

February 8, 2018

An Open Letter to Unifor Representatives of Federations and Labour Councils

Sisters and Brothers,

Since Unifor's National Executive Board decision to cease affiliation to the CLC, many in our Union have done all we could to get a conversation started about what led to that decision. What has become abundantly clear is the labour movement is not ready to have this conversation.

Specifically, we have taken issue with the lack of enforcement of Articles 4, 26 and the affiliation provisions of the CLC Constitution.

I will focus on Article 4 for the purposes of this letter. The CLC and others would like to peddle the argument that Article 4 is working, and therefore this is about Unifor and its desire to raid. This is simply not true and is completely counter to the arguments we have been making over the past year about the serious flaws in Article 4.

Article 4 is meant to provide a means for workers to change unions if certain conditions are met.

Imagine this for a moment. Over the course of the last seven years, less than ten groups of workers have ever managed to change unions. Almost none of the cases handled by the CLC have followed the process as outlined in the Constitution and frankly many affiliates are guilty of shutting down the voices of their members who have sought to change unions.

How could it be that hundreds of groups of workers file to remove their union every year in Canada through Labour Boards, but over the course of seven years, virtually no workers have successfully used Article 4 to change unions. I would submit that Article 4 is working just as well as some of the leadership in the movement want it to work.

Of course we could all sit back and pretend that all is well. We could carry on with the status quo and continue to treat workers as if they are owned by their union. Or, we could do what Unifor was born to do. We were born to create a new acceptance of unions. To create a Union for everyone. To be bold. To help build a new, more dynamic labour movement. A modern movement.

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In 2017, Unifor first spoke up about the trusteeship of ATU Local 113 and the travesty of having Canadian workers' voices shut down by their U.S. parent union. We spoke up opposing the use of trusteeship to quell the desire of workers to change unions. In 2018, this same issue repeated itself with Unite HERE and their trusteeship of Local 75 in Toronto.

At the same time, a committee to deal with the gaping holes in Article 4 was to be established following the May 2017 Constitutional Convention of the CLC. Unifor, the largest private sector union in the country and the union raising these concerns, was banned from being part of the committee. It was simply unconscionable.

Frankly, when this happened we were left with little choice.

Was Unifor going to stand for the status quo, or were we going to chart a new course for workers in Canada?

Was Unifor going to allow union offices and assets to be seized in the middle of the night?

Was Unifor going to allow a U.S. union to fire all staff and elected leaders of Local 75 to quell dissent?

Was Unifor going to deny workers who had resoundingly rejected the politically motivated trusteeship to simply be silenced?

Was Unifor going to pretend nothing was wrong at the CLC and it was acceptable that we would be barred from being part of the work of the Committee to fix Article 4?

Your National Executive Board made a decision to oppose all of the above. They made a bold decision to stand with some of the most vulnerable workers in our country. And, it was the right one.

The fact of the matter is, workers are not chattels and Unifor stood with the workers and their desire to be protected from the bully tactics of their U.S. union and we should do it again if the situation repeats itself.

All of the above being said, many Labour Council and Federations' elected representatives have had to deal with being removed from their positions. This is the most unfortunate fallout from this decision.

We had hoped to avoid this scenario. Frankly, it is shocking that solidarity with the labour movement is an all or nothing proposition.

Unifor locals around the country pay millions of dollars in per capita to Labour Councils and Federations, while other unions ignore their existence. Seemingly as long as you pay to the CLC, your commitment to workers is not in question. It is a ridiculous position that stifles grassroots activism.

With all of the above said, it is abundantly clear that Unifor must find ways to provide support to Labour Councils and communities across our country. We look forward to any recommendations or suggestions you may have. We have some too and will be outlining them in a follow-up communiqué in the coming days.

Unifor activists are committed to building a better country for everyone. This will not change. Their heart and soul is in this work. And you can be assured that our Union will continue to be a powerful political voice in Canadian communities.

As your President, I apologize for the difficult issues you have been forced to deal with, but know that your union has stood with workers on an issue of principle.

History tells us that when challenging the status quo, there are sure to be bumps along the way. But remember when we came together in 2013 to create this bold, progressive union, we made some pretty important commitments, to each other. We promised to build a new dynamic union. To be bold. We promised to change the politics of the country and to help change our labour movement. We remain committed to all of these goals. Never doubt it, we are making a difference. And we will continue to do so. Together.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry Dias". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jerry Dias
National President.

JD:lmc/cope-343

cc: Unifor Locals, National Executive Board, Front Office, All Staff