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Global Justice

Women's rights are workers' rights



Women in South Africa demonstrate in support of women's equality.

By Pat Daley and Archana Rampure

ONE HUNDRED South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) members met in Johannesburg in November 2010 for an unprecedented national workshop on gender. The workshop was aimed at integrating the struggle for women's equality with the South African labour movement's broader fight for workers' rights and against corruption in government.

CUPE staffers Archana Rampure and Pat Daley participated in the workshop and were able to see for themselves the benefits and drawbacks of having both women and men integrated into one workshop on gender issues. That and the

sheer size of the workshop, which included representation from every South African province, made it a fascinating learning experience for the CUPE sisters too, who were there to share their research and communications skills. Part of an ongoing multi-year project between CUPE and SAMWU that focuses on organizing women who are working on contracts for various South African municipalities, this workshop was an opportunity for SAMWU gender activists to learn from each other's successes and challenges.

The greatest success in signing up new members and "re-municipalizing" (or contracting-in) services has been

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CUPE

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COP16 CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT:

Workers want to build a more climate stable society

By Matthew Firth

CUPE'S WORK with the Council of Canadians is a clear example of the co-operation needed to address climate change, National Secretary-Treasurer Claude Généreux told 150 delegates from progressive movements participating in the 16th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP16) in Cancun, Mexico in December 2010.

Généreux attended along with national environment committee members Carolyn Unsworth and Carina Ebnoether and national staff Pierre Ducasse and Matthew Firth.

Among the key events was the coming together of progressive

delegates to discuss mobilizing for action on climate change. This summit within COP16 was put together by the Cornell Global Labor Institute. Speaking at the event, Généreux said workers are ready to help build a more sustainable, climate-stable society.

Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians implored delegates from the different movements to “see each others’ struggles as just as important as our own, so that we can fuse social justice, labour and environmental issues to reject our current destructive system and reinstate the importance of the commons.”

Bill McKibben, the founder of the 350.org movement, outlined the urgent need for deep greenhouse gas cuts. He said the summer of 2010 – with its devastating floods in Pakistan, severe heat waves in Russia and record-breaking temperatures in many parts of the world – was just a taste of what a warmer planet will be like. McKibben, a long-time environmental activist, said labour’s history of solidarity – of working together for the common good – is a principle that must guide all progressive groups working for climate justice.

For more information go to cupe.ca/podcasts

CUPE support for Haitian trade unionists

By Rhonda Spence

PLANS ARE MOVING AHEAD to assist the Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers (CTSP) in Haiti. Following the earthquake in January 2010, the CTSP was quick to identify the reconstruction of its union office as a priority. CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer Claude Généreux, was part of the initial mission

to Haiti sponsored by Public Services International (PSI) and has been leading efforts to get the project up and running.

The reconstruction project for the CTSP offices was discussed at the PSI meeting in September 2010 with representatives from the CTSP and a group of



Activists in Saskatoon demonstrate in support of Abousfian Abdelrazik.

Citizens brave winter blast to speak-out

By Beth Smillie

CONCERNED CITIZENS braved an arctic blast in Saskatoon on International Human Rights Day to speak-out in support of Abousfian Abdelrazik. Mr. Abdelrazik, a Canadian, returned 17 months ago after six years in exile in Sudan, including a year in which he was trapped within the Canadian consulate in Khartoum. He has never been charged with any crime but his name remains on a UN Security Council “black list” which imposes sanctions on individuals, including an international travel ban and a freeze of assets.

“The treatment of Mr. Abdelrazik by the federal government is inexcusable,” said Tracy Marchant, one of the speakers at the rally, who blasted the Harper government for violating Abousfian’s fundamental human rights.

The Harper government is upholding the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267 sanctions against Mr. Abdelrazik, even though he has never been charged with any crime. “Both the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the RCMP have publicly stated they have no

evidence against him,” noted Simon Lewis, another speaker at the rally.

The 1267 sanctions – which prevent Mr. Abdelrazik from working or having a bank account – are indefinite. Individuals on the 1267 list have no right to a hearing – a blatant violation of the Canadian Charter and international law.

Countries like Britain have refused to impose the sanctions against their nationals on the 1267 list, stating they are unconstitutional.

For more information:
peoplescommission.org/abdelrazik

PSI unions from the Americas. Following this meeting and the conclusion of an agreement with the PSI, CUPE launched an appeal to Quebec, Canada and U.S. members to raise funds. Several unions have confirmed their participation.

CTSP has retained the services of an engineer in Port-au-Prince and building plans have been drawn up. CUPE has worked with our own construction contractor to review and cost the plan. It is estimated that a modest

office building can be built for approximately \$50,000.

An agreement between CTSP and the supporting unions has been reached, with CTSP involved in all aspects of the project. Early in 2011, all parties will meet to start up the project.

Solidarity with Haitian public sector workers is a vital part of rebuilding a society based on respect and self-determination. CUPE will be there to help make a difference.

Arrests of union activists in Iran

By Derek Blackadder and Farid C. Partovi

ORGANIZING INDEPENDENT

labour organizations in Iran are met with state repression. Last May, teacher Farzad Kamangar was executed after a five minute trial for “endangering national security” and “enmity against God.”

Being elected to a leadership position in a union guarantees a prison term or dismissal. Activists at the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company are regularly arrested as the government attempts to disrupt their organizing activities.

Currently, four members of the union are in jail. Mansour Osanloo and Ebrahim Madadi, president and vice-president, have

been in jail for the past three and half years. Meanwhile Reza Shahabi, the union’s treasurer, has been incarcerated since June 2010 without trial and activist Gholamreza Gholamhosseini has been held incommunicado since November 3, 2010.

Almost all elected representatives of the Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tepeh Sugarcane Company have been in and out of jail since 2009. These include past president Ali Nejati who spent more than six months in jail and current president Reza Rakhshan who was transferred to Fajr prison in Dezful on January 3, 2011 to serve a six month prison sentence and is

charged with spreading lies after he published an article titled “We are all one family.” In addition, Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, a well known labour activist who has been incarcerated since June 2010, has now been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

These attacks on labour activists and organizations in Iran are taking place while the government is engaged in massive neo-liberal policies of privatization and subsidy cutbacks to the most basic needs of the Iranian population.

For more information on workers’ struggles in Iran, you can follow: labourstart.org and info@workers-iran.org

South Africa continued in Eastern Cape province. Unions in South Africa do not have the benefit of automatic dues check-off. They must sign up and collect dues from each individual member. This itself is a challenge. Workers here are not only low paid – especially when working contracts, often through labour brokers – but many also do not have access to the kinds of transportation, communications, housing and other infrastructure that Canadian workers enjoy.

Another major challenge to organizing is the corruption

that exists in many municipal governments. The skits presented by provincial teams on the final night of the workshop illustrated clearly the impact of corruption on the awarding of contracts and on workplace dynamics. Participants role-played sexual and emotional harassment, rip-offs by labour brokers and nepotism in hiring – but often had solutions that highlighted the positive impact of union involvement. SAMWU is committed to exposing this corruption and to defending public delivery of public services.

South Africa’s unemployment rate is over 25 per cent and as high as 80 per cent in some townships; women here acutely feel the lack of services (child care and support for the fight against domestic violence, for example). This workshop brought together activists in SAMWU’s gender structures to learn about how women’s equality fits into the broader cause of improved working and living conditions, which many see as the continuation of the labour movement’s historic participation in the struggle for social justice in South Africa.