

AUGUST 2025 NEWSLETTER

200 Consumers Road, Suite 211 North York, ON

office@cope343.com | (416) 703-4448



EQUITY QUILT

COPE 343 PROJECT

COPE 343 is showing our colours through the creation of an equity quilt! We want to create something that represents every member of COPE 343, and all the beautiful identities we share. The COPE 343 Equity Committee will be hosting a drop-in at the local office for all members to contribute a square to the equity quilt. Reach out to equity@cope343 if you're interested, and we'll decide a date based on availability.

Can't make it in person? No problem! Contact equity@cope343.com and we'll send you some materials to create your own square and ship back to us!

CURC CONFERENCE

JANICE GAIREY

The Congress of Union Retirees of Canada Conference held its first in-person conference in 7 years this past June.

Delegates supported a resolution to change the configuration of the executive, demonstrating moving forward to be more inclusive, identifying a separate position for a member at large to represent Indigenous Peoples, and a separate position for a member at large to represent People of Colour. The other change to the executive generating over whelming supported by the delegates was adding six members representing the affiliates to the decision-making body.

The convention delegates reaffirmed their commitment to defending union retiree rights, strengthen public healthcare, safeguard pensions, and advancing social justice. Through strategic lobbying, coalition-building, and activism, CURC aims to influence federal and provincial policies to secure a dignified and equitable future for all union retirees.

COPE 343 would like to thank Janice Gairey for her commitment to labour, and for representing the local at the CURC Conference, and providing this report.

Keep up the great work!

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
JENNY SELLATHURAI & MITHILEN MATHIPALAN

This summer, members of COPE 343 and the Tamil Freedom Coalition travelled to their occupied homeland, Tamil Eelam. As trade unionists and diaspora organizers, we went not just to witness, but to connect, to build, and to ask: what does justice look like 15 years after Mullivaikal?

For some of us, it was our first time on the island, since our parents had been forced to leave as refugees. We arrived nervous that our broken Tamil would give us away immediately, but instead, we were met with warmth and pride. In village markets and tea shops, aunties insisted we eat more and uncles tested our pronunciation. People asked where we were from, how long we were staying, and why we had come. It was clear: this is still our land, our people, our community. And we have a role to play here.

What we're told vs. what we saw

We are told by the West and those in power that the genocide is over. That Tamil political aspirations of nationhood and self-determination are nonsensical. But walking through Kilinochchi, once the administrative capital of Tamil Eelam, we counted eight liquor shops on a single street, most owned and operated by Sri Lankan Army commanders. Not too long ago, there were none. Locals described the growing availability of drugs and alcohol, often targeting Tamil youth. With schools under-resourced, Tamil university enrolment in decline, and unemployment rising, these conditions are not fortuitous. They are part of a deliberate strategy of pacification and displacement. This is a protracted genocide. And all of it unfolds alongside the countless Sri Lankan army camps still littered across what was once the de facto state of Tamil Eelam, military occupation embedded into the everyday psyche of Tamil society.

Education is resistance. So is economic justice.

We visited projects we had helped organize, including local education spaces which Tamils call "tuition centres", run by graduates and community members from their respective villages. These centres operate with limited resources but fill a critical gap left by a state that has abandoned Tamil children and youth.

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In the Eastern Province, a former President of the Eastern University Students' Union told us about a garment factory built through diaspora support, which now employs many members of the Tamil community in economically marginalized neighbourhoods. As trade unionists and organizers, we spoke about how we can support and scale initiatives like this, projects that offer more than just income, but sustainability and livelihood. They create pathways to economic stability, local control, and long-term community resilience. This is not charity; these are opportunities for our people to decide their destiny. These are concrete steps toward self-determined development.

We also discussed the potential to expand this work linking tuition centres with cooperative economic ventures, where education leads directly to employment rooted in the community. For the community, by the community.

Truth. Resistance. Responsibility.

In Jaffna, we joined a protest in Chemmani, where mass graves are being unearthed, linking as far back as the 90s. We stood alongside mothers of the disappeared, students, and community members demanding justice. The gathering was not just about grief; it was a call for accountability. The Tamil people continue to resist, not out of nostalgia, but because living under occupation leaves no other option. This protest was held in parallel with hartal strikes across the North and East, demanding justice and a meaningful international response.

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We know who will rebuild us, because we know who tried to erase us.

As members of the diaspora, we carry a responsibility: to rebuild what was systematically destroyed. The same government that starved, bombed, and disappeared us will not be the one to restore us. That work belongs to us, both those in the homeland and those of us abroad who refuse to forget.

Now, as genocide continues in Palestine, we are reminded of our own. The same international community that once sold weapons to Sri Lanka, labelled Tamils as terrorists, and celebrated a military “victory”, is now allowing us to build genocide memorials to commemorate our dead. We see the gesture, but symbolism does not absolve complicity. It cannot rewrite history, and it will not distract us from the work that remains even 15 years later.

Send us the work you're doing in the union
or in the community and we'll include your
story in our Member Spotlight:
office@cope343.com

MARK YOUR CALENDARS
UPCOMING EVENTS

LABOUR DAY
Monday,
September 1

COPE 343
EQUITY
QUILT DROP-IN
TBD

COPE 343
FALL SCHOOL
October 18-19

Have something that
you would like
promoted in the
newsletter?
Contact
office@cope343.com

Want to get more involved in the local?

Consider joining one of our committees:

- Equity Committee
- Young Workers' Committee
- Political Action Committee

Join the emailing list, and get updates on committee actions, meetings, and events!

Contact equity@cope343.com, youngworkers@cope343.com, or office@cope343.com.