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## Filipino labour activist visits Winnipeg

BY DAVID JACKS

Ferdie Gaité, the National President of the Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE) spoke at two events in Winnipeg about the struggles and challenges of the labour movement in the Philippines.

Gaité spoke to members of CUPE 1973 (Concordia Hospital) and 1063 (WCB) as well as at a public event about the differences and similarities of the struggles in the Filipino and Canadian Labour movements. CUPE Manitoba partnered with Migrante, a migrant worker advocacy organization, to host the public event.

“We were honoured to have one of the Philippines’ most active labour organizers speak to us in Winnipeg”, said Kelly Moist, President of CUPE Manitoba. “We are committed to helping defend labour rights of workers in the Philippines in the same way we are committed to defending labour rights in Canada.”

COURAGE is the largest labour confederation in



DIWA MARCELINO (MIGRANTE), SINGER-SONG WRITER LEVY ABAD, KELLY MOIST (CUPE MB), AND FERDIE GAITE (COURAGE)

the Philippines. With over 275,000 members it is at the forefront of public sector workers’ struggle for decent wages, humane working conditions and full union rights.

Gaité’s visit to Winnipeg was part of a pan-Canadian tour that included his participation at CUPE National Convention in Quebec City. Gaité travelled to Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg

and Vancouver speaking with CUPE members and the migrant Filipino community.

The Philippines is the third largest source country of migrants coming to Canada.

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# Anti-apartheid a global movement

BY RON VERZUH

When Nelson Mandela passed away on Dec. 5, 2013, CUPE members shared the sorrow with the rest of the world. His greatness touched us all and we grieved this loss.

With the formation of a national committee on international solidarity following the 1987 Quebec National Convention, CUPE was there in the immediate post-apartheid period.

The committee's first task was to develop a set of operating principles based on the notion of worker to worker solidarity. Then we sought to establish our first international solidarity partnership. The most urgent need was in South Africa

where workers were struggling against tyranny and for democracy.

Soon an exchange between CUPE and the National Education and Health Workers Union (NEHAWU) began. Thus our first partnership in South Africa was born out of the struggle to end apartheid.

The exchanges continued with our members learning about the effective organizing methods practiced by NEHAWU and their members studying our structure, political affiliations and staff functions.

During one exchange visit, NEHAWU members joined then National President Judy Darcy at the CUPE National Health Care Conference in

Montreal. As usual, it was a freezing cold winter, but it was politically hot as Quebec trade unionists protested cuts to employment insurance.

As we prepared to march, a fierce blizzard blowing outside, some of the Montreal members supplied our South African comrades with parkas, scarves and boots. They stepped into winter for the first time in their lives and marched next to Darcy on the front line.

One of the NEHAWU members reflected as he shuffled to keep warm. "Had this been the kind of weather we faced in South Africa", he said jokingly, "we might never have defeated apartheid." We laughed and considered

ourselves lucky that we had to contend with blizzards rather than bullets and bombs.

CUPE went on to establish a productive partnership with the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU), another union that had fought against apartheid. The partnership continues today with both unions providing strike and other support when needed.

Now with Mandela gone, we remember with great respect his incredible contribution to humanity. The international solidarity movement of which CUPE was a part of helped make some of Mandela's dream a reality. ●

*Ron Verzuh is a former CUPE international solidarity staff member.*



NEWS IN BRIEF

1. Trade union and civil society representatives at the UN climate talks (COP 13), in Poland, walked out of the meeting in protest of government and corporate inaction.

Organizations including PSI, Oxfam and Greenpeace, said that the UN and national governments were captured by the corporate sector. To counter this, they will focus attention on mobilizing members and allies rather than spending time in these corporate driven talks.

2. The 9<sup>th</sup> World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial meeting took place in Bali, Indonesia in Dec. 2013. Labour and civil society attended the talks to tell governments that the international trade and investment negotiations are fundamentally flawed. Delegates from 32 countries mobilized in opposition to these talks.

Public Services International (PSI) attended to promote quality public services and to raise awareness about the harmful effects of the proposed Trade In Services Agreements (TISA). The deal will threaten food security and increase inequalities across developing countries.

3. Members of the Korean Railway Workers' Union (KRWU) struck in December in a courageous struggle against radical restructuring proposals by Korail, the rail company, which threatened to privatize the sector. The employer responded with strike-breakers and other attacks on strikers and their rights. More than a 100 protesters were illegally detained.

# Justice for garment workers

BY KELTI CAMERON

**Kalpona Akter started working as a garment worker when she was 12. She was fired at age 16 for trying to organize a union in her factory. Akter co-founded the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) in 2001, where labour rights and leadership training is offered to garment workers.**

**A** kter, Executive Director of BCWS travelled across Canada, from Nov. 24 to Dec. 6, 2013. She was invited by CUPE, the Maquila Solidarity Network and the Public Service Alliance of Canada to travel to Vancouver, Ottawa, Quebec City, Montreal and Toronto to garner support for Bangladesh's most vulnerable garment workers.

In April 2013, over 1,100 garment workers were killed and more than 1,600 injured when the Rana Plaza building collapsed in Bangladesh. Since this tragedy, consumers in North America and Europe have come to realize the



KALPONA AKTER, GARMENT WORKER ACTIVIST

real cost of fast (and cheap) fashion. The growing international attention to worker rights abuses in Bangladesh has increased pressure on

the Bangladeshi government to reform its labour laws and allow garment workers the right to organize and bargain collectively for

improved wages and working conditions.

The minimum wage for Bangladeshi garment workers hovers at \$66 a month. This equals approximately 40 cents an hour, the lowest minimum wage in the world. This wage fails to cover the cost of the minimum nutritional needs of even a single worker, let alone her family.

The main objectives of Akter's Canadian tour was to raise awareness about the situation of garment workers and to increase pressure on Canadian companies linked to the Rana Plaza building collapse to compensate victims.

The BCWS has been providing support to the victims of the Rana Plaza disaster. They are lobbying for just compensation for all the victims of the disaster. ●

*Learn more:*  
[cupe.ca/global-justice/canada-wide-tour](http://cupe.ca/global-justice/canada-wide-tour)

## Filipino labour activist visits Winnipeg

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Many migrants are here under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), a highly exploitive labour program that denies workers their basic rights of freedom of mobility and association. The program leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation by denying them access to permanent residence status. By the end of 2012, there were 338,189 temporary foreign workers in Canada. ●

In July 2013, CUPE led a 10 day worker-to-worker solidarity mission to investigate human and worker rights violations in the Philippines. The delegation included representatives from the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Ontario Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines. The group worked closely with CUPE's Filipino partner organization COURAGE. The delegation visited with public sector workers to investigate the rising and intensifying attacks on unionized government employees, organizers and those who defend human rights.

The mission was initiated by COURAGE after six of its leaders were executed in a span of five years. There are currently 401 political prisoners held across the country. Two COURAGE national organizers, Randy Vegas and Raul Camposano, known as the COURAGE 2, have been detained since Dec. 3, 2012.

The delegation made the commitment to raising awareness in Canada about the human and union rights violations.



**NELSON MANDELA**  
1918-2013