



For immediate release

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Workers oppose government's privatization agenda

Approximately 550 union members resumed their Annual Convention today in Saskatoon.

Delegates debated several resolutions critical of the Saskatchewan Party government's privatization agenda. Following a presentation from Jennifer Britton, co-ordinator of the Save Our Saskatchewan Crowns campaign, workers passed resolutions supporting the campaign to strengthen and expand Saskatchewan's Crown corporations.

Delegates discussed the effects of public-private partnerships and other forms of privatization and contracting out, namely the decline in high-quality services and in decent union jobs.

Several resolutions also called for a publicly-funded, publicly-delivered national childcare program. "We heard from many working parents who shared their personal experiences of trying to find quality, affordable childcare. They spoke of four-year waiting lists, the impossibility of finding childcare for shiftworkers, and the shockingly low level of wages paid to childcare workers. Families have waited long enough for a universal program for our working families – and governments need to hear the message loud and clear that privately-delivered childcare is not the answer," said President Hubich.

Murray Dobbin, political commentator and writer, addressed the delegation this morning. He argued that governments and their corporate allies are "explicitly and deliberately attacking democracy through free trade agreements, privatization, deregulation, corporate tax cuts, and anti-union legislation."

"We need to strengthen our network of social movements and take back our public services and our democracy, and labour should lead the way," said Dobbin. He told unions that governments have the power to turn back the power of corporations by taxing them appropriately and by enforcing strict regulations on corporations who break laws.

Armine Yalnizyan, economist from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, delivered a presentation this afternoon on global capitalism and growing income inequality. “Global capitalism’s appetite is bottomless. The biggest recession since the Great Depression has turned into the Great Bailout, with the banks getting 62 billion dollars in handouts, and the rest of us getting scraps,” said Yalnizyan.

She spoke about the growing income inequality gap in Saskatchewan in which “the top 10 or 20 per cent are doing way better, and the bottom 70 per cent are taking home a smaller share of the pie that they helped bake”. This gap results in skyrocketing housing and rental costs and a less healthy population.

“We also need to pay attention to inequality because it creates a permanent underclass and an eroded middle-class. We lose our shared public purpose,” said Yalnizyan. She praised Saskatchewan workers for their “undeniable spark” and their commitment to equality and self-determination.

This afternoon delegates also heard from labour rights and occupational health and safety activist, Bob Sass. He presented on behalf of the National Ban Asbestos Committee, describing their efforts to create a public registry of public buildings where asbestos is located so that the deadly substance can be safely removed. The Committee is also calling for an end to the import and export of asbestos.

Deliberations continue tomorrow beginning at 9:00 a.m.

The SFL represents approximately 95,000 workers from 37 affiliated unions across the province.

For more information, contact Cara Banks at (306)533-3423 or
Larry Hubich (306)537-7330