

# Off The Shelf

Newsletter Representing Vancouver and Gibsons Public Library Workers



## 'Reduced cuts' No Win For Public Libraries

CUPE BC

NEWS RELEASE from Cupe BC - August 24, 2009

BURNABY— Funding cuts for B.C. libraries, announced last week by the BC Liberal government, are not as deep as first feared but will still have a negative impact on public libraries throughout the province, says the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

“Our public libraries are a huge asset to the province, so the government should be investing more in them, not less. Instead, **we're seeing funding cuts of 22 per cent,**” says **CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill.**

“This doesn't exactly square with the premier's own words about the importance of our public libraries. Not so long ago, Mr. Campbell called them 'the front lines of the effort to make British Columbia the most literate place in the world.'”

On Thursday, the government announced that provincial funds to support public libraries would be \$13.7 million, or about 78 per cent of anticipated provincial funding for 2009-10. O'Neill says the announcement is likely a pre-emptive move by the BC Liberals—already reeling from widespread opposition to the Harmonized Sales Tax—to strike a conciliatory note in advance of other, deeper cuts to public services expected in next week's budget.



He adds that last week's announcement was partly the result of a province-wide campaign against the cuts by library workers and their many supporters among the public. However, he added: **“I don't think we can claim any sort of victory when more than one-fifth of library funding is being gutted.** Alberta has actually increased its funding to libraries by 39 per cent.”

O'Neill said that both Premier Campbell and Education Minister Margaret MacDiarmid are aware of the importance of operating grants to public libraries' ability to provide quality services such as literacy programs.

“While all libraries suffer from reduced provincial grants, smaller libraries are disproportionately affected. Generally, the grants form a higher percentage of total revenues for those libraries,” he says.

CUPE BC represents over 2,600 public library employees in 25 public library systems across the province.

# ***BC Budget: Working Families Pay More, Get Less***

NEWS RELEASE from CUPE BC - September 1, 2009

VICTORIA—The Provincial Budget announced today cuts jobs, reduces services for people who need them most, and continues the Liberal shift of the tax burden away from corporations and the wealthy onto the middle class, says the Canadian Union of Public Employees.



“The government can’t have it both ways,” says CUPE BC president Barry O’Neill. “They can’t say, on one hand, that the budget is all about protecting vital services while at the same time cutting funds for K-12 and post-secondary education, student aid and day care.”

School boards will be particularly hard hit by the Budget, facing more than \$130 million cuts in both of the next two years. In addition, school boards will not be exempt from the Harmonized Sales Tax.

“And we’re not talking about frills with these cuts. Even repair costs that accompany seismic upgrades in public schools, such as roof replacements, mechanical and electrical system upgrades, and asbestos abatement, are no longer funded,” says O’Neill.

With post-secondary institutions also getting cuts in infrastructure funding, the condition of B.C. colleges and universities will continue to deteriorate, he adds. Working families and the middle class will have to eat new MSP and HST expenses, and students who can’t find jobs in the summer will have their student aid cut.

The BC Budget also hurts communities with cuts to community service agencies. Capital project grants, playground grants and three-year grants will no longer be eligible for funding this year from community gaming grants.

Nor is daycare exempt from the budget knife.

“How can the government boast about protecting vital services when they’re cutting daycare in the Downtown Eastside?” asks O’Neill, referring specifically to cuts at Ray-Cam Cooperative Community Centre in Vancouver, which lost three positions that work with special needs children.

“What all British Columbians expect is fair taxation. But middle class families will pay more in regressive taxes like the HST and the MSP while wealthy British Columbians will get more of the benefits from tax cuts. How is that fair?”

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# Employee Assistance Program

By Sherry MacLeod

Once upon a time I took some acting classes through the Arts Club Theatre. They were fun, exhilarating, fear-inducing and, best of all, flooded me with creative energy that carried into every aspect of my life. I could no longer just 'do' something – I had to do it creatively! That said, I also think it follows that, if something positive like creativity can affect me so strongly, then the opposite must be true as well. When stress and pressures at home and/or work begin to affect the people and relationships in our lives, it can open the door to financial and legal issues, as well as drug and alcohol dependencies. Negativity, like creativity, can spill into all aspects of our lives.

For many of us, our first instinct is to keep our personal lives private, while professionally, we are often encouraged to leave our problems at the door when we come to work. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to compartmentalize our lives; the shame and distress we feel over our inability to handle those issues only exacerbates them, often resulting in a sense of isolation that prevents us from exploring possible solutions.

VPL's Employee Assistance Program has a list of volunteers called Peer Referral Representatives, who will listen to your problems and assist you in resolving them. They work in cooperation with multiple resources, including the Vancouver Civic Employee Assistance Program. The VCEAP provides registered counsellors (like therapists) who are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They are available for free to employees and their family members - even after retirement - and the service is absolutely confidential.

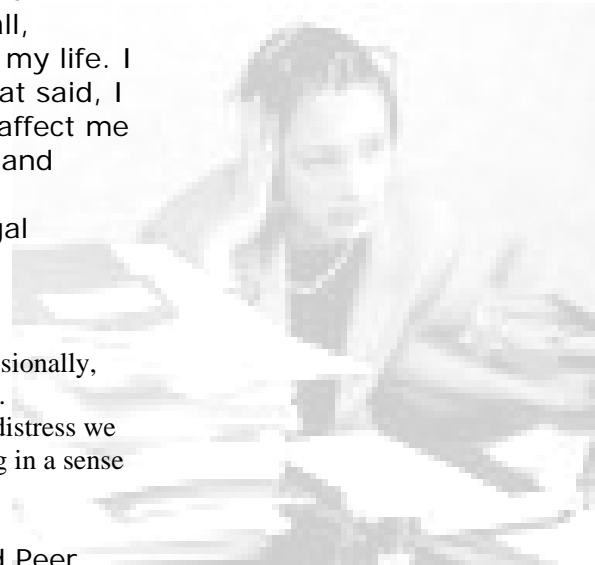
EAP Counsellors Terry Brennen and Francine Robinson are also happy to deliver 'brown-bag' lectures for staff at any worksite. There are many established topics to choose from and they are always looking for more, so feel free to call them at any time.

As well, thanks to the United Way and the Canadian Labour Congress, we also have the benefit of a Union counselling program. While both programs focus on **listening** and **referral** and utilize the same resources, the Union counselling program is also a primary resource in its own right, and will act as necessary to defend the rights of its members.

For **Cupe391 Union counselling** contact any member of the Executive or Sherry MacLeod at: 604-331-3753 or [sherry.macleod@cupe391.ca](mailto:sherry.macleod@cupe391.ca))

If you are interested in training to become a **Peer Referral Representative**, check out the EAP website at:  
<http://citywire.city.vancouver.bc.ca/programs/eap/>

Current EAP Reps for VPL are listed on the HR page:  
<http://staff.vpl.ca/Locations/SECTION/HRES/EAP.html>



# Notes...

## *From a young CUPE 391 member attending their first CUPE BC Convention*

This past week, I was very fortunate to travel to Victoria and attend my first ever CUPE Convention. I was a bit nervous prior to, as I didn't know what to expect, but very excited nonetheless. As the convention took place, I was accepted and praised for coming out – as I'm a young worker (the youngest member to attend this convention) – and everyone was ecstatic for A) a new member, B) a new voice, and C) (most importantly) a young worker. I soon learnt how this union is a great union to work for; everyone is very welcoming and are all willing to take the time to teach others something new.

As I listened to speeches being made throughout the day by many extraordinary, powerful people - including Carole James (leader of the NDP), Stephen Lewis (former UN secretary-treasurer), Dean Fortin (mayor of Victoria), and Barry O'Neill (CUPE BC President) – I was astonished by little information and facts that I didn't know about working people in BC. I not only learnt things about my own job at the library, but I heard personal experiences and stories from hospital workers, school employees, members of CARD (Committee Against Racism and Discrimination), environmentalists, the list goes on and on. The point was, that **many workers in this province are struggling**. I seriously thought about this and was thinking how my wages (for someone in a union) are significantly different than my friends' (for someone who is not in a union) wages. *Is that fair?*

see "Notes" on page 5...



Shevonne Leslie and Carole James



“You are the groups that can lead us out of this bloody mess we're in...”

Dave Barrett  
Excerpt from CUPE BC 2009

<http://www.workingtv.com/cupe-2009convention.html>

..."Notes" continued

No. *It's not fair that workers, including young, and old, are struggling to live a descent life because they're stuck at minimum wage.*

Although that is a huge problem that CUPE union members are selflessly trying to help change, there are many other things the union is trying to do.

The best part of the whole experience was joining the paramedics as they walked down the street on strike. It was a beautiful day in Victoria, and was a perfect day for the paramedics (and supporters) to go out and inform the public as to why they're on strike. The paramedics have been on strike since the beginning of April, and it felt great to be walking the streets with them, as well as attending a rally, to show my support.

I realized that the union is desperate for young workers to come out to meetings and share their opinions. People like me, under 20, or even under 30, have had much different experiences than someone much older. I'm looking forward to working with other young workers involved in the union to hopefully make a change, as I know that our minds could come up with great ideas and solutions.

Shevonne Leslie

*Some of the 21 resolutions delegates passed at CUPE BC's 46th Annual Convention in April, 2009 include:*

- ***Call for a moratorium on run-of-river private power projects in B.C. and a composite resolution calling for a moratorium on new oil sands developments in Alberta.***
- ***Lobby for the restoration of acceptable base funding for post secondary institutions.***
- ***Support and expand the "four pillars" approach to drug addiction.***
- ***Continue to demand at least \$150 million annually for community social services agencies' budgets to address waitlists for services such as shelters for women and children, and underfunding issues in the sector.***

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Source: <http://www.cupe.bc.ca/5266>

My rant is about people who are in short term acting positions who make major changes to the organization of the workplace. This is confusing and counterproductive. When the manager goes along with these changes without any discussion with any of the permanent library assistants this becomes hugely disrespectful. If you are in a short term acting position, please make a report of your suggestions for the employee you are filling in for. If you are a manager, please show your permanent staff members the respect they deserve and include their long term knowledge of the workplace in the decision making process.

**Rants  
&  
Raves**

Cheryl Hluchaniuk  
Firehall Branch Library

Don't worry. It's just a slight downturn in the economy.



Cartoon altered by Editor

**Conformia**

starring  
**ALIZA NEVARIE**

production assistance  
**DEBRA MCGERRIGLE**

written & directed by  
**SLOAN GARRETT**

© 2008 CUPE/SCFP  
Produced by  
Comic Twist Productions  
comictwist.com

A video player interface showing a woman with dark curly hair, wearing a green jacket, eating a banana. A play button is overlaid on the video. The YouTube logo is in the bottom right corner, and a progress bar at the bottom shows 0:00 / 2:07.

YouTube

0:00 / 2:07

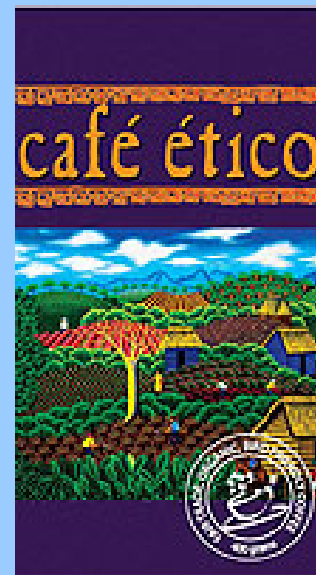
Please visit the following web address to view this entertaining satirical video produced by CUPE 391 members: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MFYChdIMpk>

## Its a fair trade brew!

*...and delicious too!*

Café ético can be purchased at the following locations:

- [café ético office](#), 260-2747 East Hastings St, between Slocan and Kaslo [[map](#)]
- Chicas Restaurant, 8722 Granville St
- [Donald's Market](#), 2342 East Hastings St
- Donald's Market, 2279 Commercial Drive
- Gourmet Warehouse, 1340 East Hastings St
- McGill Grocery, 2691 McGill St
- Nine Ten Grocery, 4355 Main St
- [Ten Thousand Villages](#) – 4 locations
  - 1205 Commercial Drive
  - 2909 West Broadway
  - 929 Denman St
  - 2101 - 2253 Leigh Square, Port Coquitlam
- East End Food Co-op, 1034 Commercial Drive
- Mainly Organics, 4348 Main St
- [Burnaby Co-op](#), 6934 Winch St, East of Sperling Ave, Burnaby
- Queen's Park Meat Market, 402 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave, New Westminster
- Small Potatoes Urban Delivery, [www.spud.ca](http://www.spud.ca)
- [Brookmere Vintage Gallery](#), 2001 Voght St, Merritt BC
- Take A Stand for Kids, Carroll Airey, 250-845-8569, Houston, Smithers and Burns Lake, BC



**All profits support CoDevelopment Canada and their work with grassroots organizations in Latin America. For more information visit [www.codev.org](http://www.codev.org).**

<http://www.etico.ca/etico/>

Thanks to everyone who made submissions to this issue of *Off The Shelf*, and apologies to those whose submissions didn't make it into this issue. Submissions to future issues of *Off the Shelf* may be sent confidentially to Lorne MacDonald (Editor) at [freelorne@gmail.com](mailto:freelorne@gmail.com), [lornemac@vpl.ca](mailto:lornemac@vpl.ca), or to Carnegie Reading Room.

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## Upcoming Meeting Dates:

Wednesday, **November 25, 2009** - Central Branch

Wednesday, **January 20, 2010** - Renfrew Branch

Wednesday, **March 17, 2010** - New Mount Pleasant Branch or Kensington if it is not open yet

*General Meetings start at 6pm (unless otherwise noted), and usually last 90 minutes.*

Off The Shelf is currently looking for other CUPE 391 members to get involved with the production of this newsletter. If you would like to participate in any way with this newsletter please contact me via [lornemac@vpl.ca](mailto:lornemac@vpl.ca), or [freelorne@gmail.com](mailto:freelorne@gmail.com).

I am looking for people willing to share their skills and talents in areas such as:

- writing and interviewing
- drawing cartoons
- photoshop
- research in labour issues
- using newsletter layout software
- advocating for workers issues
- sharing ideas for improving the quality of this newsletter

*This is an opportunity to develop your research and writing skills in a practical and meaningful way.*

Thank You,  
Lorne MacDonald  
Editor, Off The Shelf



## *Report on the First CUPE Western Library Workers Conference*

### *By Hank Einarson*

The First CUPE Western Library Workers Conference was held in Burnaby, October 2-4, 2008. The theme of the conference was “Connecting our Communities”. It included library workers from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. There were public, academic and school libraries represented and there were common themes which came up time and again.

The event was lead off with a traditional blessing, recognizing that the Conference was being held on First Nations land.

The Keynote Speaker on the first evening was David Chariandy. Chariandy is an associate professor of English at Simon Fraser University. Chariandy’s first novel Soucouyant has won awards and is considered a significant piece of literary fiction. What makes Soucouyant important for library workers is that much of it was written while Mr. Chariandy was using the facilities, resources, and staff of Vancouver Public Library’s Central branch.

David Chariandy identified the key roles library workers play for patrons – assisting them in using the library to meet their needs. He identified how patrons received help regardless of their look or station in life. He also reminded us how the services the library provides go far beyond printed material to give more people access to information and technology which they might not be able to access otherwise.

Chariandy talked about how the wide variety of people who use a public library inspired him in his writing. He also pointed out how his own upbringing, as the son of a working-class immigrant family was influenced by the people in the library gave him access to knowledge and the tools needed to search for that knowledge on his own. His parents took him to the library to learn about books.

Chariandy, as a person of colour, experienced discrimination and would have felt shut out from the chances to advance himself if it hadn’t been for the people in the library. In school he was looked at and assessed as a child with an “accent” who did not speak proper English. In the school system Chariandy had a special needs teacher assigned to him to help him improve his English, but in the library the space was offered for him to show the skills he had and wanted to develop that transcended language..

To Chariandy a library may be a place of grandeur and pomp, yet it is also approachable. Accessibility is important – both having barriers affecting removed and welcoming access to all who are seeking. Providing a model of ethical and moral issues – working to stop inequity, working to respect all who use the library – creates a desired microcosm for all of us to emulate. Creating a space where a passion for knowledge is cultivated is part of the quintessential qualities of a library and the staff who seek to serve their patrons.

For Mr. Chariandy there is a contagious passion for knowledge which the library staff pass along to their patrons.

On the second day we looked at two areas which affect library workers directly – issues around occupational health and safety and the ways that libraries interact with their communities.

For many outside the library community it is hard to believe there are many issues around Occupational Health and Safety which affect us. The opening panel looked at the ergonomics of the workplace do affect our jobs and our lives. Because much library work is repetitive having an awareness of ways to structure the day to reduce the wear and tear on the body is essential. It is

also important to know how best to do the work which needs to be done to reduce stress on the body and the mind. The first session also looked at how important it is that we are all able to recognize unsafe situations – from physical problems in the workplace to the stresses and strains which may occur from the various ways we interact with fellow employees – and to deal with and report them properly.

A further presentation was made about the sources of stress in the workplace, whether that stress was related to the working conditions or the people with whom we are working. It was pointed out that resolving issues of stress in a way which respects all employees is very important for good morale in the workforce. Other stresses which are particularly important to library workers are related to the need to keep up-to-date with technology, both in terms of helping patrons with the use of library software and hardware, and in terms of ensuring library collections, especially in public libraries, bring in new technologies while embracing the needs of other patrons who feel uncomfortable with, or have no other access to that technology than in the library.

The afternoon session looked at the ways libraries interact with their communities. The situation faced by a librarian in a school library generally includes situations where the librarian, or teacher-librarian, is now seen almost as an add-on service where students are expected to use the library as before, but hours are reduced and the services the person in the library is expected to perform seem to be expanding. To make matters worse, the librarian is often isolated, since they are not seen as teachers, office or janitorial staff. Cutbacks are also occurring in academic libraries, but there the need to keep up with technology is creating strains and pressures. In the public libraries there are threats more from the transition from full-time employment to greater reliance on auxiliary and part-time staff. As with the other libraries, workloads are increasing. This includes the inevitable need to serve the public in many roles, and to have students who can no longer rely on their school library coming to the public system, increasing pressure on staff to deal with technology, research needs and increased

circulation. In short, there are many strains on library staff to maintain effective service, feel heard and listened to, and to keep up with the needs identified by the public being served.

On the third day we looked at population of library workers – their age composition and the strains this places on the workplace, replacement and retention. We also considered issues of pay equity – why are library workers not given the incomes they deserve. Finally we looked at an issue of the media and issues of free speech.

The morning was led off by a discussion of the demographics of library workers. Four groups were identified, by the era in which they were born – Veterans, Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials. Each group have traits which create tensions in the workplace because of the world view which they have grown up with. The discussion led into recognizing the traits of each group, not to offer formulas for working together, but to suggest ways of looking at colleagues to begin to understand what makes them tick, offers motivation and how to best utilize the traits they exhibit to work well in a library environment. Since many of the participants were older, the discussion also included an awareness of the importance of recruitment and retention to create a smooth transition as younger employees enter the library system.

The discussion on pay equity focused on libraries being perceived as typically female-dominated work environments. This creates an inequality in compensation (pay) for the work and skills asked for by the employer. A history of equal pay for work of equal value pointed out that it can be difficult to compare job value because employers have insisted that differences in job title mean the skills required are not equal, and therefore not appropriate ways to measure. The further problem faced by library workers in Western Canada is that only Manitoba has some form of pay equity legislation in place. Having supportive legislation and strong enforcement will make management need to reexamine their position and renegotiate to address our issues around equity properly.

The last segment of the conference dealt with freedom of expression and the concentration of media ownership. Media conglomerates use their financial clout to try to muzzle differences in point of view and silence some critics. This type of action is to be expected, being economic and political self-interest. It is when the media step over the line and start to persecute outspoken members of the public, that they become bullies who need to be stopped. The case presented was that of Mordecai Briemberg, a man who attended a meeting at the Central Branch of VPL, picked up copies of a mock-up of the Vancouver and distributed them, the following day, to transit riders in Burnaby. As a result of his actions the

Sun has accused him of deliberately copying the Sun and presenting a view which is contrary to that of the newspaper. The fact that Mr. Briemberg is a supporter of the Palestinian cause, and an outspoken activist, seems to have been the criteria which caused the Sun to proceed with a lawsuit more intended to waste the time of the courts and to drain Mr Briemberg's financial resources.

Including Mr. Briemberg's situation brought us back to the importance of a library as a centre for free speech, open to recognizing differences and encouraging discussion without fear, to support all members of the community.

## Giving blood is a personal thing

About 3 years ago I noticed a call for blood donors to give blood platelets. I decided I would check it out to see if I qualified. I did, and decided to try it out.

The procedure is similar to giving whole blood, but lengthier. The platelets are removed from the blood, then the blood is returned to you. The process takes about 1 1/2 hours and you can give blood every two weeks. (No, the library can't give you that much time to give blood.)

In April I was getting ready to make my donation - it was to be my first extended platelet donation. The week before the appointment I was called directly by one of the researchers and asked to change my donation to whole blood. I found out I was one of four donors in BC who could give blood to a specific person on Vancouver Island. Knowing this, I changed my appointment. When the appointment came I was made to feel quite special.

The researcher who had contacted me explained about the extensive testing done on platelet blood. They are looking for specific antibodies and other qualities to make it available for situations which require more than a simple blood transfusion. This testing is more extensive than what is done with whole blood donations.

To all the blood donors at VPL, I am not suggesting you switch to giving platelets, but I am suggesting you may wish to make a donation or two as a platelet donor to possibly help a blood recipient who needs a specific type of blood.

As for me - I am giving a second donation to my Island partner later on this month.

Hank Einarson

## Homelessness

A vagabond with a cell phone  
A backpack and travellers cheques  
No ties that bind and the world to roam

A war torn country out on its own  
Raped and pillaged, forcing people out of a home  
Orphaned children from broken families  
And a scorched Earth are among the casualties

Jobs lost and the family's gone too  
Rents too high and no one on your side  
Streets are now where you lay your head  
As cardboard and newspapers are your bed

Sentenced to a life in prison  
For whatever reason  
We all are paying the cost  
Lives forever changed, once known now lost

Forgotten seniors staring at the walls  
Left behind trying to cope with it all  
Improperly placed trust upon others  
To care for our sisters, brothers, fathers and mothers

Battered women bruised and torn  
He says he's sorry and loves me without any scorn  
Unsure of the future, questions about the past  
Should I go or should I stay and try to make it last?

Pets bought to quite a child's plea  
Are now broken promises of responsibility  
Their future lives are left for chance  
Left on the side of the road without a second glance

Clear cut landscapes, muddied ravines and butchered trees  
Not much left for the animals nor you and me  
Contaminated waters that we drink  
Smog thick with our excess, it makes one think  
Polluted lands filled with garbage and outer space with waste  
As we hasten our demise and seal our fate

Keith Edwards  
Library Assistant, Central  
February/March 2008



## *A "New Delegate" at the BC Fed Convention, Nov. 2008*

*By Peggy Watkins*

I went to my first convention of the BC Federation of Labour in November. It was quite an interesting and educational experience. I would like to share a few of my observations and highlights and suggestions for improving the convention.

There were many important issues addressed at the convention along with some very heartfelt (and often sad) personal stories and passionate (and often angry) speeches. Several of these really stood out for me.

I thought it was really important that environmental issues were raised in particular climate change. It was noted that this is the most urgent, challenging issue of our times and that organized labour has an important role in determining how it is addressed. A labour activist from Oregon spoke and the Western Climate Initiative (WCI) was discussed.

<http://www.westernclimateinitiative.org/>

Another timely and compelling issue is worksite safety and compensation for injured and ill workers. These issues were highlighted by a beautiful and moving speech by Grace Lynn Pham whose father was killed in a tragic workplace accident on a mushroom farm recently. Her story, and others who spoke on the issue, highlight the urgent need to protect workers through better training, equipment and enforcement of safety rules. The compensation provided by Worksafe BC (formally WCB) also needs to be improved and strengthened.

Finally, I felt that it was noteworthy that the convention spent some time dealing with issues of international solidarity. The struggles of working people here in Canada may seem like an uphill battle sometimes but that is nothing compared to places in the world where workers can be harassed, jailed and even killed for standing up for their rights. The poor treatment of temporary foreign workers in Canada was also addressed. It is very good to see a large organization like the BC Fed passionate about standing up for the most

vulnerable of workers both here and abroad.

Don't get me wrong, I also have some issues and concerns about the BC Federation and the way things are done. I think the BC Fed should become a more democratic and grass-roots organization. There was some discussion about making a change from an annual to biennial convention (held every 2 years) which was an idea seen by many as anti-democratic. Thankfully, this idea was voted down but I think the federation needs to have a larger discussion about making the organization more democratic and member-driven and less controlled from the top of the organization. This could include making sure that the ideas and issues raised by delegates are acted upon and put into practice right away.

Environmental issues also need to be addressed starting with the convention itself by having one of the executive council take on the role of environmental steward. This person could ensure that the convention (and the federation) reduces its environmental footprint. For example, some meetings and conventions could be replaced with audio conferences to reduce their environmental impact (this would also save money). There also needs to be an accessibility steward who will address the concerns of delegates who need assistance to fully participate in the convention. For example, the hearing impaired delegates need sign language interpreters and teletype translation. These and other ideas need to be considered and changes need to be made to ensure the federation evolves and continues to be a useful and dynamic organization.

Overall, I enjoyed my time at this convention and was informed and interested in what I heard. Some of my other personal highlights included a funny, sad and inspiring speech by Stephen Lewis, the younger workers who came out in record numbers to have their say and the lunchtime rally at Library Square to support striking workers at Canada Post. If you ever consider signing up to be a delegate to this convention, I would definitely recommend it.