

STEELDRUM

USW1998 NEWSMAGAZINE

FALL 2023 | Vol.21 No.2

12.8% Wage Increases and Other Bargaining Results



Inside the SteelDrum:

Interview with Kai Lai

Getting to Know the People of Bargaining

UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW
LOCAL 1998

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The Local's hectic collective bargaining schedule continues to unfold. New collective agreements have been recently ratified in our U of T Staff Appointed Unit and in our Victoria University Unit. Significant monetary and non-monetary gains were made for the members in both of those units. Please see Tamara Vickery's Staff-Appointed Unit report and my Victoria University Report for the bargaining highlights of those units.

Preparations are underway for negotiating new contracts for the U of T Casuals Unit and for the UTM Dons. The members of the bargaining teams for those two groups are working closely with our Staff Representative, Colleen Burke, and me to create proposals that are in keeping with the priorities of their respective constituents. Soon we will begin working with the USW negotiating team of the University of Toronto Schools Unit to prepare for negotiations with the School.

In 2024, we will be back at the bargaining table with the St. Michael's College administration.

After negotiating a two-year collective agreement in 2022, the plan is to get our St. Mike's members back on the same negotiations cycle as the rest of the units in our amalgamated local. All of this bargaining is happening while the day-to-day work of the Local providing assistance to members continues.

In addition to ratifying their new collective agreement, the members of the Victoria University Unit voted in favour of having their pension plan move into the University Pension Plan (UPP). If the University's retirees also support the move, Victoria University will join the University of Toronto, Queen's University, the University of Guelph and Trent University in the UPP. Our members in the St. Michael's College Unit could be the next Steelworkers to join the UPP family. They are currently in the process of considering that possibility and the Union will be negotiating with the St. Mike's administration the terms under which a move into the UPP would be implemented.

I am looking forward to seeing you at the Local's various holiday parties and other social events that will be held leading up to and after the annual winter closure.

John Ankenman, USW 1998 President

CONTENTS



- 2** **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**
- 4** **COVER STORY - 12.8% Wage Increases and Other Bargaining Results**
- 6** Honouring our Union Legends: Retiring Local 1998 Union Activists Pave the Way for a New Generation
- 8** Grand Celebration of Retirees Spanning Five Years
- 10** Interview with Kai Lai, Equity Rights Representative in the USW National Department of Education Equity
- 16** Labour in Pop Culture Reviews
- 17** USW 1998 in Solidarity with USW 7135 During National Steel Car Strike
- 18** People of Bargaining: First Time Members of the Staff-Appointed Bargaining Committee
- 21** District 6 Spring School Course on Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace and in the Union
- 22** Political Cartoon
- 23** Book Review: The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Self Love
- 24** Victoria University Unit Report
- 26** Social Activism with A Theatrical Twist
- 28** Human Rights Committee's Recommended Book List
- 30** Nawesa Bollers HBA, MSW, on Making Use of the Staff Tuition Waiver
- 33** The Power of Community Gardens
- 35** Member Profile: The Critical Research of Jejociny Consalas
- 36** USW 1998 Happenings

12.8% Wage Increases and Other Bargaining Results for the Staff-Appointed Unit

9% WAGE INCREASE
IN THE FIRST YEAR



1

ADDITIONAL
PERSONAL DAY

\$1,300

PARAMEDICAL PER
BENEFIT YEAR



\$650

VISION EVERY
24 MONTHS



\$3,100

MENTAL HEALTH
BENEFIT IN YEAR 3

PHOTO ON COVER PAGE: U of T Staff-Appointed Negotiating Team - Left to Right: Richard Waters, Tom DeSouza (USW Toronto Area Coordinator), Justen Bennett (rear), John Ankenman, Rabia Nasir (rear), Colleen Burke (USW Staff Representative), Tamara Vickery, Ruxandra Pop (rear), Katrina Marshall, Victoria Simpson (rear), Audrey Fong, Sukhpreet Sangha, Zack Sholdra (rear), Aziz El Mejdouby (rear), Mary-Marta Briones-Bird.

We know all too well the negative effects that the provincial government's Bill 124 had on our membership. This legislation, subsequently ruled unconstitutional, coincided with increasingly high inflation, and created a difficult landscape in which our journey for a better collective agreement began.

In February 2023, the UofT Staff-Appointed Unit elected their negotiating committee. Following this, we conducted surveys, held town hall meetings, and engaged with thousands of members through our outreach initiatives and social events. We sent 14 bargaining updates to members of the Staff-Appointed Unit and they engaged with our union in unprecedented numbers and in extraordinary ways. We had over 4,000 members of a 5,800-member unit cast a ballot in a strike mandate vote which is evidence enough that the membership was engaged during this round of negotiations.

The Staff-Appointed tentative agreement was presented to the membership in a hybrid meeting on September 13, 2023, and again virtually on September 14, 2023. The contract highlights include:

1. Wages: Across the Board Increases
 - July 1, 2023 9.0% Across the Board (ATB) increase
 - July 1, 2024 2.0% Across the Board (ATB) increase
 - July 1, 2025 1.8% Across the Board (ATB) increase

The July 1, 2023 increase will be retroactive only for those employees who are actively employed in the bargaining unit on the date of ratification. Step increases will continue as usual.

2. One additional personal day (for a total of 5 in the July - June year, every year between 2023-2026).
3. Improvements to Paramedical, Vision, Mental Health Care, Dental, Hearing, and Drug benefits.
4. Increase in the overall value of the Childcare Benefit by \$100,000.
5. Improvements to the Educational Assistance provision.

6. Improvements and expansion of Professional Development days.
7. Continuation of the Career Development Fund.
8. Renewal of and expansion of the Employment Equity Committee's mandate.
9. Significant changes to the Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA) program language will provide more transparent and fair processes for such requests.
10. New language to address workload discussions.

This, of course, is not an exhaustive list, but they are some of the improvements I am most proud of. In my humble opinion, this was a significantly successful round of negotiations. It was the goal of the elected bargaining committee to ensure that the members of the Staff-Appointed Unit would see many of their priorities reflected in the result and due to the extensive outreach and communications we had with the membership, we were confident in presenting the tentative agreement as outlined above.

Another sign of membership engagement was when 4,481 ballots were cast in the ratification vote with 94.8% voting in favour of ratifying the tentative agreement as presented on September 13 and 14, 2023. The official date of ratification was September 15, 2023.

I want to take the opportunity to once again thank and acknowledge the following groups, who worked behind the scenes to help make all of this possible:

- The Local office staff, who pulled off triple duty working on communications, outreach, and covering the services we regularly provide to members while many of us were focused on bargaining.
- All of you who signed up to be a member of the Communication Action Team (CAT), which played an integral role in collective bargaining by ensuring two-way communication between the bargaining committee and the membership so we in turn could be responsive to members' priorities, questions, and concerns.

- Our Strike Committee, who worked many unpaid hours fleshing out all of the logistics for possible job action up to and including a strike. Because of you, we were in a state of preparedness, we were able to bargain a strong contract, and we avoided job action or lockout.

- The unwavering commitment of every member of our elected bargaining committee and John Ankenman, Local 1998 President, who never lost sight of our members' priorities.

And you! The members. Thank you for all your support, constructive criticism, and participation. Membership engagement and mobilization is what wins good contracts, and the power of your involvement cannot be overstated.

I am beyond proud of the Staff-Appointed Unit for what we accomplished. Let's stay united, let's remain engaged because before we know it, we will be at the bargaining table again. We had all the elements for a successful round of negotiations; let's make sure the same is true in 2026.



In solidarity,

Tamara Vickery, University of Toronto Staff-Appointed Unit President & Local Vice-President



Honouring our Union Legends: Retiring Local 1998 Union Activists Pave the Way for a New Generation

The past three years saw the retirement of six Local 1998 union activists. They are (in alphabetical order of last name): Arthur Birkenbergs (who retired in 2020); P. C. Choo (2021); Toni Eyre (2021); Lee Jeffrey (2020); Rudy Limberger (2021) and Donna Wheeler (2023).

Far from creating a leadership vacuum, the retirement of these union activists paves the way for a generational change of leadership.

Local 1998 President, John Ankenman, thanked the activists for their roles in building up the Local and the many sacrifices they made.

Below is a brief biography of the six activists.

Arthur Birkenbergs

Art Birkenbergs was the chief honcho for the Local out at the University of Toronto at



Art Birkenbergs at the June 2023 USW Local 1998 Retirement Luncheon. Photo by: USW Local 1998.

Mississauga (UTM). He was the Chief Steward and represented UTM on the Negotiating Committee for many years. He was also a Trustee and Treasurer on the Executive Committee. Birkenbergs is widely respected, both by the general membership and by management at UTM.

P. C. Choo



John Ankenman presenting P.C. Choo with his retiree watch at the June 2023 USW Local 1998 Retirement Luncheon. Photo by: USW Local 1998.

P. C. Choo was one of two Governors for Administrative Staff on Governing Council at U of T. He was Governor for 15 years - from 2004-2013 and from 2015-2021. As Governor, Choo consistently spoke out against staff re-organization and job losses. He was also the face of job evaluation for the Local, heading up the Job Evaluation Committee for many years. Choo was elected Vice-President of the Local from 2015-2021.

Antonia (Toni) Eyre



Toni Eyre at the June 2023 USW Local 1998 Retirement Luncheon. Photo by: USW Local 1998.

Toni Eyre has been an advocate for worker rights throughout her years at U of T. She had been, at one time or another, a Steward, Grievance

Chair, and a member of the various committees at the Local. She was elected Financial Secretary in 2015 and served two terms in that role. In addition, Eyre was a member of the Steelworkers District 6 Human Rights Committee, the Toronto & York Region Labour Council's Equity Committee and the Filipino Workers Network as well as a guest speaker on the TV show, "Workers' Agenda."

Lee Jeffrey



Lee Jeffrey at the June 2023 USW Local 1998 Retirement Luncheon. Photo by: USW Local 1998

Lee Jeffrey has a long history of involvement with the labour movement at U of T, beginning with the Staff Association, then the union drive, and finally with Local 1998. At various times, Lee was involved with the Negotiating Committee, the Grievance Committee and the Job Evaluation Committee. She also served as Guard and later as Treasurer on the Executive.

Rudy Limberger

Rudy Limberger was a Project Manager, Network Design and Specialist at U of T for many years, but he considers serving on the Job Evaluation and Negotiating Committees to be the highlights of his career. He credits the Steelworkers as being 'our fearless protector' and quipped, "Who knew that negotiating salaries and benefits could be such fun?"

Donna Wheeler



John Ankenman presenting Donna Wheeler with her retiree watch at the June 2023 USW Local 1998 Retirement Luncheon. Photo by: USW Local 1998.

Over the years, Donna Wheeler has served the Local in various capacities. She was a Union Steward in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB) department and served on the Grievance Committee. Later, she became a Trustee on the Executive. She was also the Administrative Staff representative on the Faculty of Arts & Science Council as well as the Co-Chair of the Health & Safety Committee.

P.C. Choo, retired USW 1998 Vice-President and Editor of Steel Drum

Grand Celebration of Retirees Spanning Five Years

A grand celebration of Steelworkers Local 1998 retirees took place on June 13 and June 14, 2023. Owing to the pandemic, no retirement luncheons were held by the Local from 2020 to 2022. As a result, a total of 79 retirees from 2019 to 2023 and their family members and friends attended the 2023 retirement luncheons. The group was so big that the retirement luncheon had to be held over two consecutive days.

Local 1998 President John Ankenman introduced each of the retirees and presented them with a Steelworker Bulova watch. Brando Paris, President of the Toronto Chapter of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), also addressed the retirees and encouraged them to join SOAR to keep in touch with the Union and join the many activities such as lobbying and social outings.

P.C. Choo, retired USW 1998 Vice-President and Editor of Steel Drum



Group photo of retirees at the June 13 luncheon. Photo by Monica Chong.



Group photo of retirees at the June 14 retirement luncheon. Photo by Toni Eyre.

Selected Profiles in Retirement

Andre Tremblay worked in the Centre de recherches en éducation franco-ontarienne (CREFO) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) before retiring in 2019. In 2008, Andre was named as one of two winners of the prestigious Chancellor's Award. The award recognizes and honours outstanding contributions by an administrative staff member.



Photo courtesy of Andre Tremblay.



Photo courtesy of [A&S News](#)

Laurane Harding worked in the School of the Environment as a Business Officer for over 44 years. Described by colleagues as the 'heart and soul' of the School, Laurane was conferred the Faculty of Arts & Science Dean's Distinguished Long Service Award in 2020.



Photo courtesy of Pat Simmons.

Worked together, retired together! Stephanie Madden, Pat Simmons and Helen Avramidis all worked in Health & Wellness at U of T. Together, they have a combined 80 years of service at the University!



Kai Lai facilitating the Promoting Mental Health course at the 2023 District 6 Spring School. Photo courtesy of USW District 6.

Interview with Kai Lai

Equity Rights Representative in the USW National Department of Education Equity

Editor's Note: Kai Lai is one of my favourite people within the Steelworkers outside of our Local. I took mediation training with him, and it was only because of his insistence, along with the support of our former President Paul Tsang, that I got to attend USW facilitator training in 2015. He believed in me and insisted that I be allowed to participate when I was initially denied on a technicality. That training enabled me to facilitate USW courses to members across Canada, which have been some of my most rewarding union experiences. So, when our Human Rights Committee Co-Chairs Scott and Gary proposed interviewing Kai for Steel Drum in advance of his retirement after they took his course at the District 6 Spring School, I was all for it. I could not resist joining the interview so I could be part of paying homage to the fiercely brilliant Kai Lai. I always appreciated how Kai would never hesitate to

challenge the union leadership when required, but always with love - a characteristic evident in this interview. Thank you, Kai, for everything, and happy retirement.

SD: For those who don't know, who are you and what is your role at the Steelworkers?

I'm Kai Lai. I am a person who is Chinese by blood, South African by birth, Canadian by citizenship. I work in the Canadian National Office's Department of Education Equity as the Equity Rights Representative. What takes up most of my time is designing, facilitating, and training facilitators to do the Human Rights stream of courses. This includes some off-the-shelf courses like the five-day Human Rights are Workers Rights, The Duty to Accommodate, and the

Promoting Mental Health courses, as well as the anti-harassment and anti-violence programs in workplaces attended jointly by management and workers. I also uphold the anti-harassment and anti-violence policies at union events. I also do mediation and investigation into internal human rights complaints.

SD: Tell us about how you became involved with the Steelworkers.

By nature, I'm a procrastinator. It surprises me I get any work done. I used to work as a waiter at Sutton Place Hotel, which was unionized by Steelworkers. I attended York University and lived downtown and was going to the U of T library to do some research. True to my procrastinating nature, I remembered there was a union meeting at the hotel on my way to U of T. I thought I would drop by to see what it was about. It happened to be an election meeting for the Local Executive. They were running an unopposed slate. When they read out the nominations, a friend of mine nominated me as Vice President as a joke. We both laughed, but when asked if I accepted, I said sure. The other person running on the slate for Vice President then withdrew their own nomination, because they thought I would do a better job!

When the Staff Rep realized I was attending University, they thought I would be good at writing collective agreement language and handling grievances, so he sent me to some courses. The first time I realized something serious was happening to me was when I was put in a course to be a campaign manager, which I was told was a course people are selected for that puts them on a fast track to become union staff. In that workshop I met a lot of major players who have since retired, like Michael Lewis and Leo Gerrard.

I still didn't really know what was going on. The restaurant was slowing down a lot, so I found another restaurant where I would make better tips and put in my notice at Sutton Place. During my final month as a Steelworker, I attended another course. Michael Lewis asked what I was doing,

since if I stopped being a Steelworker, I'd be out of the system. I didn't care, I wanted more tips. Years later, I was working at the Centre for Work and Labour Studies at York. A hotel and restaurant union contacted me, having heard I had some union background. They offered me a staff job which I took, but it was very difficult. During that time, I became Vice-President at Large of the OFL. But the life there was terrible, so I resigned my staff position and did my Master of Arts in Conflict Analysis and Management and started my own practice. I wanted to come back to the Steelworkers. I met Michael Lewis on a few occasions, but he said there was no way.

A few years later, the head of the USW Education & Equity Department contacted me about this posting in the National Office. They couldn't find suitable candidates the first time it was posted, so she asked me to apply. I got it and have been doing this now for 20 years.

SD: What have been the biggest challenges you've encountered in this position?

My portfolio deals with all things Human Rights. One of biggest challenges is to get the Steelworkers itself to actually put resources into and pay serious attention to issues of Human Rights that affect society and our members today. By this, I mean not just having Human Rights and various other national committees on equity. But leadership at all levels, from local to staff to directors, need to educate themselves as predominantly white people in what the racial and Human Rights issues are for equity-seeking

We need specific standing equity positions at all levels from the Local to the District and National levels, where there are designated seats by constitution so that there is adequate diversity representation.

groups. This should be mandatory education for everyone at every elected level throughout Canada. Time and resource investments are required to ensure Steelworker culture more deeply supports equity-seeking groups. We need specific standing equity positions at all levels from the Local to the District and National levels, where there are designated seats by constitution so that there is adequate diversity representation. This should be as mandatory as education and constitutionally determined, but it would require changes to the constitution. What Pittsburgh would have to say about it, I'm pretty sure, because by now they would have done it.

That is one of the themes of my job. The equity role of my position has always been folded into a bigger department. If you look at many other unions in Canada of our size, they have freestanding equity offices with a Director of Equity and staff that run different departments within that, such as Anti-Black Racism. They have staff that deal specifically with disability, Indigenous issues, women's issues, just to name a few. One of my biggest challenges is I have not had the opportunity to really pay attention to national issues of policy, establishing a network for myself of who our key activists are across Canada. Right now, if someone were to walk

Part of why I feel a great deal of vitality for whatever else I will do after is because of the solidarity that existed between me and people I've been in class with.

right by me, I would have no idea if they were on a Local Human Rights Committee. I've always felt the Equity Department should be freestanding, properly resourced and staffed.

SD: What have been the most rewarding components?

The most pleasing, affirming thing is my work with the grassroots membership. Much more rewarding than meeting politicians or leaders within the union is working with grassroots members, particularly when facilitating the five-day Human Rights workshops. What is different between the Human Rights streams and others is that they are about people's identities, so I get to know people very well over five days. They also get to know me very well. In that sense, I



Kai Lai facilitating the Promoting Mental Health course at the 2023 District 6 Spring School. Photo courtesy of USW District 6.

know members at a much deeper level than most people. That has been one of the most affirming things to me, to meet people and get to know them at the identity level, in addition to teaching skills they would learn in a shop steward course.

Part of why I feel a great deal of vitality for whatever else I will do after is because of the solidarity that existed between me and people I've been in class with. We always talk about solidarity. What are the behaviours of solidarity besides just a concept? If you look at behaviours, one would be solidarity, the other would be love. I feel that in both solidarity and love, I have got to know grassroots members across the union.

SD: Of all the Steelworker courses you have facilitated, which is your favourite?

I really can't say which one, because they are all different, requiring different ways of facilitation, which means the interaction with the participants is different. I'll pick two that are very special to me. The Duty to Accommodate course is legally complex. From both a facilitator design and participant perspective, the challenge with this course is to boil the legalities down into clear language in a way that won't put people to sleep. One of greatest things is that by the end, participants can navigate the entire gamut of their jobs both in the legality and in the process of representing members. Their pride in doing it, my pride in them doing it, and the affection for each other that comes from having taken that journey together in a course that is densely technical and legal, but that people need to know.

The other is the Human Rights course. It deals with dominance in Canada. There is a dominant group named, and people in this group get very angry and uncomfortable. That dominant group has the characteristics of male, white, able bodied, straight, and Christian through either religious practice or observance of major Christian holidays. That group of people get very angry at dealing with their identities in relation to other equity-seeking identities. One of the most amazing things, over the course

of five days, is that white men after about day three will experience a profound change in their own identities. I'll give a couple examples that are very meaningful to me. In one of the Human Rights courses, there were a couple white men who had liked taking other courses with me. Throughout the course, neither of them said a single thing until we did the final debrief and farewells at the end. When asked what they thought of the week, one of them said they were so affected by this course that people may have noticed they didn't say anything in class, and that at lunch they wouldn't sit with anyone. What they were doing was sitting in their truck together discussing what they were experiencing. Often, they would cry with each other about understanding what it is in this country to be a white man. They didn't want to talk about it and cry in front of others, but this course changed their lives and how they see themselves as white men. They now understood the privilege of white men, though when we started, they were pissed off by what I was saying.

Another story is of a woman who in appearance, the way she spoke, and perspective was very much that of a white woman. When we dealt with Indigenous issues, she said she was part Indigenous but never believed that stuff. At the end of the workshop, she asked me to go with her into the kitchen and she started crying. She said, "Kai, as a result of this course, what I've been thinking in the last few days is something that has never happened. I admitted that I am - whether I like it or not - part Indigenous and on top of that, for the first time, I have felt proud to be Indigenous. I feel like I have taken back something I have always rejected and that's what this course did for me." These are examples of what happens in the Human Rights course and why I can't rank favourites.

SD: Tell us about a memorable experience you've had doing this work.

We shared an experience with Gary and Scott in the Promoting Mental Health course recently. That whole week was a highlight for

me, because it was one of the last times I will do that course. That group of people touched me deeply as a human being. In addition to getting through the material, when people speak about the solidarity and love we have for each other as human beings built through education, that course represented it. I don't mean a moment of breakthrough, though they happen. It's the small joining moments everyone shares as part of learning new material that actually improves a person as a human being, and the whole collective in the room knows that's going on. That experience tells me that I, as the designer and facilitator, and that we as a group are doing the right thing and everything else falls away.

The other thing I would say about highlights is I don't think participants realize how much they affect me as a human being in the Human Rights stream courses.

SD: What advice would you have for your successor?

Deliberately, nothing whatsoever. There will be a handover where day-to-day activities and functional stuff like file locations and contacts will be shared. But I don't want any influence over who takes my position. Many people, when they retire, speak about their legacy. I've been here 20 years. I don't care about my legacy because after someone has been in a position for 20 years, they become the position, and the position becomes them. It's very good for an organization that someone else comes in and starts something new. They may do things differently and better than me, maybe they will emphasize things I hadn't or wasn't good at. I give absolutely no advice and by that, I'm giving total free space for this person to make this job their own.

Although I have no advice, there are some things I feel they will have to deal with for this job to work, such as the politics and protocols. They will need to learn it on a case-by-case basis, such as when you email someone, who must be copied, and how who you copy changes your message. They will have to learn that although it's a position in the National Office, that doesn't mean

It's the small joining moments everyone shares as part of learning new material that actually improves a person as a human being, and the whole collective in the room knows that's going on. That experience tells me that I, as the designer and facilitator, and that we as a group are doing the right thing and everything else falls away.

they will have control over anything because the National Office has no power to make unilateral decisions. Anything coming out of this department must have immense consultation with all the Districts and Directors, and what comes out is not necessarily what I think is best. It's balancing how to work in the system and pull back my personal aspirations and frustrations that things are not moving fast enough. We do not take Human Rights seriously enough that we assign proper resourcing and staffing to it from the Local to National level.

SD: What should members in Local 1998 know about the work that happens in the Education Equity Department?

The education is designed and created in the National Office, but the way members get the education is determined by requests for different kinds of education coming from the area councils, who submit requests to the District Coordinator. I have no idea what I will do from year to year, I just know I will do a lot of it. Some years there are five Duty to Accommodate courses, two Promoting Mental Health courses, and no Human Rights courses.



Kai Lai with his camera. Photo courtesy of USW District 6.

I get asked a lot to design courses from scratch. I'm not sure how that will be handled in future. Districts and Locals sometimes ask me to create training on specialized topics, and it depends on my expertise. For instance, the Confidence with Conflict course. I am a mediator by profession, so I know Local 1998's member-on-member conflict resolution program that was set up by St. Stephen's very well. I taught it and am on the case roster of 60-70 mediators using that same method. The thing with complaints is the people filing them feel that by doing so, it will be dealt with by others, and they have given up any personal responsibility to solve the issue except by filing the complaint. With mediation, people must look at their own responsibility to deal with the issue head on.

In one way, filing a complaint can be seen as more efficient in terms of the emotional labour involved in getting to a resolution. The value of member-on-member conflict resolution is that members actually understand each other better by really dealing with the issues at hand and it requires them to be part of resolving their own conflict.

SD: What are your plans for retirement? What are you looking forward to?

My plans are measured out in thirds. One third of my time will be devoted to photography, one third to the stuff I do now as consulting, and one third to my personal life.

SD: Anything else you'd like to mention we haven't asked you about?

I just want to say that Local 1998 is one of three Locals that I have always felt a huge affection and respect for. When these Locals ask me to do something, I will do it. As a larger Local, you are a different beast. The stuff you have and your approach to Human Rights is more what I'm looking for on a National scale. I note the diversity on your Executive, and the efforts that your Local makes to promote diversity at all levels.

The level of literacy and critical analysis in Local 1998 is higher than many others, simply because of the jobs you do. For me as a facilitator, it means I start in different places. The fact you are a U of T Local, and your geographic situation also makes a great difference in that the student body and membership is representative of the demographics in the major metropolitan areas of Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto, which are almost 50% racialized. You have a demographic that allows you as a Local to do the things you do.

Kristy Bard, Committee on the Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability, with Human Rights Committee Co-Chairs Gary Horenkamp and Scott Eldridge, Standardized Patients Program

Labour in Pop Culture Reviews



Image of Tom Morello and grandson from the Hold the Line music video. Photo courtesy of labour411.org.

MUSIC: Hold the Line, Tom Morello, ft grandson (2021)

Morello, best known for his tenure as the guitarist of Rage Against the Machine, released a Union Strong edit of this track from his album *The Atlas Underground*. While Morello lays down his distinctive licks, the video plays samples and clips of striking workers, many from recent work actions in the US - but there are also plenty of great archival photos. The video then runs through a list of many of the rights the labour movement has won. Get caught up on what's been driving hot strike summers south of the border and watch the video at <https://youtu.be/61gHyyGZyXU>

TELEVISION: But I'm a Virgo, dir. Boots Riley (2023)

Many reviewers of *But I'm a Virgo* are so taken by the show's surrealism and creativity that they do not focus on the Trojan horse the show manages to slip onto Amazon Prime - Amazon being the union busting Goliath that despite all its might, failed to prevent the successful formation of the Amazon Labor Union at Staten Island, NY in 2022, helmed by president, Chris Smalls. So, what's in the horse? Two fantastic speeches delivered by the character Jones that manage to lay out some fundamentals about capitalist exploitation in plain language. You can watch Jones' first speech here at <https://youtu.be/lpagmvYZKRc>, and the entire series is recommended.

FILM: Sorry We Missed You, dir. Ken Loach (2019)

Sorry We Missed You is a straightforward working-class story about a man who joins the gig economy, delivering warehouse packages. If you've seen any other films by Loach, you pretty much know how this is going to play out, which is to say, management is going to squeeze this man and it's going to be brutal. Made before the pandemic, watching this film makes for a timely reminder of how critical gig and logistics workers are for a functioning economy - for example, our fellow Steelworkers based in warehouses and distribution centres. I'm also writing this review to plug the gig workers organization in our very own Steelworkers Hall, [Gig Workers United](https://gigworkersunited.ca). You can show your solidarity with delivery drivers by posting a sign in your window, leaving messages of support in your delivery instructions and whenever you download a delivery app and keep up with GWU campaigns. For more information, see <https://gigworkersunited.ca/support.html>



Find out how you can support Gig Workers United by visiting their website at gigworkersunited.ca

Erica Sum, Division of University Advancement



USW 1998 in Solidarity with USW 7135 During National Steel Car Strike

Gary Horenkamp (centre) on the picket line in solidarity with USW Local 7135 members during their strike this summer against National Steel Car in Hamilton, Ontario. Photo by Scott Eldridge.

On July 24, Scott Eldridge and I traveled to Hamilton, Ontario, where we met with members of USW Local 7135 who were picketing at National Steel Car. That date marked the beginning of the fourth week of their strike. Despite their interruption of pay and benefits, the members were steadfast in their desire to strike until they received a satisfactory offer. The first tentative agreement was rejected by the membership and after that the company left the negotiating table. There was no end in sight. We talked with members and pledged our support to do whatever we could do to help. Research into the company and its CEO revealed that the company had customers on both sides of the border, mostly in the United States. National Steel Car is the largest single-site manufacturing plant in North America and the only rail car manufacturer in Canada.

Since our visit to their picket line, we were pleased to learn that members of Local 7135 voted in favour of a new contract with National Steel Car, ending the strike by 1,475 workers that began on June 29, 2023. USW Local 7135 won the strike and made significant improvements from the contract offer rejected in June. Union members ratified the three-year collective agreement by an 87.4% majority in a vote on August 8.

"We believe that we achieved what we were looking for. Wages were a huge issue for our members. We wanted the company to offer wage increases that met inflation and we were able to secure that," said Frank Crowder, USW Local 7135 President. The new contract will provide a 13% wage increase over three years, with 6% in the first year, plus a \$1,000 signing bonus. Members in the skilled trades will also get an additional \$1-per-hour wage increase in each of the first and third years of the contract. Workplace health and safety has also been a contentious issue at National Steel Car, with three workplace fatalities in a span of 21 months at the plant. Representatives of all levels of the union have worked jointly to address and improve systemic issues related to unsafe work entrenched in the workplace. The new collective agreement will add another health and safety representative at the workplace and will improve other health and safety provisions. Other significant gains in this contract include improvements to the defined-benefit and defined-contribution pension plans, and increases in shift premiums, dental care, vision care and safety boots allowances.

Gary Horenkamp, Standardized Patient Program, with some source info from the August 8, 2023 [USW Media Release](#)

People of Bargaining:

First Time Members of the Staff-Appointed Bargaining Committee



From left to right, first time bargaining members Aziz El Mejdouby, Katrina Marshall, Sukhpreet Sangha, Ruxandra Pop and Rabia Nasir. Photo by Mary-Marta Briones-Bird.

Aziz El Mejdouby

Home department: Centre for International Experience/Student Life

Why did you run for the bargaining committee? I have been encouraged by several colleagues to be part of the bargaining process. Most of them know my involvement in different committees and groups that fight for and promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion both at UofT and in society at large. They knew how tough I was when it comes to issues that equity-deserving groups deal with. So, they believed that I would be the best person to advocate on their behalf and be their voice at the bargaining table.

Biggest challenge: My biggest challenge was balancing between family needs and the intense bargaining preparation and negotiations. I was blessed with a new baby in April when

preparation for bargaining had just started. So, it was a little bit hard for me initially to balance between family needs and bargaining. Luckily, my wife who is also a labour activist and a strong proponent of the labour movement, has been very supportive during the entire bargaining process.

Proudest achievement: I am proud to have helped secure a great contract for our members. Despite the challenges, strong, and long resistance from the university representatives throughout negotiations, we worked as a strong USW bargaining team to not only save those benefits that our predecessors fought hard for, but also make new gains and improvements. The unprecedented salary increases, the extra personal day, the enhanced language related to staff professional development, AWA, EDIA, workload, are just a few examples of the gains that we have made.

The unprecedented salary increases, the extra personal day, the enhanced language related to staff professional development, AWA, EDIA, workload, are just a few examples of the gains that we have made.

Katrina Marshall

Home Department: Faculty of Dentistry

Why did you run for the bargaining committee? To help bring the voice and challenges forward of members who have been feeling unheard and whose workplace needs have been unmet. The members in our faculty were on the front lines of health care during COVID-19 and were essential on-site workers who faced very stressful conditions, but we rose to the challenge to serve the public while facing increased risk of exposure, uncertain and rapidly changing health directives and staggered shifts and work practices for physical distancing as they evolved during the pandemic.

Biggest challenge: One of the biggest challenges was the intensive notetaking required to cover all the negotiations and every word said that could be relied on in the future for interpretation. Typing those notes to be accurate for future use for long hours each day was very challenging.

Proudest achievement: I am proud of my ability to stay strong to my goals. I am proud of the team of wonderful people I worked with. I am proud of their strength and resilience and overall tenacity in the face of a challenge. I am proud

to have worked with these courageous people who taught me what it means to advocate. In the end I am also proud of our results. In addition to advocating for Across-the-Board increases, I'm proud of advocating for health benefits expansion including increased medical coverage for major dental, vision care, cochlear hearing aids and anesthesia for dependents for non-surgical procedures when needed and to be able to contribute my knowledge from the dental field in support of the bargaining process.

Rabia Nasir

Home department: Department of Physical and Environmental Sciences, University of Toronto Scarborough

Why did you run for the bargaining committee? As a dedicated union member and UTSC steward, I frequently come across the challenges that our fellow members encounter, stemming from various reasons. It brings me great satisfaction to assist these members in addressing their concerns and inquiries. I believe there is a need for stronger advocacy to push for safer and improved workplaces, enhanced benefits, and



Bargaining members taking a break from negotiations. From left to right: Audrey Fong, Justen Bennett, Katrina Marshall, Rabia Nasir, Richard Waters. Photo by Mary-Marta Briones-Bird.

fair wages that align with the evolving demands of our dynamic world. I felt that I would be able to be the loud voice for our members and represent UTSC.

Biggest challenge: The biggest challenge for me revolved around grasping the intricate details of the collective agreement, given its wealth of technical information that isn't encountered frequently. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the entire agreement within a limited timeframe to be able to contribute effectively to discussion was certainly demanding.

Proudest achievement: I greatly enjoyed my involvement, and as a new member, I deeply value the collaborative and supportive nature of the entire process. Team members addressed issues close to their hearts from their respective workplaces, and the committee's support was wonderful. My proudest accomplishment involves securing clearer language on professional development. Early in my career, I found it disheartening that my development was confined to my current role or a closely related one. Many, like myself, entered UofT with diverse skills and degrees that weren't fully utilized in their current positions, desiring growth into different roles. The new language permits professional development for "a role at UofT," meaning it can be tailored to any position one aspires to. I believe this is a significant victory, enabling numerous members to pursue roles they've long wanted to explore.

The new language permits professional development for "a role at UofT," meaning it can be tailored to any position one aspires to. I believe this is a significant victory, enabling numerous members to pursue roles they've long wanted to explore.

Ruxandra Pop

Home department: Faculty of Law

Why did you run for the bargaining committee? I wanted to develop more in-depth knowledge of the collective agreement. As a Grievance Officer I thought that would be very useful to my role and that it would help me assist members better. I also wanted to learn more about collective bargaining in general.

Biggest challenge: The long nights and just in general the long work hours, it was very mentally and physically taxing to continue deliberating into the night on very important issues.

Proudest achievement: Getting to know folks on the committee better and being able to achieve a great contract for the members. In addition to the monetary achievements of the committee, I am also looking forward to working with the updated grievance procedure language.

Sukhpreet Sangha

Home department: Faculty of Law

Why did you run for the bargaining committee? I had long been wanting to become more involved with our Local and this seemed like a great way to fight for members' rights alongside experienced folks and fellow novices alike. It also seemed like a good fit for my professional skillset.

Biggest challenge: Knowing when to let go of an idea.

Proudest achievement: Holding our ground as a team on some tough positions and winning them! I am also very proud of the gains we made on important benefits, like counselling, and that tasty first ATB increase—of course.

Mary-Marta Briones-Bird, Job Evaluation Pay Equity Coordinator and 2023 Staff Appointed Bargaining Committee Member

District 6 Spring School Course on Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace and in the Union



Gary Horenkamp, centre, receiving his certificate of completion for the Promoting Mental Health course from District 6 Director Myles Sullivan (left) and District 6 Coordinator Anita Bryan (right). Photo courtesy of USW District 6.

From May 14 to May 19, Scott Eldridge and I were among 18 other USW members from different locals who attended the Promoting Mental Health course at the 2023 District 6 Spring School at the Fern Resort in Orillia. The course was professionally presented by Kai Lai, Education Coordinator and Equality Rights Representative from the USW Canadian National Office.

The course was geared to give union activists statistics, tips, and tools to help support members facing mental health challenges. It wasn't meant to make us amateur therapists, but rather colleagues who could provide effective support and referrals. It covered definitions of some disorders, disability, the Ontario Human Rights Code and potential accommodations that would allow members to remain in their jobs and continue being productive employees; a win-win for both employee and employer.

One half day of the course was spent with one of the Indigenous presenters for the Unionism on Turtle Island course. The presenter, Kanzee, talked of his mental health and life challenges in general and shared with us the Indigenous ways for dealing with mental health challenges, such as the Sacred Fire. A Sacred Fire is normally lit for four days and nights with a Fire Keeper in attendance. Stones usually form a circle around the fire with four openings representing the four directions. Each Sacred Fire is unique in its teachings and an Elder or Fire Keeper is always available to help share the teachings. This was a transformative and powerful experience for many course attendees because we learned so much about the lived experience of Indigenous people.

The week-long Spring School included evening sessions, which were geared to all 100 USW members attending from across District 6 (Ontario and Atlantic Canada). We learned about the [Humanity Fund](#), the [Family & Community Education Fund](#) and the [Raising the Bar on Women's Health & Safety campaign](#). On the Thursday evening, all classes were asked to present a skit representing some of what they learned during the week. Our skit was a presentation highlighting the statistics we had learned about the prevalence of mental illness in Canadian workplaces. Attendees were surprised by how large the issue is for all of us.

The final morning was devoted to providing feedback on the course and summarizing what we had learned and how we might apply it in our workplaces with our fellow union members. For example, adjusting a workspace to be more friendly for folks who have anxiety disorders or are easily distracted to help them be more productive, ensuring union members know about the employer's duty to accommodate and various benefits like sick leave and provincial disability benefits.

Course participants shared their own personal experiences, either as helpers or persons affected by a mental health issue. We became quite close, sharing the classroom experience as well as dining together and socializing outside class. We exchanged contact information so we could stay in touch for mutual support. Scott and I highly recommend this course for every member, given the pervasiveness of mental health issues. Overall, the Spring School is a great experience for all who attended the various courses, which also included Arbitration: Prepare and Present, Unionism on Turtle Island, and Bargaining to Win. Parting was, as they say, "sweet sorrow."

Gary Horenkamp, Standardized Patient Program USW1998 Human Rights Committee Co-Chair

Political Cartoon



Book Review: The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Self Love

The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Self Love, (Second Edition, 2021) shows how restoring our relationships with our bodies on an individual level can lead to transformative change in the world. It's a guide to developing a radical self-love practice while also disrupting the systems of power that depend on our body shame to survive. This book was a game changer that I read over the summer of 2021. Having experienced an eating disorder as an angst filled ballerina as a teenager, and currently as a menopausal woman going through hormonal life changes, I've been able to confront the emotional traumas of past and present.

When we talk about loving ourselves and our bodies, you might think that self-esteem has a big role to play. However, the kind of self-love that the author is talking about - radical self-love - isn't the same as self-esteem. It's about accepting and loving the body you inhabit. It is unapologetic and intersectional. Radical self-love is about the self, being part of the whole. Likewise, radical reflection is from body shame we have perpetuated in others. We need to be honest with ourselves.

Sonya Renee Taylor discusses three peace's:

1. Make peace with not understanding
2. Make peace with difference
3. Make peace with your body.

Taylor writes of a radical reflection, celebrating our differences in transformative ways. "It is constrained by the boundaries of our imaginations... We must strive to create a different-celebrating culture where we see diversity as an intrinsic part of our everyday lives."



The Body is Not an Apology book cover

Radical self-love – isn't the same as self-esteem. It's about accepting and loving the body you inhabit. It is unapologetic and intersectional.

The author also identifies Four Pillars of Practice:

1. Taking out the Toxic
2. Mind Matters
3. Unapologetic Action
4. Collective Compassion

In a world of body terrorism, Taylor urges readers to dismantle body shame, to confront past shaming values and to surpass them by radical self-love and to celebrate one's new identity and to share that with everyone. It takes compassion and inner strength, but the end results are life changing. The book was a quick read, and worth reading time and time again.

Audrey Fong, School of Graduate Studies

Victoria University Unit Report

October 2023

Collective Bargaining Leads to Significant Gains for Workers in the Victoria University Unit

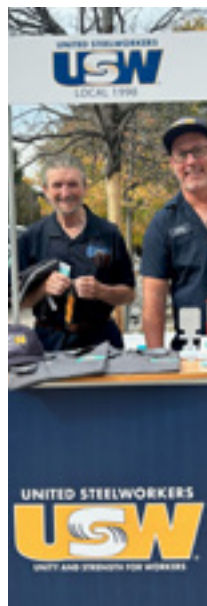
After several weeks of negotiations with the Victoria University administration, bargaining for a new three-year collective agreement wrapped up on Thursday, October 19. The result of negotiations was a tentative agreement that included new provisions and improvements to existing provisions that successfully addressed many of the priorities identified by members through their written survey submissions and their input at union townhall meetings.

Another result of bargaining was the rejection by the Union of a significant concession that the University proposed at the bargaining table. The University wanted to have language introduced into the collective agreement that would have all but eliminated overtime. Our consistent resistance to this concessionary proposal led to the University eventually withdrawing it.

The success achieved in this round of bargaining was, in large part, the result of the hard work put in by Wanda Hughes, Adrian Rizzi and Colleen Burke as members of the negotiating team and Mark Austin, Mike Lau, Paul Robinson, Alex Thomson and Milly Weidhaas as members of the Strike Committee. Of course, the union solidarity demonstrated by the Unit's members, most notably by voting 96.6% in favour of a strike mandate, created strength that was crucial for our success. Below are highlights of what was accomplished.

Monetary improvements include:

- Across the board wage increases of 9% in the first year (retroactive to July 1, 2023), 2%



From left to right, Prasanna Victor, John Ankenman, Almarion Guaca, Alex Brown, Paul Robinson, Ljubisa Panic, Kady Liu and Mark Austin. Photo by Meredith Rappaport.

in the second year and 1.8% in the third year.

- Increased maximum coverage in our mental health, dental, vision, paramedical, drug and hearing health care benefits.
- An increase in personal days from three to four full days (or eight half days).
- The introduction of 16 hours of lieu time for hourly-paid employees to use as paid time off work. This new provision is the result of the Union's persistence over several rounds of bargaining to address the long-standing exclusion, due to the nature of their work, of hourly-paid employees from the summer hours program.
- Instead of being permanently stuck at the hiring rate of their job class, a Casual Category B employee whose job is linked to a pay band on a USW wage grid will now move through the pay band steps up to the maximum wage rate.

- The introduction of paid sick shifts for casual employees. Our casual employee members will now have two paid sick shifts per year.
- An expansion of the scope of bereavement leave so that members are eligible to take three bereavement days when a person who is not a relative listed in the bereavement leave provision, but whose impact on the member is comparable to that of an immediate family member, dies. This change in language allows for a member to take bereavement leave when a close friend dies.
- Increased enhanced severance.

Non-monetary improvements include:

- New language that gives members who are scheduled to work at a conference, event or function that falls outside of their regular work hours the option of adjusting their start and/or end time on the same day so that they do not work overtime. This option is only implemented if requested by the member. The new language clearly states that nothing in the article allows for the reduction of a member's overtime rights or for the reduction of their normal working hours. In other words, we now have contract language that more clearly indicates that managers who adjust their employees' start and/or end times to avoid paying overtime are in violation of the collective agreement. The legacy wording that indicates that the article does not apply to Food Services from May 1 to August 31 remains.
- New language dealing with the alternative work arrangements (AWA) programme that compels management to consider the duties, tasks and overall functions of individual jobs when they are considering an AWA request.
- A 15 working day deadline for a manager to respond to an employee's AWA request.
- A minimum of six weeks' notice period for management to notify an employee that their AWA is being altered or ended.
- New language that compels managers to use seniority to determine which employee's AWA request prevails when two requests

are similar enough so that both cannot be granted.

- An increase from five to eight days of training and familiarization for members who are temporarily laid off and choose to displace a junior employee in another job class in the same or lower pay band.
- An increase from five to ten days of training and familiarization for members who are indefinitely laid off and choose to displace a junior employee in another job class in the same or lower pay band.
- Language that ensures members on temporary layoff who are recalled early have the right to delay their return to work until their original recall date.
- A written restatement by the University that it is not their intention or expectation to use managers, temp agency and contracted workers to do bargaining unit work.
- A written restatement by the University that it is not their intention or expectation to use casual employees to circumvent the posting and filling of part-time and full-time bargaining unit jobs.
- A written restatement by the University that it is not their intention or expectation to use part-time employees to circumvent the posting and filling of full-time bargaining unit jobs.
- New language that leads the University to schedule one eight hour long shift rather than two four-hour shifts when the eight hours of work are in the same job class and are not overlapping.
- A commitment by the University to create a roster of Food Services casual and part-time employees who will be given the opportunity to pick up extra shifts instead of those shifts being first assigned to temp agency workers. The University reserves the right to use temp agency workers in situations where they need to backfill a same day absence with less than 24 hours of notice or if no casual or part-time employee is available.
- The creation of a union/management working committee that will address the

scheduling of Food Services shifts on statutory holidays and the length of time between Food Services shifts.

- New language that compels a manager of salaried employees to provide a written rationale for why they have determined that the four-day condensed work week summer hours option is not practical.

Also included in the tentative agreement is new wording that alters the displacement provision for temporary layoffs. In a temporary layoff situation where a laid off employee chooses to displace a junior employee in an equally paid or lower paid job classification and such an opportunity exists within their home department, the laid off employee will exercise their displacement rights within their home department. If the laid

off employee does not have the opportunity to displace a junior employee in an equally paid job classification within their home department and there is an opportunity to displace a junior employee in a lower paid job classification within their home department, they will do so and be paid their higher wage rate for all hours worked in the lower paid job. If there is no opportunity for a laid off employee to displace a junior employee in their home department, they can displace a junior employee in an equally paid or lower paid job classification outside of their home department. There are no changes to the displacement process in the case of an indefinite layoff.

John Ankenman, Victoria University President and USW 1998 President

Social Activism with **A** Theatrical Twist

At a local coffeeshop, when a homeless young man harasses an older woman in a niqab, where do our sympathies instinctively flow? The quick fix: the bystander who quickly buys him a coffee to the relief of others waiting in line. As for the two (white) policemen, who chalk up his behaviour to mental illness, they conveniently gloss over the verbal harangue since she has not been physically assaulted.



I Carry With Me promotional poster

At the hospital, a patient hurls racist epithets at a nurse trying to change a dressing and insists on having someone else attend to her. When the nurse's supervisor appears only to normalize the patient's behaviour and later accuses the nurse of trying to make things worse, a coworker's attempt at sympathy is to come up with an ill-considered joke about her ethnicity.

At the playground, a young child is taunted, but when the mother recounts the harrowing experience, her (white) spouse tries to minimize the incident. Should she have handled the incident differently, or was she overreacting? Could her spouse have taken the time to learn more about the impact of these recurring flashpoints and been more understanding?

"I Carry With Me" is a ground-breaking collaboration between Mixed Company Theatre and USW Local 1998. Beginning with two workshops on Race and Privilege spearheaded by the BIPOC Committee involving both Local 1998 members and those in the community, playwright Heather von Atzigen plumbed painful personal accounts of shading, discrimination and rank racism to craft searing composite stories.

Forum theatre, which involves both actors and spectators, was devised by Augusto Boal, an actor, director and political activist, as a way of countering the repressive military regime in his native Brazil almost half a century ago. Also known as Theatre of the Oppressed, it is still practised all over the world for social and political activism, conflict resolution, community building, therapy, and government legislation.

Simon Malbogot, the theatre's artistic director, explains the process: "The playwright goes into community, listens to individual stories and creates a universal story - everybody's story," he says. For the disaffected, "it's a chance not just to be a victim but to actively affect your reality. We don't look for perfect options or solutions. We're looking for multiple perspectives. The idea is to give everybody the chance to speak up. " Then, professional actors are hired to enact these scenes.

In a radical departure from traditional theatre, members of the audience take on the roles of any of the participants in the scenes to change the narrative - and eventual outcomes of these charged situations - in real time. Instead of just being passive onlookers, anyone and everyone is given the opportunity to speak up.

"It's so easy to say, 'That's what I would do'," says Heather, also a steward with USW1998. It's quite another to experience the messy, uncomfortable, often humiliating reality of walking in another's shoes. But that's exactly what happens when an audience member experiences the shock of becoming someone else, even if only briefly: "I love the fact that everybody gets to practise for reality."

The marginalized and disenfranchised know only too well the daily indignities of being The Other, Suspicious, Less Worthy of Consideration or just plain Overlooked. After all, there's nothing micro about micro-aggression. Yet even those with privilege don't escape unscathed.

For Simon Malbogot, Artistic Director of Mixed Company, two pivotal events became the springboard for what would become the Race and Privilege project. One occurred when his son, then only 13, was simply waiting at the bus stop with his black friend when they found themselves being interrogated by a passing policeman in a routine carding. The other incident occurred when Simon himself was working with a Jamaican playwright and found himself being followed by a police car for 2 kilometres, ostensibly because of his taillight, which was in working order. Outraged and perplexed by these incidents, Simon says reading the book *White*

We don't look for perfect options or solutions. We're looking for multiple perspectives. The idea is to give everybody the chance to speak up.

Privilege by Paula Rothenberg brought home the “various forms of privilege we don’t even think about.”

While the initial iteration of “I Carry With Me” was a series of virtual theatrical presentations with audience participation, the company is looking forward to touring an in-person theatrical production, as it has done with similar productions not just across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) but potentially across the province and the country.

As John Ankenman, president of USW Local

1998 and Victoria University Unit, says of this unique collaboration, “The USW Local 1998 leadership is committed to pursuing more opportunities to advance the cause of increasing racial equality in the communities closely related to our Local and beyond.”

Members interested in getting involved in the BIPOC committee should contact bipoc@usw1998.ca.

Rebecca Chua, Standardized Patient Program and Chair of the USW 1998 BIPOC Committee



Human Rights Recommended Book List

Members of the Human Rights Committee have compiled this reading list. Have a suggestion to add? Contact Human Rights Committee Co-Chair Gary Horenkamp at gary.horenkamp@utoronto.ca

Title	Author
21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act	B. Joseph
A Small Place	Kincaid
A Treaty Guide for Torontonians	Talking Treaties Collective
Algorithms of Oppression	Noble
Black Software	McIlwain
Canada’s Indian Act	Christianson
Caste	Wilkerson
Everything But the Burden	Tate
Final Report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume One: Summary	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Title	Author
Four Hundred Souls	Kendi & Blain
How Europe Underdeveloped Africa	Rodney
How to Be a (Young) Antiracist	Kendi & Stone
How to Be an Antiracist	Kendi & Stone
Ibrahim X. Kendi	University Press
Indigenous Toronto	Bolduc, Gordon-Corbiere, Tabobondung, Wright-Mcleod
My Grandmother's Hands	Menakem
Our Long Struggle for Home	Enjibaajig
Policing Black Lives	Maynard
So You Want to Talk about Race	Oluo
Stamped from the Beginning	Kendi
The Antiracist Deck	Kendi
The Condemnation of Blackness	Muhammad
The Journey of Ibn Fattouma	Mahfouz
The Making of Butterflies	Hurstun & Kendi
The New Human Rights Movement	P. Joseph
The Path	Puett & Gross-Loh
The Skin You're In	Cole
The Sum of Us	McGhee
The Truths We Hold	Harris
They Were Her Property	Jones-Rogers
This Book Is Anti-Racist	Jewell
Unsettling Canada	Manuel & Derrickson
Utopia for Realists	Bregman
White Privilege	McIntosh
White Racism	Schwartz & Disch
White Rage	Anderson
White Women	Jackson & Rao
Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race	Eddo-Lodge

Nawesa Bollers HBA, MSW, on Making Use of the Staff Tuition Waiver

Nawesa Bollers has completed her Master of Social Work (MSW) degree and received two awards along the way! Nawesa (pronounced Na-weh-sa) enrolled in U of T's Academic Bridging Program in 2001 as a mature student. Following that, she worked towards her undergraduate degree part-time, which was conferred in 2018 with distinction. In 2020, after the murder of Mr. George Floyd, Nawesa decided to apply to the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, with a goal of working in the sphere of social justice. She took an unpaid leave from September 2021 to August 2023 from her position at Woodsworth College so she could immerse herself in full time studies.

In the first year of her master's degree, Nawesa was awarded the Beverly & Emerson Mascoll Graduate Scholarship. This award is given to a Black student in the MSW program who demonstrates good academic performance. In her second year, she received the Dr. Daniel G. Hill Sr. Scholarship, given to students enrolled in the MSW program with consideration to academics, recruitment, incentives, support, and retention of Black students.

While working towards both degrees, Nawesa utilized the U of T tuition waiver that is available to all Staff-Appointed members ([see CBA Letter of Intent: Educational Assistance, pages 42-44 of the 2023-2026 MOA](#)). Steel



Nawesa Bollers (right) with classmate Merva Hutchinson at the June 4, 2023 U of T Black Graduation Ceremony. Photo by Andy Nwankwo.

Drum interviewed Nawesa to learn more about her experience.

SD: What did it mean to you to have the staff tuition waiver? Do you think you still would have decided to go back to school without it?

The staff tuition waiver meant a lot to me! I don't know that I would have done my undergraduate degree without it. I was still responsible for the incidental fees, but that was a couple of hundred dollars each year compared to several hundred dollars per course throughout my undergraduate studies. And because I took courses part time, I paid more in terms of the incidental fees because I enrolled in one course a year. For example, in the fall of 2017, I was enrolled in a half course which was \$659.00, plus \$220 in incidental fees. If not for the tuition waiver, I would have

The staff tuition waiver meant a lot to me! I don't know that I would have done my undergraduate degree without it.

paid \$879. In January 2018, I went on an unpaid leave and enrolled in three half courses. The total of the three courses was \$1,977, but the incidental fees were the same as when I was only enrolled in one half course. So, paying \$440 for four half courses was considerably less compared with having to pay \$3,076 if not for the tuition waiver. For my graduate degree, the maximum tuition waiver was \$3,000 per year which was also of great benefit covering almost a third of my fees.

SD: Did you consider applying for the self-funded leave instead of taking an unpaid leave? Why or why not?

When I was doing my undergrad, I met a classmate who was on a leave from work. She told me about the benefits she had with her union, where she received 80% of her salary for five years. For four years, 20% of her salary was held back so that in the fifth year, while on leave she would still receive 80% of her salary. I thought about enrolling in the self-funded leave but didn't have the confidence to enroll in a full-time course load. It wasn't until 2017, when my Learning Strategist suggested enrolling full time to finish my last few undergraduate courses, that I started to seriously consider this option. My Academic Advisor friend also thought it was a good idea. I thought that to qualify for the self-funded leave, it would have had to be arranged five years in advance. Now I know that's not the case; our members can defer part of their salary for as little as a year to a maximum of up to four years.

Still though, I was afraid that if there was a change in management, or if I changed jobs, my plans to take a year off for school could be impacted. The advance planning required for the self-funded leave plan was a barrier for me.

After earning my undergraduate degree in 2018, I was mentally exhausted! So going back to school was not a consideration, at least not for the immediate future. I just wanted to be free and have my evenings and weekends back to sleep-in, socialize, or do whatever. In 2020, after the murder of George Floyd and during the lockdown is when the idea of social work came to me, and I decided to apply to the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW) that December. There wasn't even time to consider enrolling in the self-funded leave as I received my letter of offer in the spring of 2021.

[\[See Self-Funded and Unpaid Leave Comparison article from the Fall 2022 edition of Steel Drum, pages 12-14, and the Staff-Appointed CBA Letter of Intent: Self-Funded Leave Plan, page 84 for more details on self-funded leaves.\]](#)

SD: Tell me about your practicum at the Faculty of Music.

I finished my practicum in the Faculty of Music (FoM) in August. My role was to support the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Director in her mandate. Some of my responsibilities were to work with members of faculty, staff, and student groups to improve the navigation and signage within both FoM buildings, support the Community Engagement Taskforce in their goal to improve FoM's outreach to students - especially those belonging to equity-deserving groups. I also worked with staff on a couple of Pride events, helped plan for Fall Orientation and Queer Orientation, and assisted with planning to ensure wellness and EDI supports were incorporated. I enjoyed meeting, connecting, and working with staff, students, and faculty. Though I have worked at U of T a long time, I did not know much about FoM, such as that free concerts take place at the Edward Johnson Building throughout the year.



USW1998 member Adonica Huggins (left) and Nawesa Bollers (right) outside the Steelworkers Hall on Labour Day, 2023. Photo by Gary Horenkamp.

SD: What do you hope is next for you after graduation? How would you like to put your MSW degree to use?

I want what I do to be meaningful, and I want to make a difference in the lives of people who have been disadvantaged. In my second year I specialized in Social Justice and Diversity, a field for social workers who want to develop critical thinking and practice skills to address growing inequality, exclusion, and marginalization. The courses drew from a range of knowledge to inform social work practice, including structural, intersectional feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+ and anti-oppressive theories and approaches.

Looking back, I think I was always working towards this path. In my undergraduate studies, my major was in Equity Studies, now called Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity, and I did minors in Sociology

I want what I do to be meaningful, and I want to make a difference in the lives of people who have been disadvantaged.

and Diaspora & Transnational Studies. My interests lie in serving communities that have been intentionally marginalized and underserved. In my first-year practicum, I was a Student Counsellor at the FIFSW Talk It Out Online Counselling Clinic. I was responsible for my caseload, and I was able to build strong relationships and therapeutic alliances with the service users I was assigned. It was a rewarding experience and I felt like I was making a difference.

SD: What were some of the most valuable things you learned as part of the MSW program?

I learned a lot about myself. I learned mistakes are going to be made despite attempting to do my best. I learned that “done is better than perfect”. Sometimes I spent so much time on an assignment attempting to make it perfect, but perfection is not achievable and furthermore it is subjective. So, I had to learn to let go, and just do my best at that moment in time while keeping in mind all the other assignments, readings, group work and life tasks I was responsible for. I also learned that I did not have to do it alone and that it was okay to ask for help. My Academic Coach, Writing Instructor, advisors, and some instructors helped and supported me in immeasurable ways, and I am very grateful to them.

SD: What advice would you have for other members considering doing something similar?

If going back to school is something you want to do, do it! I was socialized to believe I was not smart enough for university, but I started with the Academic Bridging program which gave me an understanding of what would be expected in university courses. After that, I just enrolled in one course a year for almost two decades. I was advised not to rush, to just take my time and enjoy it, as I was working and did not need the degree to get a job. For me, that was good advice. Often people want instant gratification, but for me there was no need to rush. It took a long time, but I got there in the end and achieved my goals.

Kristy Bard, Committee for the Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability (CECCS)

Photo by Ileana Murray



The Power of Community Gardens

This is what food security looks like to me. This is the harvest of our beautiful community garden which provides us with a bounty of fresh produce every year, not only to feed ourselves and our families, but also to share with local charities and food banks.

I had an experience once while on my knees removing suckers from tomato plants. I saw a tiny insect. My first reaction was to ignore it, but the insect didn't go anywhere, it was persistent and determined to be seen and acknowledged, taking its rightful space. It then dawned on me its role in the garden, and I said to myself "This insect is no less important than the Queen of England!" I was reminded of this experience a couple of weeks ago when the title of this book came on my feed: [The Insect Crisis: the fall of the tiny empires that run the world by Oliver Milman](#). Many things happen when I am down on my knees in the garden. While in contact with all kinds of living organisms, I have learnt to appreciate the true value of diversity, which I now translate to other aspects of my life.

The solution to most of our current problems rests in our hands. If you wish, please reach out to your local politicians to join/start a community garden.

By joining a community garden and growing our own food, we not only reduce our dependence on imports subjected to fluctuations in exchange rates, but we also contribute to the reduction of fuel needed to transport food as it is all locally produced. Community gardens are not only a source of nutritious food; they are also a vehicle to promote physical and mental well-being. Research has shown that gardening can lower blood pressure, help with weight management, boost our immune system and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

In Canada, we have an opportunity to learn from Indigenous leaders to produce food more sustainably. Within our communities, there are fundamental steps we could take to support both decolonization and climate action through community gardens. To start, I believe we must support and uphold Indigenous leadership in community gardens in order to learn from their wisdom and intimate knowledge of the land. This could also lead us a step closer to Truth and Reconciliation in Canada and support our chance of collective survival in the context of global climate change.



Ileana Murray's community garden in Toronto. Photo by Ileana Murray.

In addition to greater Indigenous leadership, I would call on our local politicians to invest in the building of greenhouses at schools so that students could learn how to grow their own food – a subject as important as Mathematics, English, and History. This would provide students with the opportunity to witness the magic and wonders of what mother nature can do for us – an experience every student should have. These greenhouses could have a dual purpose, as both training labs for students, and social enterprises to provide their communities with nutritious food all year round. Such initiatives would also create real “green jobs” that our communities so desperately need, particularly for youth.

I don't think it is a big undertaking to build these spaces. For community gardens to be built, we only need access to a piece of land, which we already have in abundance in Canada. While greenhouses would be a bit more complex to build and maintain, we have the capacity to reorganize our systems of producing food.

We are such a rich nation and technologically advanced society; everything we have built has come from our ability to imagine new ways of being. If we have built spaceships to go to the moon, building spaces to grow our own food locally is not inconceivable. I believe self-sustainable farming is the way of the future, if not the only way. All we must do as a society is set the intention and collectively put our minds into it.

Creating system change can feel heavy or beyond any one person. What might be one thing you could do to support this shift to inspire action?

Ileana Murray, Munk School of Global Affairs

In Canada, we have an opportunity to learn from Indigenous leaders to produce food more sustainably. Within our communities, there are fundamental steps we could take to support both decolonization and climate action through community gardens.

Member Profile: The Critical Research of Je Jociny Consalas



USW Local 1998 Casual Unit member Je Jociny Consalas in front of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health on College Street. Photo by Nick Marchese.

Research is so integral to the raison d'être of a university, so we wanted to highlight how USW 1998 members contribute to the University's research mission by profiling the important work of Casual Unit member Je Jociny Consalas. In the profiles segment of Steel Drum, we usually highlight members who do unique jobs at U of T. In this case, we recognize that Consalas is just one among hundreds of Casual Unit members working as researchers or research assistants on matters of high public interest.

Consalas was hired in February 2023 by the Dalla Lana School of Public Health to work as a researcher on a CAMH study of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among youth (16 to 29) with mental health and/or substance use concerns.

Consalas, 23, graduated from U of T in 2022 with a degree in Molecular Biology, Immunology and Diseases, and minors in Psychology and French. For the CAMH study, she recruits youth to participate in virtual co-design workshops with the goal of creating two vaccine resources: a youth specific resource to encourage youth to get vaccinated, and a clinical conversation guide to help clinicians and doctors talk to youth about vaccines.

"COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is a major problem among youth with mental health concerns because they tend to use social media more, and there they find misinformation that can guide them to not take vaccines," says Consalas. The aim of the study, says Consalas, is to provide youth with sufficient information to feel comfortable taking COVID-19 vaccines.

Along with this project, Consalas is also a Research Analyst at the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute where she recruits long COVID patients

COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is a major problem among youth with mental health concerns because they tend to use social media more, and there they find misinformation that can guide them to not take vaccines

to help them manage symptoms through education and mindfulness. Consalas is also a Research volunteer at Baycrest Health Sciences Hospital, where her research work focuses on dementia caregiver stress among Tamil immigrant Canadians.

Consalas says the most rewarding part of her research projects is helping vulnerable populations. "I have made sure that I get to work with different kinds of population, [to] understand different perspectives and help them through my research. I'm also excited to do knowledge translation for my research work to educate others and apply for funding to implement them."

The next step in Consalas' research career is to return to her studies and earn a master's degree.

Nick Marchese, Casual Unit Steward for KPE

USW 1998 Happenings



USW1998 members at the 2023 Labour Day march. From left to right: Mark Austin, Nawesa Bollers, Adonica Huggins and Gary Horenkamp. Photo by Kim Hume, USW D6.



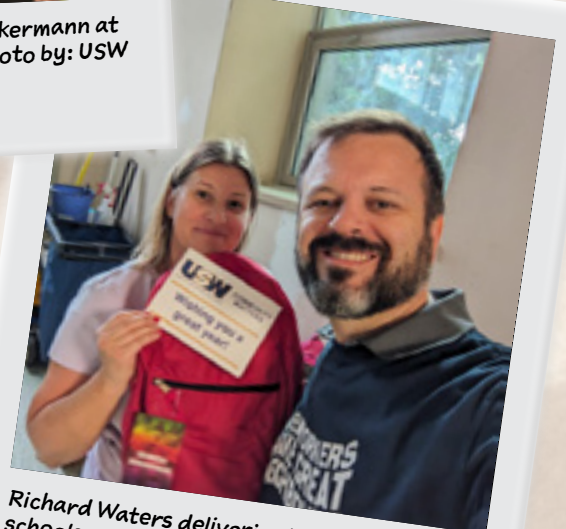
Scott Eldridge, centre, receiving his certificate of completion for the Promoting Mental Health course from District 6 Director Myles Sullivan (left) and District 6 Coordinator Anita Bryan (right). Photo courtesy of [USW D6 Flickr](#).



Irshad Osman and Christine Beckermann at the 25th Anniversary Social. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



USW1998 members at the Labour Day March, September 4, 2023. Photo courtesy [USW D6 Flickr](#).



Richard Waters delivering backpacks to schools with Hamilton Steelworkers Area Council. Photo by: Richard Waters.



PC Choo, Arthur Birkenbergs, and Laura Patterson at the 2023 Retirement Luncheon
Photo by: USW 1998



Liesl Joson, Nik Redman and Cassandra Lima at SMC Ice Cream Pop-up. Photo by USW Local 1998.



Aziz El Mejdouby and Joseph Unufegan at the 25th Anniversary social. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Members at the 25th Anniversary Social.
Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Gary Horenkamp setting up the committee booth at the 25th Anniversary Social. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Uvasiri Dharmawansa at the 25th Anniversary Social. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



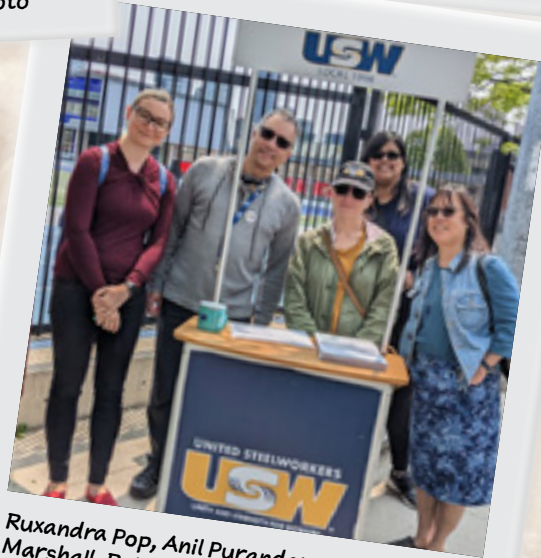
Ruxandra Pop, Grievance Officer, receiving her cert. of completion for the Arbitration: Prepare and Present course from D6 Director Myles Sullivan (L) and D6 Coordinator Anita Bryan (R). Photo courtesy of [USW D6 Flickr](#).



Dentistry Ice-Cream Pop-up. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Members of Local 1998 gathered at the Steel Pride Committee's 2023 Pride Week event. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Ruxandra Pop, Anil Purandare, Katrina Marshall, Rabia Nasir, Audrey Fong at USW ice-cream pop-up. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Brando Paris, President of the Toronto Chapter of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), addressed attendees at the Local's 2023 retirement luncheon



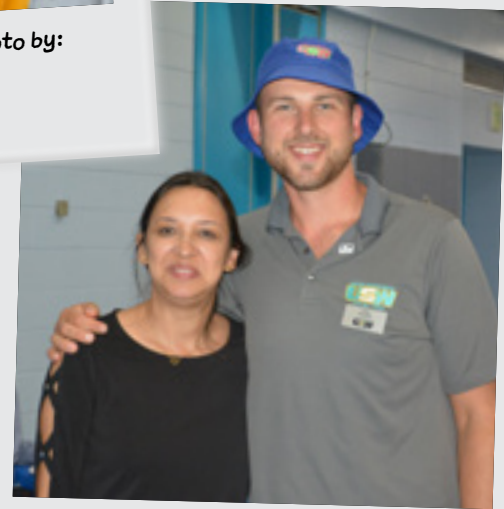
USW Local 1998 members at UTM posing with the new USW swag. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Dentistry Ice-Cream Pop-up. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



2023 Retirement Luncheon. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



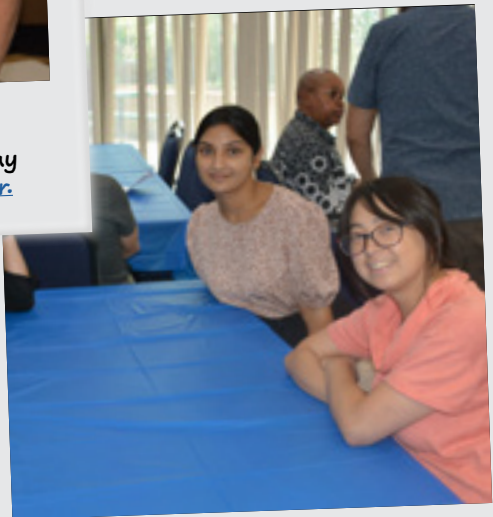
Laura Patterson & Zack Sholdra at the 25th Anniversary Social. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



USW1998 Staff Representative Colleen Burke handing out USW jackets at the Steelworkers Hall before the Labour Day march. Photo courtesy of [USW D6 Flickr](#).



Stephanie Madden picking up her retirement gift at the 2023 retirement luncheon. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



Members at the 25th Anniversary Social. Photo by: USW Local 1998.



STEELDRUM NEWSMAGAZINE

is published by
USW Local 1998
at the University of Toronto,
Victoria University, University
of St. Michael's College and
University of Toronto Schools.

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If you want to contribute to the next issue, please
email submissions to kbard@usw1998.ca by
March 15, 2024.


Special thanks to all our contributors!

STEELDRUM is a member of the United
Steelworkers Press Association &
the Canadian Association of Labour Media

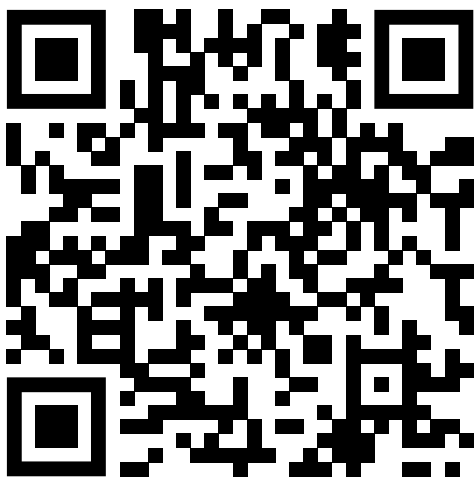
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