June 21, 2018 |

Statements

Statement from BC Federation of Labour president Irene Lanzinger on National Indigenous Peoples Day

Vancouver - June 21st is National Indigenous Peoples Day. This is a day that is meant to acknowledge and celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples.

For the last 21 years Canada has celebrated National Aboriginal Day. Now we celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day. On June 21st, 2017 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the name change to better reflect support of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The document emphasizes the right of indigenous peoples to live in dignity; to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions; and to pursue their self-determined initiatives.

UNDRIP was developed over twenty years and was adopted by the UN General Assembly in September, 2007. Since then the document has become a point of political promises in federal and provincial elections and was officially adopted by Canada on May 10, 2016.

Shortly after the 2015 federal election, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett pledged that the new Liberal government would implement UNDRIP as part of its effort to rebuild its working relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

BC Premier John Horgan has committed that his government will work to implement UNDRIP at all levels. We have seen him take action through the hiring of a special advisor to work in his office and advise him on UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action.

On the other hand, the federal Liberal government is in many ways showing that their support of UNDRIP is little more than lip service to Canada's Indigenous communities.

The rushed and poorly administrated National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is an example of how the Liberal government wants to be seen to be taking steps toward implementing UNDRIP but is unwilling to do the real work required to accomplish that implementation.

As union members on mostly unceded territory in BC, there are many things we can do to practice reconciliation. The first is by electing governments that are serious about implementing UNDRIP. The second is by reading UNDRIP and the TRC's 94 calls to action and choosing calls that we can implement in our own communities and unions.

The #next150 challenge is an accessible resource that can help activists at any level move through understanding UNDRIP and the 94 calls to action. It also provides links to many other campaigns and resources that exist for education on Indigenous rights. https://next150.indianhorse.ca/challenges/94-calls-to-action

It is all of our responsibility to ensure that UNDRIP and the TRC's 94 calls to action are implemented in the land that we occupy. Only with all of our efforts together will we achieve a conciliatory relationship with Indigenous communities.