



HEU conference focuses on the struggle for equity and justice

Under the theme – *Rising Together: Roots, Struggle, Strength* – more than 120 HEU members gathered in Vancouver this week for the union's 2017 Equity Conference.

The union's secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside spoke of the need to address the many changes taking place in the makeup of HEU over the years saying, "We need to base our work as activists, advocates and representatives on the principles of equity and the practices of anti-racism."

Members received an important update on HEU's equity program and future equity audit from consultant Natasha Aruliah.

Aruliah described the important differences between equity, equality and liberation, and explained how economic justice cannot be achieved without racial justice and gender justice.

The equity audit was mandated by delegates by the HEU Convention in 2016.

HEU president Victor Elkins addressed delegates remotely from a human rights conference in Miami. He underscored the importance of advocating for "equity and justice for all people, and to make our union a safe and welcoming place for all members."

Chaired by HEU financial secretary Donisa Bernardo, the conference worked toward building solidarity among the union's five equity-seeking groups, and welcomed several guest speakers who stressed the urgent and ongoing need to fight against discrimination and injustice.

A highlight of the conference was a special interactive presentation by Angela White and Adeline Brown of the Indian Residential School Survivors Society.

During the presentation, HEU members volunteered to play the roles of Indigenous children, their mothers, grandmothers and fathers, while one member took on the part of a government official who took the children away from their families and homes. It was a very emotional and powerful lesson about the horrific residential school system, and an effective way to open the conversation on reconciliation.

Participants also heard from several speakers on equity issues. They included Dr. CJ Rowe from Qmunity, Yuly Chan of Chinatown Action Group, Carol Arnold of the B.C. Teachers' Federation, Carissa Ropponen of WAVAW, Byron Cruz of Sanctuary Health, Jane Dyson of Disability Alliance BC, and Jane Ordinario of Migrante BC.

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Delegates elected four members and four alternates to each of the union's five equity standing committees – Pink Triangle (LGBTQ+), Indigenous Peoples, Women, Ethnic Diversity, and People with disAbilities. The remaining three members and three alternates to each committee will be selecting through an upcoming selection process.

On May 31, delegates held a sidewalk solidarity rally at St. Paul's Hospital to support the more than 4,000 HEU contracted dietary workers and cleaning staff who are demanding fair wages and basic job security from their corporate employers.

“I have a message for the health authorities,” said Whiteside. “Housekeepers and dietary workers are not a disposable workforce... They're an essential part of the health care team. Any you can't contract out your responsibility to ensure decent standards of work in our health care system.”

Check out the next issue of the *Guardian* for more coverage. Meanwhile, photos of the rally and conference are on the union's Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1577219428956923.1073741895.203485052997041&type=1&l=3e00cf0b3c>

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