

## COPE LOCAL 343 CONVENTION – ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

In April, COPE Local 343 held its biennial convention in Toronto. There were approximately 110 delegates in attendance for two days of workshops, elections, reports, resolutions and best of all, comradery.

Part of the standard agenda includes swearing in of new members. That certainly is a highlight, when we see new faces and our numbers growing. As well, we get new and different ideas, comments or concerns brought to the membership that can affect our diverse membership in a variety of ways.

We welcomed two guest speakers, one of whom shared a tragic story with threads of hope for vindication and change in the treatment of those suffering from or living with mental illness; the other enlightened the members on the existence of environmental racism and the tools to expose it and work towards eliminating it.

Yusuf Faquiri addressed the delegates and spoke about the Justice for Soli campaign. He, and his family have been fighting for the answers they deserve about the death of his brother Soleiman, who died while incarcerated during an incident in which the guards were applying force. Soli, only 30 years old, had mental health issues and was awaiting medical evaluation. On December 15, 2016, that wait ended, along with his life.



Yusuf played a video that described details of that horrific day and follows some of Yusuf's path to truth and exposed concrete developments that could eventually get justice for Soli. He encouraged us all to visit [www.justiceforsoli.com](http://www.justiceforsoli.com) to learn more about the campaign, and how we can get involved.

Chris Wilson,  
First Vice  
President  
of the  
Coalition  
of Black  
Trade Unionists—Ontario  
Chapter, graciously accepted  
our invitation to speak to the  
delegates about the importance  
of understanding what  
environmental racism is, how it  
impacts racialized and  
Indigenous communities and  
what part we can play in ending  
socio-economic inequalities.



Chris touched briefly on a day-and-a-half workshop that he and his team offers on environmental racism. One that some members attended at the COPE Local 343 Fall School in October.

The workshop uses a participatory education model that is based on the belief that the expertise already exists among the participants in the room. Placed into groups, members can then offer their own knowledge and experiences to enrich a dialogue around environmental racism in Canada and to provide information to develop a plan of action.

### EXECUTIVE BOARD—COPE Local 343

**President**, Kelly Belbin • **Vice-President**, Casey Oraa • **Secretary-Treasurer**, Tina MacPherson •  
**Recording Secretary**, Pauline Fitzgerald • **Members at large**: Ronda Allan, Tanya La Rush, Phill Morgan •  
**Young Worker**, Aiden Davies • **Equity Members**, Vanitha Ethiraju •  
**Trustees**: Ashley Kirby, Tiffany Main, Ethiraju Ramachandar

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In the afternoon on the Saturday, it was time for delegates to participate in a workshop called “Building



skills for change.” Olivia Chow, founder of the Institute for Change Leaders and thirty-year public figure, serving in Toronto’s municipal politics and Canadian Member of Parliament, led the workshop.

The participants used the Story of Self tool to explore who you are, the choices that have shaped your identity, the lessons you have learned from those choices, and the values that guide you. With this, placed in groups, we each discussed our stories. We were then prompted by a facilitator to explore how we would use these experiences to organize for change. Some of these stories were deeply personal, but participants were brave enough to share with fellow members.

Lastly, as mentioned above, elections were held for the 2019–2021 Local 343 Executive Board and Trustees. The following were the results: Kelly Belbin, President; Casey Oraa, Vice President; Tina MacPherson, Secretary-Treasurer; Pauline Fitzgerald, Recording Secretary; Ronda Allan, Tanya La Rush and Phill Morgan, Members at large; Aiden Davies, Young

Worker; Vanitha Ethiraju and Guled Warsame, Equity Members and the Trustees elected were Ashley Kirby, Tiffany Main and Ethiraju Ramachandar.

Thanks to all involved in making this a memorable Convention.



## EXECUTIVE BOARD VACANCY

In April 2019, Local 343 held its Biennial Convention and at that time delegates in attendance elected the new Executive Board, who are currently serving a two-year term as per the Constitution. Unfortunately, one of the two Equity Seats has since resigned which has created a vacancy on the Executive Board.

As this resignation occurred so early in the term, the Executive Board unanimously decided to send this call out which gives any member in good standing who is interested in becoming an active participant of the Executive Board, the opportunity to put their name forward for consideration.

To be considered to fill the Equity Seat vacancy, a member must be in good standing for

the last twelve (12) months. As well, as per Article 8.7 b): “Equity seats will be representing members from the First Nation and Inuit, persons with a disability, persons from the LGBTQ community and racialized persons. Only members who have self-identified may run for these positions on the Local Executive Board.”

Local 343 is a very active, working Executive Board. Members of the Executive Board regularly participate in the planning and execution of Local 343 events, participate in monthly Executive Board meetings and any other meetings required, as well as work on various projects throughout the term.

If you are interested in joining the Executive Board, kindly submit your name with a written submission outlining why the Executive Board should consider appointing you to this position. The written submissions should not exceed 500 words.

Any members interested in filling this vacancy should send their written submission to COPE Local 343 via e-mail at [office@cope343.com](mailto:office@cope343.com) by no later than Friday, July 12, 2019.

## WANT TO BE A LABOUR DAY LEAD IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

### WE NEED YOU!



Local 343 is looking for activists who want to be a Labour Day Lead in their community. What will this entail you ask? As the Labour Day Lead for your community, you'd be responsible for:

- being the Lead person for Local 343's contingent in your Region/Area
- corresponding with the Local's Executive Board to ensure enough materials are available for the contingent
- coordinating your Region's/Area's Local 343 contingent and participating in the Labour Day parade and festivities with your fellow Local 343 activists

Members of the Local 343 Executive Board will be handling preparations for Toronto. The Local is looking for Leads outside of Toronto.

If you are interested in being a Labour Day Lead, please email [office@cope343.com](mailto:office@cope343.com) by no later than Friday, July 12, 2019. In your email, please include your name, Unit/Workplace, the Region/Area you wish to be

lead for (ex/ Halton, Durham, etc) and a personal email address where you can be contacted by the Board as well as any members in your Region should you be chosen to be a Lead.

## OFL PREVENTION LINK

The Ontario Federation of Labour's Prevention Link is sponsoring the following workshops in the fall of 2019. Prevention Link workshops provide participants practical skills for addressing and resolving workplace disability and accommodation challenges.

Our comprehensive workshops include group discussions, case studies and engaging activities.

The workshops are ideal for WSIB representatives, RTW specialists, Health and Safety Reps, Union Leadership and Union Stewards.

Here is a list of upcoming workshops/courses:

### Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Workshops

- Sudbury: September 24 & 25, 2019
- Toronto: October 8 & 9, 2019
- St. Catharines: November 5 & 6, 2019
- Oshawa: December 11 & 12, 2019

### Level 3, Appeals & Dispute Resolutions

- September 15 to 20, 2019: Bayview Wildwood Resort

### Fall Educational, October 20 to 25, 2019

- Level 1 & 2
- Return To Work
- Medical Orientation
- Occupational Disease

Please call us for further information at (416) 443-7683 or 1-800-668-9138 or visit our website at

[www.preventionlink.ca](http://www.preventionlink.ca) on services and courses offered.



## CUTS TO LEGAL AID ONTARIO

*Submitted by: Vanitha Ethiraju*

It is no surprise that the Ford government's cuts have led to some serious anger and outrage from labour and community groups. Beyond anger, these cuts will cause serious devastation for many Ontarians who haven't already been hurt by Ford's agenda.

Equal access to justice is one of the many services that have made it to the Ford chopping block.

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) has been grappling with cuts to its budget made by the Ford government in April — a 30 per cent reduction of the previously anticipated \$456-million provincial allocation. The cuts that LAO is imposing on clinics,

totalling about \$14.5 million, are part of a larger cost-cutting effort to save about \$70 to \$75 million this year. The cuts will also see reductions to LAO's internal operations, to its funding for private lawyers in court, and to immigration and refugee services. Years of meagre Liberal funding following the Harris/Eaves cuts in the 90s had already put clinics in a precarious financial situation that limited their ability to do more than the bare-bones of legal work and advocacy. This is only adding more fuel to the fire of oppression and inequality.

Legal Aid Ontario is mandated to promote equal access to justice throughout Ontario for low-income individuals across Ontario. Everyday, Legal Aid Ontario helps almost 4,000 or more disadvantaged people, including single parents seeking child support, domestic violence survivors, parents seeking custody of children, refugees, and accused persons.

One of the provincial agency's main responsibilities is to provide funding for private lawyers to represent impoverished people in court. It is also the main funder of Ontario's 73 community legal clinics, some of which provide general legal services to low-income people on matters such as housing and income security in specific "catchment areas," while others have provincial mandates in certain issues,

including HIV/AIDS, children and youth, and the elderly. Notice a pattern? They are all people who are disadvantaged in some way and now will be dragged down even further by these cuts.

Saving money is great but not at the cost of people battling for custody of their child, being prosecuted, or simply cannot afford legal services. Legal clinics play an integral role in making sure that our communities stay healthy by acting as a liaison between the justice system and the community. Even though some legal clinics have been spared, they are still concerned about how future cuts will affect their clients and communities. Niagara Community Legal Clinic (Local 343 Bargaining Unit) have raised concerns about "specialty clinics" that do a lot of policy work and provide translation services. If such services are abolished it can negatively affect racialized and Indigenous communities.

Just recently, Legal Aid Ontario announced that bail hearings will no longer be covered, which will lead to an increase in jail time, weaker defence for those accused, and disincentivize lawyers from defending those on legal aid.

These are just some of the adverse effects expected with these cuts and we should expect to see more stories in the news and media about how

it is negatively affecting people's lives.

How can you help? Book an appointment with your MPP! Let them know that you are not happy with these cuts and how it is affecting yourself or someone you know.

Shame on you Doug Ford and Caroline Mulroney for rubbing even more salt in the wounds of many who will have further difficulty accessing the justice system.

## 48<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CBTU CONVENTION

*Submitted by: Ethiraju Ramachandar*

The 48th CBTU Convention was held at the Hyatt Place Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia. This year's theme was "Reclaiming Our Country, United for a Better Tomorrow". It was a packed agenda with a lot of speakers, presenters and facilitators who are tackling issues that matter the most for their unions, communities and families.

Terence Melvin, President of CBTU gave a passionate and fiery speech and report to open the convention and welcome the delegates to Atlanta. He spoke about the victories earlier in the mid-term elections and the importance of the 2020 election stressing the things that are at stake. He talked about voter suppression and the obstructions the Black community was facing during

the mid-term elections, which cost the elections for a few candidates, for example, Stacey Abrams who lost in Georgia. He mentioned that 470 Black women ran for congress in the mid-term elections, which was a record for the United States. He also talked about the straw poll that the CBTU was conducting and encouraged delegates to take part. Joe Biden was the winner for the Presidential Poll and Kamala Harris the winner for the Vice President Poll.

Right after this session, a group of delegates from the Canadian group decided to visit the National Center for Civil and Human Rights (Civil Rights Museum). This center connects the American Civil Rights movement to today's Global Human Rights Movement. The center's exhibits tell stories in ways that promote empathy and understanding.



The Friday session was started by Claude Cummings, Trustee, CBTU who was the presiding officer. That morning featured a few prominent speakers, Becky Pringle, Vice President, National Education Association who gave a passionate speech about the importance of public education and the hurdles they face. She also talked about the

various state-wide protests across the country. Tyler Downey, Secretary-Treasurer, SEIU Healthcare spoke about the importance of giving young unionists chances and mentoring them. He was followed by Ayuba Wabba, President, Nigerian Labour Congress & International Trade Union Confederation. He is the 1st Black person to be elected to the ITUC. The Nigerian Labour Congress has about 6 million members and the ITUC has about 200 million members globally. The population of Nigeria is about 200 million.

Followed by the speeches several resolutions were passed.

Robin William, Treasurer CBTU was the presiding Officer for the morning on Saturday, May 25. Moulana Said, Ambassador/Representative of Western Sahara Polisario spoke about the difficulties and hurdles faced by workers of colour.

This was followed by panels:

- Organizing Labor around Environmental Justice and Climate Justice
- The Rise of the Right Wing in Latin America
- The Rise of the Right Wing in Africa

The afternoon featured workshops on: Getting out of Debt, 2020 Census, International Affairs-Americas, International Organizing, Social

Media Organizing in the Digital Age, Organizing 101, Understanding the Basics of Credit, Common Sense Economics and Sexual Harassment.

It was truly empowering to be surrounded by so many great activists who wanted to rise up for a common cause and make sure the voices of all people, especially those that are disenfranchised are heard loud and clear!

## Winnipeg General Strike Centenary Conference

*Submitted by: Tanya La Rush*

The Winnipeg General Strike in May 1919 was a pivotal and landmark moment within the working class. When the strike was over, there were *some* gains but many of the struggles still exist today such as inclusiveness, poverty and equity -- albeit somewhat better than a hundred years ago.

I was fortunate to attend the Winnipeg Strike Centenary Conference held in Winnipeg in May of this year. We heard from several guest speakers and participated in many workshops and roundtables throughout the jam packed four-day conference. We were graced with the expertise of scholars from across Canada including labour activists, filmmakers and historians. The wealth of information and knowledge was unsurpassable.

In addition to the plenaries, we viewed short films, documentaries and in particular, the trailer for the labour musical *STAND!*. The musical follows a young Ukrainian immigrant who falls in love with a Jewish suffragette on the streets of Winnipeg during the strike. On June 21, an exact replica of the streetcar (see below the original photograph) that was overturned during the strike will be made a permanent structure in the city's centre. It is my hope that this visual reminder will remain in the hearts and minds of all of those who fought for and still fight for the rights and freedoms for our labour movement and all working-class Canadians.

## COPE/SEPB National Convention

*Submitted by: Pauline Fitzgerald*



The sixth National Convention of COPE/SEPB took place in Gatineau, Quebec. The theme was "Inspired to Action" and delegates representing Emilie Taman, NDP Ottawa-Centre and former Federal crown prosecutor, stated that we all have the good fortune to be living in this great country. She

spoke on a number of issues and urges us to vote for a government that supports environmental change, sustainable jobs, affordable housing and universal pharmaceutical care. To vote for a leader with a plan to get drug costs lowered and available to all. One that supports truth and reconciliation. She also touched on homophobia, transphobia and the anti-immigration view of the right wing and the importance of a gender equality initiative.

Daniel Boyer, President of the Quebec Federation of Labour debunked the myths associated with raising the minimum wage. He tells us that there were no negative job or drop-out rates in areas that have implemented the increase. He reminds us of Doug Ford's tactics and his refusal to raise the minimum wage in January. He also spoke on the need for fair EI benefits for all seasonal workers and that all Canadians deserve to live with dignity.

Modejeh Cox – National Director of Anti-racism and Human Rights CLC is an award-winning advocate of Labour and Human Rights. She gave a thought-provoking speech on Anti-Islamophobia and reported on matters of discrimination and racism.

Tarana Burke - #MeTooMovement Founder and keynote speaker took to the stage and told her story of how the #MeToo movement

came to be. Born in the Bronx, New York, her mother was a strong feminist who worked as a union organizer and taught her early about injustice. Tarana spoke about the trauma of sexual violence, something she never talked about until someone she met told their story. This for her was a life-changing moment. She began working with young girls and women and eventually opened up about her own personal experiences. Tarana stated that the #MeToo movement is about 'healing and action', that 'hashtags are not movements'. She told us we are still very behind and although this movement went viral worldwide, that between 2017 and 2019 there have been no changes in laws or policies. She explained that a movement requires time, strategies and bodies on the ground in order to change misconceptions and that there is a lot more work to be done. She finished with, "The #MeToo movement is a survivors' movement, not just women but men as well."

The next National Convention will take place in 2021.



An information picket took place at the Canadian Bar Association National office. Members were out bright and early to support members of Local 225 who are bargaining their first collective agreement.

## Liz Fong Activist Award

At the Local 343 Convention, Sister Bhupinder Sanghera was awarded the 1<sup>st</sup> Liz Fong Activist Award. Unfortunately, Bhupinder was not present as she was on the Workers United Rainforest Café picket line.

We thank Bhupinder for all her years of dedication to the labour movement and her community. She has been a member of COPE Local 343 for over 20 years and has worked tirelessly on issues that matter to all members.



## Widows of Asbestos preview on Day of Mourning

*Submitted by: Natasha Luckhardt*



Filmmakers, Natasha Luckhardt and Rob Viscardis (Photo credit: Steve Cornwell)

A sincere thank you to the COPE 343 executive and members for joining a preview of the Widows of Asbestos documentary project on the Day of Mourning this year. The documentary follows General Electric widows and workers' historic battle for compensation after their loved ones and their city of Peterborough was overcome with cancer. I first heard about the issue from a family friend, who said that workers were "dropping like flies" from cancer in a town nicknamed "The Electric City." Once I heard their stories, I knew they had to be told.

After filming their fight over the past three years, we wanted to give a sneak preview to the widows, workers, families and our supporters. About 250 people filled the Wenjack Theatre at Trent University, to watch their story.

It was an emotional few hours but we were overwhelmed with support from the community. The crowd watched as widows and workers took on the workers' compensation system, lobbied the government and spoke out against a company that built their city. They watched citizens become activists in their own right – and see wins!

Afterwards, we heard from the families themselves, as well as from other advocates and activists impacted by these issues. The room was filled with laughter, tears and

camaraderie. Everyone had a chance to meet the widows and workers after, who were now celebrities to those in the room.

Our greatest honour is to be able to capture their stories and we could not have done any of it without support from unions like COPE 343. I had zero experience in filmmaking, but my union and others believed that I would find a way to tell their stories. And it is the greatest honour I've ever had.

The workers truly embody the slogan of the Day of Mourning, which is to 'mourn for the dead and fight for the living'.



COPE comrades with General Electric worker, Roger Fowler