

ALERT

A special bulletin for all BCGEU members

Please post
June 20, 2008

Aboriginal Solidarity Day Events-- moving to equality

A message from BCGEU President Darryl Walker:

In 1982 the National Indian Brotherhood, (now the Assembly of First Nations) began the call for the creation of a day to recognize and honour aboriginal peoples in our country. In June 1996 the Governor General of Canada formally declared June 21, Aboriginal Peoples Day.

This year we can acknowledge a number of important steps that have been taken recently on our long journey to reconciliation with First Nations.

The recent apology by the Canadian government for the abuse and suffering caused by the residential school system is one small step. Many aboriginal people, including aboriginal workers in our union have very mixed feelings about the apology itself. But I am encouraged by the words of Assembly of First Nations National Chief, Phil Fontaine, who said in the House of Commons on June 11: "We must not falter in our duty now. Emboldened by this spectacle of history, it is possible to end our racial nightmare together."

There were two other encouraging developments at the federal level this past week. First, an Act setting up a tribunal to resolve specific claims that are not part of the ongoing land negotiations. Second, an Act that finally will implement the commitments in the historic Kelowna Accord signed in November of 2005 between First Nations, federal and provincial governments. The Accord spelled out a detailed plan to improve health, education and economic opportunities for aboriginal communities.

Both pieces of legislation received Royal Assent this past week. But much remains to be done. First Nations have issued a seven point challenge to the Government of Canada:

- Set aside the Indian Act and replace it with real involvement, power and responsibility.

- Ensure results by implementing the Auditor General's recommendations on accountability.
- Establish fair funding in programs like education, child and family services.
- Within 10 years close the gap in the quality of life between First Nations and other Canadians.
- Set as priorities, education and revenue-sharing from resource development to help First Nations build their economies and take their place in Canada's economy.
- Respect First Nations rights and the rule of law by honouring obligations in treaties, the constitution, international law and Supreme Court rulings; and Recognize the rights of First Nations governments in Canada.

The Canadian Labour Congress, faith and environmental organizations have endorsed this challenge.

Within the BCGEU we are also taking steps to make sure aboriginal workers can find their voice within our unions. We represent workers in 20 aboriginal agencies across BC; altogether we have several hundred aboriginal workers in government and non-government settings. We will continue working to ensure the historical experience and contributions of First Nations are recognized.

There are opportunities for BCGEU members across the province to show solidarity at Aboriginal Peoples Day events over the next few days. Check the BCGEU web site (www.bcgeu.ca) for a detailed list of events.

www.bcgeu.ca

