

Share some 21st Century insights with Joe Mulhall



## CUSW at Work in the Workplace

Over the last couple of months we have been electing the Workplace Stewards and H&S Representatives in all of the bargaining units that we represent within CUSW, for the next 3-year term. In keeping with our desire to promote participation in the governance model within CUSW, the process of managing these elections was carried out by the workplace participants. Each workplace selected an Election Judge and the National H&S Committee and National Executive Board set out some clear expectations of the duties for those who decided to take on the role as elected representatives. There was confusion at some of the workplaces. There were some demands from members to implement a centralized process managed by the National Executive Board or the geographic Units, however for the most part, the Members jumped in and made the election process a success. We are making Progress.

“Progress” is a word that conjures up many possible visions and interpretations. The dictionary definitions of progress are very broad and varied. In



general terms the word progress means “Movement, as toward a goal.” Another way to express the concept of progress is simply “to advance.” From our start point back in 1999 we have been slowly moving towards the implementation of the CUSW Constitution that we set in place to guide our direction. The Constitution sets the values and beliefs that we rely on every day as we move towards our goal of being a 21st Century union.

It is in the workplace that our vision of member participation connects with our legal rights to redefine how we contribute to the relationship with our employers. In our 21st Century Union

model, the elected representatives at the workplace are the legal face of the “union” as defined by the Labour legislation and Charter Rights implemented in the 20th Century. At the same time these same elected representatives are responsible for implementing the values, beliefs and principles outlined in our Constitution. These two concepts are directly connected. As we move forward to exercise our goal of increased voice in the day-to-day operation of the workplace, we must do so with our beliefs and values clearly at the forefront.

This approach is very different

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than the “service provider” unions of the 20th Century.

The “Institution” called the Union would come to the workplace with the role of defining the relationship between the employer and the workers. Workers would pay dues and Unions would provide “union representatives” to manage the relationship with the employers. This created an “us and “them” environment. This “model” was useful as workers moved from the Master and Servant rules flowing out of Common Law to the Industrial Democracy relationship that Employment Law provides us with today. The “Institutional’ model was a response to the circumstance of the day but it is not the answer for the modern workplace.

Moving forward with implementing the Legislative purpose of providing workers in industry with the sense of worth, of freedom and of participation that Employment law was meant to provide is the work that we as members of CUSW have set out to bring to life. The first step in this process is in mobilizing the workforce behind the concept of managing their own destiny.

Asking the workplace to manage the election of the workplace representatives is a real example of this process in action. The workers selected the Election Judge themselves from the people in their workplace. The Election Judge set the rules for the election based on the size of the workplace and access to voting opportunities.

The elections were conducted in a completely open process for all to see and participate in. There was no external union influence or interference in the selection process. The workers were able to participate in all aspects of this democratic process.

The key for the workers in the implementation

of workplace democratic principles is to recognize that they have the right to a voice in the operation of the workplace and that they have much to contribute to the success of the workplace.

A review of the written literature on workplace level responses towards 20th Century employer Labour Relations strategies reveals that an “informal work culture” emerged in almost all workplaces that ran parallel to the employer management system. Through this “informal work culture”, workers built the opposition and drove the change that resulted in recognition of a formal voice through the recognition of “unions”.

The 21st Century workforce needs to embrace the idea that they no longer have to participate through informal means and that they can come together in the workplace and contribute to the operation of the workplace out in the open.

CUSW will be moving forward with initiatives to have this level of participation included in the day-to-day operation of the workplace relationship with the employers. We know that this process will take time to implement and that there will be some resistance both from employer’s middle managers and from those of our members who have benefited from the employer’s Common Law Governance style.

The members will need to overcome an entrenched workplace culture that uses rewards and punishment to mold behaviours that we have no voice in setting. In the future we will have a voice in setting the behaviour and expectations of the workplace as it impacts on the members and the success of the employers.

– Joe Mulhall