



# HEU equity conference unites members in commitment to celebrate diversity

HEU's strength comes from our diversity.

That message resonated for HEU members attending the union's 9<sup>th</sup> Equity Conference last week in Richmond, which brought together members from our five equity standing committees – Ethnic Diversity, First Nations, Pink Triangle, Women, and People with disAbilities.

Over two-and-a-half days, conference delegates participated in a number of workshops, including economics, creative writing, addictions, and finding your voice.

They also heard from HEU's leadership and special guest speakers, including First Nations greetings from Rebecca Duncan and a keynote address from Canadian Labour Congress' executive vice-president Marie Clark Walker.

HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside talked to members about the Responsive Union Project, which stemmed from Resolution 75 that was passed at 2012 convention and reaffirmed at the last convention to bring an equity lens to all of HEU's work, internally and externally.

“The Responsive Union Project is part of a five-year action plan to have a gender and equality analysis in everything that we do,” said Whiteside. “Today, we have the most diverse membership in the union's 70-year history.

“Privatization, de-accreditation, amalgamation, consolidation and shared services have all played key roles in driving down workers' wages and eroding workers' fundamental rights. And many of those workers are marginalized and from equity-seeking groups.”

HEU president Victor Elkins discussed some of HEU's rich history and leadership around equity issues, and emphasized the importance of preserving our equity caucuses.

Elkins also described the union as a champion of human rights. “HEU is the first provincial union to provide same-sex benefits before it was legally mandated by the government. We fought tirelessly for pay equity in the 1990s, securing more than \$25 million for our members in retro pay.”

And HEU financial secretary Donisa Bernardo gave an overview of how equity issues still affect so many HEU members. “It is our responsibility to ensure that every HEU member – no matter what our differences may be – feels included, heard and respected.”

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During Clark Walker's address, she provided an overview of the impact of the Harper government's policies on working people, and encouraged HEU members to get involved in the upcoming federal election.

"We have to challenge the track record of this government," she said.

The equity standing committees also elected new caucuses for the next two years. These committees act as advisors to the Provincial Executive, helping to shape the direction of the union.

Conference delegates were also encouraged to take HEU's federal election pledge, committing to vote for public health care <[www.votehealthcare.ca](http://www.votehealthcare.ca)>.

To see all conference photos, and tag your friends, please go to our Facebook page <<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.996079073737631.1073741848.203485052997041&type=3>>.

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