To: COPE 491

From: Heather Farrow

Date: July 2015

Re: CLC Women’s School: Women in Leadership

Dear Sisters and Brothers of COPE 491:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to attend the CLC’s Women’s School in July 2015 at Port Elgin! It was an amazing experience and I learned so much.

The main highlight for me was the address by sister Judy Rebick. Judy is a Canadian women’s activist and was president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) (which is now defunct) between 1990 and 1993. She had much to share about inclusion, equity and anti-racism work and the role of ally both inside and outside of the women’s movement. She shared her triumphs and mistakes – a very raw “look back” at her time at NAC. Although she worked hard to help a racialized woman be president (Sunera Thobani 1993 to 1996) after her term (which she was proud of), she wished she had not “abandoned” this new leader when she moved to Alberta after she left the presidency. The backlash was pretty strong inside NAC after Judy left and Sunera could have used Judy as an ally, Judy said.

Although I started out in the course “Tranforming Conflict”, I soon realized that the course “Women in Leadership” would better suit my needs – especially as the Leadership course did have a “dealing with conflict” section. Since I would like to assume more leadership inside the labour movement, and possibly within this local, I found the course to be excellent (with some small tweaks that are needed).

We reviewed leadership styles (not everyone has the same style); intersectionality of “isms” that affect all members and leaders (for instance, racism and sexism); and being an ally. We also created a “story” using the software “photostory” available free on the web. This was an amazing tool that a local could use in bargaining or for other struggles instead of the “old” style newsletter, for instance. Mixed media seems to be the way forward for leaders and local members. We also completed a “herstory” (or history) quiz for Women in Canada. We practiced public speaking, conflict resolution, decision making skills, communication strategies and sustaining women’s leadership (for instance, the concept of self-care!). Upon leaving, we created a personal action plan.

As much as I enjoyed the course, my suggestion is to incorporate the “World Café” or “The Art of Hosting” as a teaching methodology. CUPE uses this now in their courses and I have encountered it in staff meetings. It allows for more in depth group discussion where much sharing can occur. I also thought that we should incorporate more movement into our days. Perhaps yoga or tai chai. There was a lot of sitting.

Thank you again for the opportunity to attend the CLC Women’s course. I look forward to actualizing what I have learned.

In solidarity, Heather Farrow, COPE 491, national office, former RVP and health and safety committee union chair F:/COPE/educationals/report