

CUPE BC 2023 CONVENTION INDIGENOUS COMMITTEE REPORT

The CUPE BC Indigenous Committee would like to acknowledge and express gratitude to Elder Sam George, who is Sə'ílłwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) and on whose unceded territory many CUPE BC and CUPE National events occur, along with Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. He continues to provide wisdom, grounding, and voice to the good work that we strive to do. We also have fifteen Indigenous workers and two Indigenous national staff reps representing twelve First Nations territories in what is now called British Columbia. Whether we, as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis people, are on our home-based territories or are visitors from other parts of Turtle Island, we respectfully recognize the Elders, Ancestors, culture, and contributions of the Nations who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

It is important to note that this report is a collective of experiences with members contributing using their own words. This year has been incredible with several new members on our Committee. We currently form the largest committee within CUPE BC, representing many diverse cultures and traditions across Turtle Island. With diversity come varying perspectives, and members appreciate the variety of holistic teachings, which are especially important to those not raised in their homelands or with their language and culture.

Activity Report

Our work on the Indigenous Committee often raises emotional reactions because the work is tied to our identity, loss of identity, and lived experience. We cannot undo being Indigenous nor detach when we work to lift up Indigenous CUPE members and pave a path for future generations of Indigenous workers. As a result, this year, our Committee focused on taking space and being heard. We are not startled by the distractions and limitations of the colonial systems, but we are affected by them; for example, holding a meeting on National Aboriginal Veteran's Day, instead of attending the memorial service of our relatives was unsettling. This required our Committee to pivot and focus on healing to restore our members as whole before the work could continue. We are in the process of creating an Indigenous Calendar of Important Dates to prevent booking meetings on relevant days and alert CUPE at all levels to consider creating awareness statements, campaigns, articles, or information blasts.

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Most of our action items pertain to representation and seeing ourselves on Local Executives, taking up space in the Public Employee, being featured in the childcare videos, and creating educational resources. One committee member was featured in the childcare campaign video series, Larissa's Childcare Story (CUPE BC Facebook page), where she spoke of the barriers to accessing childcare in rural communities and the inclusion of Indigenous culture and language in schools. Living on her Secwépemc'ulucw traditional territory, she was honoured to amplify the voices of Indigenous parents and believes that creating space for language and cultural safety in childcare is vital to the continued work of decolonizing and indigenizing school systems, beginning at the daycare level and extending into school age.

Our Committee was featured on the front cover of the [Public Employee Spring 2022 issue](#), presenting our ribbon skirt art installation, which will again be part of the 2023 Convention. We also contributed two articles to the [Public Employee Special Labour Day Edition](#) about the Kairos Blanket Exercise and the Kamloops 215, One Year Later, The Importance of Bearing Witness.

As we have been working to strengthen the voices on our Committee, so we can speak our truths, we have noticed that the regularly allotted time for committee meetings is insufficient for us to accomplish our goals to build up our profile in the CUPE BC landscape. For our Committee, advancing truth before reconciliation, decolonizing and indigenizing takes time and must be done with great care and attention to detail, in a consensus style, with all voices contributing.

The Committee has had three formal meetings since the last CUPE BC Convention, including the One Big Committee Meeting in the fall of 2022, another in the winter, November 2022, and our final meeting in January 2023.

Most of our work over the past year focused on Resolution 65, which is to produce an educational video addressing the need for increased awareness and protocols for Indigenous Cultural Safety in union spaces. Culturally safer organizations are committed to the ongoing learning of colonial history, deconstructing power imbalances, and developing anti-racism standards and strategies. Over the next term, we look forward to actioning the National Anti-Racism Strategy as it relates to Indigenous workers and fulfilling the goal of creating the Indigenous cultural safety video, which we hope is one step in raising awareness about safety issues and reducing harm that holistically affects Indigenous workers. Our collective experiences are an opportunity for CUPE BC to move forward in supporting reconciliation by providing safe spaces for Indigenous workers and committing to ensuring our inclusion in all aspects that concern us as CUPE members and as Indigenous peoples. We also commit to working in partnership with CUPE BC to create an orange shirt design in time for Truth and Reconciliation Day, September 30, 2023.

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During the 2022 Convention, we proudly unveiled the booklet “[How to Include an Indigenous Workers Position on Local Executives – A Guide](#)” to increase Indigenous workers’ representation in leadership roles (Resolution 52, Convention 2021). As a result of the work completed to create this guide, Local 4951, which contains five units in Northern BC, successfully created a 2nd Vice President - Indigenous position, which falls in line under the President, along with the current 2nd Vice President. Creating space at the table for an Indigenous leader is one aspect of representation, and the next step is to ensure the Executive is aware and trained in Indigenous cultural safety, so that Indigenous leaders emerge into welcoming, informed circles. Ideally, over the next two-year term, the CUPE BC Executive and Local Executives will be trained in cultural safety and continue the work to create space for Indigenous workers at all tables and in all circles.

In other good news, two members of our Committee stepped out of their comfort zone and presented the Guide at the Annual General Meeting of the North Area District Council. The members felt empowered by taking up space, having a voice in CUPE and educating on topics that our Committee worked on. They spoke from their hearts on the importance of Indigenous representation on union Locals and shared the step-by-step process from the Guide. They received a standing ovation, and some attendees took pictures of the Guide to take back to their Locals. Very inspiring!

Bargaining for Indigenous members to experience dignity and equality in the workplace was also part of the work of Committee members in their home Locals. Some Locals bargained for language on territorial acknowledgments, representative workforce, training for Indigenous workers, and leaves for bereavement, cultural days and observances, which are important dates that are not official holidays, such as National Indigenous Peoples Day. Several members are on their bargaining committees and successfully bargained for paid cultural days; as Indigenous people have followed the colonial calendar for hundreds of years, this recognition is another step toward reconciliation.

2022 Events Members Attended or Acknowledged

- Elder Sam, along with CUPE BC President Karen Ranalletta and Secretary-Treasurer Trevor Davies, laid a wreath at the National Aboriginal Veterans Day ceremony.
- Committee members participated in or planned events and marches to honour and remember the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIW2S) on February 14, the Women’s Memorial March (October 4 and May 5), the National Day of Awareness and Action on the MMIWG2S

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either in their communities, personally or at Canadian Labour Congress Winter School.

- National Indigenous People's Day (June 21)
- Truth and Reconciliation Day / Orange Shirt Day (September 30, 2022)
- Moosehide Campaign

Resolutions to Convention

1. Create a campaign advocating that June 21, National Indigenous People's Day, be recognized as a statutory holiday in British Columbia.
2. Host and cover the costs of a one-day virtual workshop about Indigenous cultural safety in alignment with Safe Union Spaces and further education toward Truth and Reconciliation.
3. Serve a resolution to CUPE 2023 National Convention seeking the creation of educational resources to assist Locals in improving or developing territorial acknowledgments with region-specific information.

Resources

CUPE BC Indigenous Committee & Canadian Union of Public Employees

How to Include an Indigenous Workers Position on Local Executives – A Guide.

<https://1123.cupe.ca/files/2022/05/how-to-include-an-indigenous-workers-position-on-local-executives.pdf>

CUPE British Columbia & Canadian Union of Public Employees

Public Employee: Bearing Witness Together (Spring 2022)

<https://www.cupe.bc.ca/2022/05/16/public-employee-spring-2022/>

Saje Ricci, S. & CUPE BC Indigenous Committee

A Truly Holistic Experience in Unlearning Racism, Colonialism

Public Employee Summer 2022

https://issuu.com/cupebc/docs/public_employee_-_summer_2022

CUPE Local 3500 Executive & CUPE BC Indigenous Committee

Kamloops 215, One Year Later: The Importance of Bearing Witness

Public Employee Summer 2022

https://issuu.com/cupebc/docs/public_employee_-_summer_2022

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Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank the CUPE BC Executive and officers, CUPE BC staff, and each other for their time and effort in working toward stronger, safer, and more progressive union spaces on the pathway toward truth and reconciliation. Finally, we would like to thank the land-based Nations, on whose unceded, traditional territories we conduct our union business.

Respectfully submitted:

Sam George, Elder
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