in the aboriginal community, opposition from Aboriginal leadership, questions regarding jurisdiction in labour relations matters, and the need for different approaches for leadership, organizing/bargaining and servicing.

The aboriginal population has increased by 232,385 people, or 20.1%, between 2006 and

2011, compared with 5.2% for the non-aboriginal population. Due to devolution of services in the community sector, we are seeing a growth in the number of Aboriginal employers as First Nations continue to expand their inherent right to govern their own communities.

With the commencement of First Nation Health Authority (FNHA) there may be an influx of First Nations workers providing health care services in communities all over BC. At this point, based on the most recent annual report, most of the transition is administrative. Another point in the transition is the priority to hire and recruit only aboriginal employees in the future.

Lastly, by the end of the three year term of the transition is the desire to bring service delivery closer to the under serviced areas.

The biggest investment here would be in the North and the Interior, where we could see new health services being established under First Nations' organizations, thus providing organiz-



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ing opportunities.

One of the lessons we learn in our organizing strategy is to build a positive image of our union, and unions in general. Aboriginal workers need to be comfortable with the organization and the organizers. We want these workers to know there is a place within BCGEU that represents them, gives them a voice, and provides them with the space and resources to be activists in the union.

For the past six years the BCGEU Aboriginal Liaison has been building relationships with the Aboriginal communities and organizations in

order to brand the BCGEU and move towards better relationship building. In Aboriginal workplaces – band councils, or First Nations and Métis institutions and enterprises – the workers are mostly unorganized and have little job security or other protections.

In January 2013, the total population age 15+ in British Columbia was approximately 3.8 million. The Aboriginal population represented about 3.0 per cent of that, or 113,100 people. This should be a signal for more outreach and organizing will have to take place to welcome the influx of workers in those communities.

THE ROUNDTABLE AND VISIONING MEETING

The following BCGEU Aboriginal certifications were invited to attend;

Area 01

- Native Courtworkers & Counsellor Association of BC
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- BC Aboriginal Network of Disability Society
- WSA NEC (SISB) Saanich Indian School Board
- Island Métis Family & Community Services Society
- NIL/TU,O

Area 02

- Tla' Amin Community Health Board

Area 03

- Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society
- Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- Healing Our Spirit BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society

Area 04

- La Société de les Enfants Michif (Métis Family Services)



Area 05

- Lii Michif Otipemisiwak, Family & Community Services Society

Area 12

- Haisla Nation Council Education Department- independent
- Haisla Nation Council Education Department - Support Staff- independent
- Haisla Public Works – stand alone
- Coast Tsimshian Academy- stand alone
- Haida Child & Family Services Society- CSS-AS
- Northwest Inter-Nation Family and Community Services Society- CSS_AS



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In total, 16 participants attended the Roundtable. The day and a half workshop was broken into six sections and was written and co-facilitated by the BCGEU Aboriginal Liaison and Human Rights Officer Holly Page and Aboriginal Officer from the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Michael Desautels. Both Holly and Michael have worked together over the years and have a sound understanding of union rights and aboriginal rights.

Other staff representatives attended as observers and also serviced a majority of the certifications in attendance.

The Director of Research, Campaigns and Communications, Lynn Bueckert and the Coordinator of Research, Campaigns and Communications, Anita Zaenker, attended. The President and Treasurer both addressed participants and were very well received..

BCGEU aims to increase the involvement of Aboriginal members in all levels of the union and advance aboriginal rights in the community and at the bargaining table. Members agreed that unions can educate their members and the public about aboriginal issues including colonization, assimilation, histories, and systemic barriers that have been created. The union and members need to join a path towards justice and reconciliation – an important role for labour.

Aboriginal members recognize our diverse communities and were there to find a common ground. Participants identified similarities between indigenous values and trade union principles. These include equality, workplace equity, teamwork, sharing, solidarity, grievance process, and fairness. Each member /component brings something unique, as do First Nations. One size does not fit all.

Values intersect through collective decision making and unity to move forward. Members were asked about their personal values, work values, and union values, all the answers were similar for the three questions.

Members answers included: fearlessness, genuine, leadership, work ethic, influence, encouraging, role model, pride, humour and loyalty.

The final question in this exercise was: What has the union given your life?

- A way forward “someone in my canoe”
- Long-lasting friendships
- Solidarity and support to carry on this important work
- A part of not a part from
- Voice and it seems the BCGEU is listening
- A way to make a difference in someone’s life.





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BRAINSTORMING GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE CONSIDERED:

Education

- A workplace culture that understands unions
- Identify systemic barriers and address and resolve issues
- Find and share existing resources – social, web and media
- Member outreach – to overcome the fear of the union, use of the union bulletin board, LOAs for outreach from our aboriginal members to speak to other aboriginal members.
- The BCGEU needs to recognize the intricacies of the unique relationship (power) in communities
- Aboriginal member on each BCGEU provincial committee

Tool Kit

- Review collective agreements
- Strong language for hiring and firing
- Support for bargaining
- Share the info
- Video or new outreach tools
- Engage elders into the conversation
- Bargaining Conference for Aboriginal certifications only to come up with a strategy collectively to address and strengthen language.
- Potlucks – potluck with members so BCGEU can learn.

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- These need to continue – it allows for connections, feedback, accountability, education

and to gain new insight and empowerment

- The roundtables could be broken into regions allowing members to build a roundtable in their own regions – which would be resourced by the union and a staff person assigned. Some members are more comfortable building and developing meetings in the community. These members would mentor others to build strength throughout all regions.
- Start off small and build on them.

Political Action

- Need an aboriginal connection in BCGEU campaigns.
- BCGEU needs to continue to support community events such as National Aboriginal Day and Justice for Murdered and Missing Women.

Representation

- Aboriginal workers should be more supported in the areas.
- Need to continue to build networks with local and area offices.
- Build inclusion into cross components and other committees – designated positions.
- A survey to gather data about our aboriginal members: “Where are they?” “Where do we need to work?”
- Designated staff person to support aboriginal members such as a liaison to bring credibility bridge relationships with members and communities.



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AGENDA

FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2014

- 8:00 – 9:00 am Registration
- Traditional Welcome to Territory – *Musqueam Elder*
 - Greetings from BCGEU – *President Darryl Walker*
 - Introduction and Overview – *Cheryl Gilbert, BCGEU Equity and Human Rights Committee member; Aboriginal Representative - BC Federation of Labour Executive Council*
 - Aboriginal Ceremony – *Gilly Alook, BCGEU Equity and Human Rights Committee member*
 - Visioning for Empowerment – A brief history of some of the work that labour has done on the issue of Indigenous rights
- 10:30 – 10:45 am BREAK
- Building Community
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm LUNCH (provided)
- Strategizing for the future - what's possible – not what's wrong
- 3:00 – 3:15 pm BREAK
- Strategizing for the future cont'd
- 5:00 pm Adjournment

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2014

- 9:00 – 9:15 am Reintroduction and Check-In
- Appreciative Inquiry - The 4-D Model
- 10:30 – 10:45 am BREAK
- Developing an action plan for the future
- 12:00 pm Adjournment



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