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Philippine Learning Tour – 2014

BY KELTI CAMERON



PHOTO: ALLAN LISSNER

In response to an appeal from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Zamboanga del Sur in southern Philippines, CUPE participated in a Learning Tour to the region in July 2014.

Gloria Lépine, Alternate Diversity Vice-President (Aboriginal) CUPE 3550, joined the Canadian delegation to visit with Indigenous and non-Indigenous mining communities. The Canadian mine TVI Pacific is operating in the region.

The Learning Tour was a one-week study coordinated by KAIROS: Canadian

Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, a social justice organization of 11 churches and religious organizations, in partnership with a Philippine delegation of church workers, Indigenous people and students.

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Upping the ante:

Bringing Global Justice Issues and Strategies to the forefront

BY SAFIA GAHAYR

The CUPE National International Solidarity Strategic meeting held in June was like no other in recent memory. We had representatives from global and social movements, community leaders and activists, CUPE national leadership, members and staff as well as grassroots community organizers.

We heard presentations, and had discussions on strategies and building worker-to-worker solidarity. Some of the issues covered included: reconstruction in Haiti, the development

of progressive trade alternatives, worker to worker projects in Honduras and the Philippines and on the use of social media in advancing global justice activism.

A sobering presentation by Raul Burbano, Coordinator of Common Frontiers, gave us insight into the fragmented lives of the people of Honduras following the 2009 coup.

Burbano gave us an account of his trip to Honduras with a delegation of election observers. They met with different groups and communities that

were affected by Canadian investments in mining as well as in the Maquila zones. He spoke about human rights defenders and the organized communities who were under the constant threat of violence and human rights violations.

There was a presentation on how capitalism has contributed to poverty and inequality around the globe. A discussion about the perilous effects of neoliberal policies and programs globally was held during the plenary and small break-out group discussions.

The presentation addressed the role of the IMF and World Bank, and their promotion of user fees, privatization, and economic austerity programs.

Social media and global justice work go hand in hand according to Derek Blackadder, Canadian correspondent for LabourStart. Social media can be used as a tool to organize individuals and communities across borders. Social networking platforms like Twitter and Facebook can be used to enhance and speed up our international solidarity work. ●



Philippine Learning Tour

PHOTO: ALLAN LISSNER

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The Canadian delegation also included participants from MiningWatch Canada, and Idle No More.

The Subanen people in the region have an especially close relationship with the mountains that link them to their environment. They thrive primarily as farmers. The foreign extractive industry

(mining) does not respect the Subanen land. Nor does this industry respect the right to free, prior and informed consent for the Subanen people as guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Their testimony mirrored the experience of the First Nations members of the Learning Tour.

The delegation called on the Philippine government

and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to be accountable for mining laws and policies that leave the environment vulnerable to massive plunder and irreversible destruction. They further called on the Canadian government to ensure that Canadian companies operating overseas act in a way that respects and upholds human

rights and does not damage the environment.

Information gathered on the Philippine Learning Tour will be used to educate Canadians about how Canadian mining activities impact Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the Philippines. It will support the communities' efforts to resist the imposition of foreign mining on their territory. ●



ENJOYING WORLD PRIDE PARADE IN TORONTO. PHOTO: CUPE ONTARIO

World Pride and human rights in Toronto

BY WENDY JOHNSTON

This summer, Toronto was host to the World Pride and Human Rights Conference. This was the first ever World Pride held in North America and the fourth such festival in the world.

The conference brought together more than 400 activists, educators, researchers, policy-makers and others from over 50 countries around the world. It was an inspiring forum where participants shared experiences, celebrated gains, took stock of the struggles ahead and discussed strategies for change at the local, regional, national and global levels.

CUPE's delegation included National Pink Triangle Committee members Julie Van Tassell (CUPE 3885, Nova Scotia), Lorenzo Dufrane (CUPE 998, Manitoba), Audrey Gauthier (CUPE 4041, Quebec), Transsexual/Transgender representative, and Wendy Johnston CUPE equality representative from the Maritimes.

10 days of learning and sharing

With up to eight different sessions in each time block, our delegation chose panels according to our diverse interests. Pride at Work: How Unions Promote LGBTQ Rights was an interactive session organized by Rashida Collins of the Canadian Labour Congress and Carol Anne Sceviour of the Ontario Federation of Labour. A panel on International LGBT Human Rights in the Workplace moderated by CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn featured an impressive line-up of researchers and activists from Poland, China, the United States and Canada. Other topics included the connected visions of the labour, women's LGBT movements, the power of boycotts and grassroots organizing in the hotel sector and the possibility of international framework

agreements as a new tool for LGBT activists, lawyers and unions pushing for protection for sexual orientation in multinational corporations.

Other conference highlights included presentations on the effects of colonization on two-spirited people in Canada and two-spirited youth activism, the international fight against HIV criminalization, the situation of LGBT refugees in Canada, aging, health care and social needs, the role of Pride parades in global advocacy, asexuality in sexual education, and trans rights in Asian countries.

We had some interesting conversations on how to build support among union leaders for LGBT members and on anti-bullying initiatives in school. The 10-day global celebration in Toronto culminated in a massive World Pride parade. ●



PHOTO: OVERPASS LIGHT BRIGADE

Water convoy to Detroit

BY GREG TAYLOR

One-thousand litres of public water were greeted with cheers in Detroit, where over 120,000 citizens have been locked in a water and human rights crisis.

Paul Moist, national president of CUPE, joined Maude Barlow, national chairperson of the Council of Canadians, and other activists in a convoy from Windsor to Detroit to deliver the water, as a show

of support and solidarity with people in Detroit who have had their water cut-off.

In April, the Detroit Water and Sewage Department started cutting off water to residences behind in their bills, affecting over 15,000 homes. The financially troubled city has declared bankruptcy, and many have fled for the suburbs or other cities, greatly diminishing the tax-base and leaving much of the public

infrastructure – such as the water and wastewater system – in disrepair. Those who have remained in Detroit, mostly African-American and low-income earners, have seen utility rates rise over 119 per cent in the last decade.

“If Wall Street banks can be bailed out, then Detroit citizens can and should be assisted by their governments,” said Paul Moist to rally supporters, assembled

at the iconic Spirit of Detroit Statue.

Following the rally, the convoy delivered the water to St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, where parishioners and activists have set up a public water station for people affected by the cut-off.

“Our solidarity as workers and citizens who believe in public water is what unites us all,” said Moist. ●



NEWS IN BRIEF

1. The world was shocked by seven weeks of violence this summer in Gaza which killed more than 2,100 people, most of them civilians, including about 500 children. Around a third of Gaza’s 1.8 million people have been displaced and many are now living in United Nations shelters. Israeli casualties included 64 Israeli soldiers and six civilians killed. CUPE joined the international community in calling for a just peace and wrote to the Canadian government asking them to recognize the unjust and disproportionate violence inflicted on the people of Gaza by Israel, and to condemn the collective punishment that was targeting civilians and infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, power and water facilities.

2. Public Service International (PSI) convened a Trade Summit in Washington D.C. in September to discuss the ongoing multinational trade negotiations (MTNs) including: Canada-EU (CETA), the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA). CUPE participated with PSI, affiliate leaders, and partners in this special gathering. These trade negotiations threaten public services and undermine accountability and transparency in government operations.

3. In September, global political leaders were in New York City for a UN summit on the climate crisis. Tens of thousands of people hit the streets to demand climate justice. CUPE researcher Graham Cox gave a presentation examining the distinction between co-ops and public ownership at the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED). CUPE participated in the Peoples’ Climate March as members of TUED, a multi-partner effort involving more than 30 unions from 15 countries.