



January 25, 2018

## **National Union statement on Unifor and the Canadian Labour Congress**

Last week the National Executive Board of Unifor announced that Unifor was, effective immediately, disaffiliating from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is deeply disappointed in this decision and is concerned about the impact that it will have on the labour movement, at both the activist and leadership levels.

Unifor has argued that their decision to disaffiliate was made in furtherance of the principle of defending workers' democratic rights within their unions. However, within hours of the disaffiliation, Unifor was aggressively raiding a large, 8,000-member local of UNITE HERE in Toronto. Claiming to be defending this principle by seeking to take 8,000 members from another union is hardly credible—it does not look like a principled action.

Unifor is conducting their raid in large part under the cloak of an attack on International Unions. It is somewhat ironic that the former UNITE HERE leader with whom Unifor is now working to raid UNITE HERE, was originally sent to Canada, from the US, by the International Union, and the Trustee at that Local is a Canadian leader from Alberta.

Unions are not good or less good on the basis of whether they are Canadian or International Unions. They have to be judged solely by their actions and their effectiveness in representing their members.

Across the country, in many provinces and localities, activists within the National Union have worked well with Unifor activists on a wide range of issues. We continue to have respect for the many activists of Unifor.

However, the decisions and actions of the Unifor National Executive Board have implications that will be, must be, felt at all levels of Canada's labour movement.

Unifor told its members that they could remain members of Labour Councils and Federations of Labour, knowing fully well that the CLC Constitution does not provide for this. We can only interpret Unifor's statements—that their members can stay as members of Federations of Labour and Labour Councils—as a deliberate attempt to create divisions within the labour movement, and as an attempt to deflect responsibility for the effects their decision has had on their activists.

Unless we are careful to act in a principled way to uphold the rules of the labour movement, we risk an internal fight where different Federations or Labour Councils end up fighting with the CLC, and with their affiliates, and even with each other, about what rules they are going to apply. That would create major chaos and animosity, and unnecessary splits within the labour movement.

The problem has been created by the decision by Unifor's National Executive Board to leave the CLC. The problem is not being caused by a principled and reasonable reaction to that decision.

There is no requirement that we treat all Unifor activists as enemies or pariahs. If they want to remain as allies locally, we can work with them at the provincial or local level. However, they cannot be accorded the same rights as affiliated members. They will be the same as other non-affiliated union members. If they choose to, they can of course work with us to defeat anti-labour attacks. But they can't do that as full members of the organization that their leadership has pulled them out of.

This situation is difficult for everyone. We are very concerned about the effect of Unifor's decision on Federations of Labour and on the hundreds of Labour Councils across the country. Activists with Unifor have played a strong and important role in these bodies. Many of these bodies will suffer as a result of the reduced participation and funding that will result from the Unifor decision. But we can't resolve those concerns by pretending that Unifor is still a member of the CLC, or by pretending that Unifor isn't openly raiding a CLC affiliate.

The leadership of the Canadian Labour Congress will be meeting over the next week. We will continue to update you as information becomes available.

In solidarity,



Larry Brown  
President



Elisabeth Ballermann  
Secretary-Treasurer