

STEELDRUM

USW1998 NEWSMAGAZINE

SUMMER 2025 | Vol.23 No.1

Inside the SteelDrum:
Indigenous Self-Governance: Call to Action

Spotlight on Standing Committees

UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW
LOCAL 1998

CONTENTS

- 3** **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**
- 4** Introducing Rebecca Chua, Editor of the Steel Drum
- 4** Becoming A Labour Community Advocate
- 6** Earth: My Mother, My Friend
- 8** Weddings, Challenges and Dreams
- 10** Civil and Human Rights Conference
- 12** U of T and USW Establish the United Steelworkers/Leo Gerard Chair in Collective Bargaining and Worker Representation
- 13** The Dr. Jean Augustine Professorship in Transformative Education
- 15** Indigenous Self-Governance: Call to Action
- 20** Deepening Understanding Through Land-Based Learning
- 24** Navigating Mental Health at Work and in the Union
- 26** Ontario Government Passes Bill 229 Working for Workers Six Act, 2024
- 28** Radon In Your Home: What You Need to Know
- 32** Spotlight on Standing Committees
- 36** P. C. Choo Acclaimed as SOAR Trustee
- 37** Equal Pay Day: A Shameful Secret
- 39** USW1998 Happenings



Residence Dons at the Solidarity Event held at the Union Hall at 25 Cecil Street

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Collective bargaining in our Dons Unit wrapped up in the early hours of March 26, 2025. The negotiations were for the Unit's second contract. For the first time, the terms of employment for our members working in the U of T college, operations and UTM residences were negotiated simultaneously. After attending ratification information meetings led by the Union's bargaining team, Dons and Residence Assistants (RAs) cast ballots in their ratification votes that took place from April 3 to April 6. The voting saw the tentative agreement for each sub-group of Dons ratified.

In addition to across-the-board compensation increases, the new contracts include changes to compensation that will significantly reduce the amount of money members with meal plans owe the University in future years. There is also a provision that will see the University make a \$30,000 payment to the Union for the purpose of reducing the amounts owed to the University by members with meal plans in the current academic year. The Union will determine how that money will be distributed. There are significant increases in compensation for work done during the winter break and new language that will see no charge for accommodation during the winter break for members who work any part of the break.

The success achieved in this round of bargaining was, in large part, the result of the hard work put in by your negotiating team of Damola Dina, Owen Hill, Jack Lewandowski, Jennifer Li, Piya Sharma, Jake Pereira and Colleen Burke (our USW Staff

Representative). The union solidarity demonstrated by the Unit's members during negotiations created strength that contributed to our collective success, and it gives us a strong foundation to build on for the next round of collective bargaining in the Dons Unit.

There is more exciting news regarding the Dons Unit. In late January, Residence Assistants who work in the UTSC residences voted 97% in favour of joining our union. At a 'welcome to the union' get together held on April 17, Colleen Burke and I presided over the process of nominating the four UTSC Residence Assistants to the negotiating team that will bargain the first collective agreement. Jaren Belobrajdic, Jude Demyati, Kapalaula Mwenya and Claire Stobo were nominated and acclaimed. Our plan is to begin preparing over the summer for collective bargaining.

Then, in April, the Dons who work in the residences at St. Michael's College voted 100% in favour of joining our Union. As I write this, plans are underway to start the process of integrating into the local these new members and to begin preparations for collective bargaining with the St. Michael's College administration.

Jake Pereira, the most recent President of the Dons Unit graduated in April. He has left the University of Toronto and moved on to a new stage of his academic career. During his time as a Unit President, Jake was a dynamic leader for the members of the Dons Unit and in his role as a member of the Local's Executive Committee. Jake's positivity, empathy and keen critical thinking skills will be missed. Nominations for a new Dons Unit President will be held in the autumn after members of the unit have returned to campus and have had a chance to settle back into university life.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Ankenman'.

John Ankenman, USW 1998 President

Introducing Rebecca Chua, Editor of the Steel Drum

I am pleased to introduce Rebecca Chua, who joined our team as Editor of the Steel Drum Magazine starting in September 2024. Rebecca comes to us with a wealth of experience in journalism and editorial roles and has expressed strong interest in taking on this volunteer position.

Rebecca brings a diverse range of experience, having written for prominent national dailies such as the *Globe and Mail* in Toronto, *Asahi Shimbun* in Tokyo, and *The Straits Times* in Singapore. She has served as the editor for both national and regional magazines and has contributed to the Heritage Series for Vision TV. Notably, she was the Executive Editor at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Rebecca was the recipient of a Rotary Fellowship in Journalism and interned at the *Los Angeles Times*—where her fondest memory was her editor telling her that she had a mind like a steel trap. While her journey in journalism began with travel writing, it has since expanded to include magazine, newspaper and book publishing, as well as radio and television broadcast experience.

Rebecca's enthusiasm for this volunteer role, combined with her extensive background, makes her a valuable addition to our editorial team. I am confident

that her contributions will greatly enhance the quality and scope of our magazine.

Rebecca is particularly eager to embrace her new role as the Editor of *the Steel Drum Magazine*. She looks forward to honing her union skills and is passionate about bringing an equity lens to communicating what matters to members.

We are excited about Rebecca joining our team and are looking forward to the fresh insights and energy she will bring to the role of Editor.

Margaret Bucknam
Communications Committee Co-chair



Photo courtesy of Rebecca Chua

BECOMING

A Labour Community Advocate



The opportunity to be a part of the Labour Community Advocate Training (LCAT) Program was a transformative journey that prepared me, as a union member, to support my colleagues more effectively and become more resourceful within my workplace. This comprehensive 10-week program (at each of three levels) has been designed to not only deepen learners' understanding of the challenges faced by working people but also equip participants with the tools to address these challenges in a meaningful and supportive way.

USW1998 member Akula Madhuker has completed the Labour Community Advocate Training.

The core focus of the LCAT program was to train union members as referral agents, providing a critical link between workers and the resources they may need. The training highlighted the importance of recognizing social issues that impact the lives of working people, including mental health struggles, housing insecurity, domestic violence, substance abuse, and systemic discrimination. By examining these issues, I gained a broader perspective on the factors that can affect an individual's performance, well-being, and overall workplace morale.

This training provided valuable insights into addressing workplace and community challenges effectively. The course strengthened my understanding of labour rights, conflict resolution strategies, and community organizing principles, enabling me to advocate more confidently and effectively for the interests of workers and community members. The course thoroughly emphasized the importance of self-care in leadership roles, helping me to recognize the value of maintaining personal well-being to better serve others. I've learned to set boundaries, manage stress effectively, and prioritize mental and physical health while balancing advocacy responsibilities.

These skills are essential for creating a safe and trusting environment where coworkers feel comfortable discussing their concerns. I learned how to actively listen, ask the right questions, and approach sensitive topics with empathy and discretion. Additionally, the program emphasized the importance of confidentiality and ethical considerations in the role of a referral agent. Through interactive case studies, I practiced real-life scenarios that helped me build confidence in managing a variety of situations. After completing



Photo courtesy of Labour Community Services.

all three levels after more than 90 hours over the past year, I am now able to better identify the signs of stress or distress in coworkers and guide them toward appropriate support systems, such as community organizations, counselling services, or union-provided resources. The program also highlighted the importance of understanding workplace policies and connecting workers with union representatives when necessary.

Beyond the skills and knowledge, this program provided a unique opportunity to connect with Labour Community Advocates from various unions affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress. These interactions fostered a sense of solidarity and shared purpose, as we exchanged ideas, shared our experiences, and learned from one another's successes and challenges. This collaborative environment reinforced the value of unions as a supportive network and a driving force for positive change in the lives of workers. Completing all three levels of the program was not just an educational experience but also a deeply personal one. It strengthened my commitment to advocating for my peers and reinforced the importance of building a workplace culture that prioritizes compassion, inclusion, and equity. The skills and knowledge I gained are not only applicable in my role as a union member but also in my everyday interactions, making me a better listener, analytical person, and advocate.

This collaborative environment reinforced the value of unions as a supportive network and a driving force for positive change

The dedication, expertise and encouragement of Najib Soufian, the LCA Training Program Coordinator, made a significant impact on my learning experience and helped me achieve this important milestone. He created a welcoming and inclusive learning environment, which allowed me to fully engage with the program's content and gain the confidence needed to apply these skills in my role as a referral agent.

In summary, the Labour Community Advocate Training Program was an invaluable experience that empowered me to make a tangible difference in my workplace and community. It has equipped me with the skills to support my coworkers, address their challenges, and contribute to creating a stronger, more supportive workplace environment. I will continue to implement the conflict resolution techniques and collaborative approaches to improve workplace relations and community partnerships. Additionally, the self-care strategies will help me sustain my anticipated efforts in high-stress advocacy situations.

Akula Madhuker, School of Continuing Studies



Earth: My Mother, My Friend

I was always fascinated by manufacturing and, as such, I worked in the chemical industry (ink and paint) and automotive manufacturing at the start of my career. I was equally fascinated with the creation of things; I liked seeing inputs getting into processes and becoming outputs. Perhaps, because I am a woman, I always had the innate sense of creation built in me. But what I didn't know was that the universe had in store for me the opportunity and privilege to witness yet the most perfect form of manufacturing, the manufacturing of a fruit.

Mother Earth

In these manufacturing industries, I saw products being produced, but I also saw the inevitable losses: machine breakdowns, workers' injuries, downtime, obsolescence, defective parts, chemical spills, and material waste. Many of these operations seemed forced, with a lot of effort. However, I saw a different manufacturing process when I started gardening. In gardening, the production of a plant seemed very natural and effortless. After putting a seed in the ground, all I had to do was water it while the soil would do the rest of the work. I used to close my eyes and imagine the manufacturing process that was occurring underneath. I imagined the seed pulling the right amount of minerals, nutrients and resources from the soil and water to grow, with any excess of resources being put back into the soil and recycled. I could sense that this is the most perfect and efficient form of manufacturing that could ever exist, with no waste.

In business school, I was fascinated by finance. At the start of my undergrad, I left the finance courses to the end because I heard from many students that they were the hardest. Nevertheless, when I took my first finance class, I liked it a lot. This course came to me naturally and with ease and I enjoyed every aspect of it. I liked to see how money reproduced and multiplied itself. However, over time, I started noticing a different type of return in the garden. I noticed that every time I planted a seed, that same seed would produce hundreds, if not thousands of seeds at the end of the season. It was then that I started viewing a seed as currency, the most stable and hardest currency of all. If I put a dollar in the bank, I would never know how much money I would get in return. However, every time I put a seed in healthy soil, it was guaranteed that I would get hundreds if not thousands of seeds back, a pretty good return on investment, I thought.



Seeds

My relationship with the soil in the garden started like any other relationship. At first, it felt like we were complete strangers, that I was interacting with a lifeless entity. I felt guarded and cautious. However, Mother Earth's infinite wisdom, empathy, patience and compassion let me take my time to get to know her and our relationship grew over time. I now see her as a fully living being. Every time I enter the garden, I feel I am visiting a woman, a mother, a friend, a confidant with breathing lungs and a beating heart who would never let me down and would always be there for me, no matter what. It was then that I wondered, if a corporation were declared a person under the law, affording it rights to protection, what is stopping us from declaring Mother Earth a person, protecting her from harm, granting her the right to live and rights to her own health and well-being?

Mother Earth is on life support right now, and I think she needs us more than ever. I imagine a revolution- a revolution of mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers, youth and children of all ages- advancing the trenches with their straw hats and gardening tools, recovering the land one inch at a time to work together to restore and regenerate her health, and ours. We are one, and I have faith in humanity.

Ileana Murray, OISE

Illustrations by Ileana Murray

It was then that I started viewing a seed as currency, the most stable and hardest currency of all.

Weddings, Challenges and Dreams



For **Andrea Burton**, becoming a wedding officiant was more than a career choice—it was a calling. As an ordained minister, she has always been deeply rooted in faith, spirituality, and a passion for serving others. With a strong academic foundation, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Ministerial Theology and later completed her Master of Divinity (MDiv), equipping her with both theological knowledge and a profound understanding of the human experience.

From the start, Andrea aspired to officiate weddings as part of her ministerial work. However, the path wasn't without challenges. While she cherished the foundation provided by her church, some teachings no longer fully aligned with her evolving beliefs. As she grew spiritually and personally, she realized the importance of staying true to her own understanding of faith.

Rather than abandoning her passion, Andrea forged her own path—one that honours both her roots and her convictions. Now working part-time as a wedding officiant, she brings warmth, inclusivity, and a deep sense of purpose to every ceremony. Practicing metaphysical spirituality, she embraces the idea that all religions can coexist within a broader spiritual framework. Her adaptability allows her to incorporate meaningful elements from various traditions, ensuring that each couple's ceremony is authentic, heartfelt, and reflective of their unique love story.

Andrea has always believed in the power of marriage—the idea that two people together can achieve more than they can alone. This belief is echoed in scripture: "One can chose a thousand, but two put ten thousand to flight" (Deuteronomy 32:30)—reinforcing her conviction that we are stronger together.

Having witnessed her parents' 50-year marriage, Andrea understands both the joys and challenges that come with lifelong commitment. Even after experiencing a difficult divorce, her faith in the beauty, purpose, and transformative power of marriage remained steadfast.

For Andrea, the most rewarding part of officiating weddings is crafting and delivering a message that speaks directly to each couple. She takes the time to learn their story—their triumphs, challenges, and dreams—so she can offer wisdom and encouragement as they step into marriage. While weddings may have many guests, she ensures the ceremony remains deeply personal and spiritually enriching for the couple at its heart.

Beyond weddings, Andrea's ministerial work extends to other significant life events. She officiates funerals, helping families honour and remember their loved ones with compassionate and thoughtful ceremonies. "I think it's a gift to be with people during some of the most raw and difficult moments of their lives." She also performs baby blessings, dedications, and christenings—celebrating new life and guiding families in their commitment to raising children with faith and love. Additionally, she offers house blessings, praying over new homes to set intentions for peace, protection, and positivity.

Despite her full-time job as Academic and Financial Aid Advisor at the University of Toronto Mississauga, Andrea dedicates evenings and weekends—especially during peak wedding season from May to October—to her officiant work. For her, it's not a sacrifice. "I would work every weekend if I could," she says. Her passion makes the work feel fulfilling rather than demanding. Whether officiating a wedding, leading a funeral, blessing a new home, or welcoming a child into faith, Andrea's mission remains the same—to bring spiritual depth, comfort, and meaning to life's most significant moments. Simply put, Andrea, "loves, love."

Andrea understands both the joys and challenges that come with lifelong commitment.



Andrea Burton officiating at a recent wedding

*Margaret Bucknam, Communications and Outreach, USW 1998
Photo courtesy of Andrea Burton*



Among the ones I did attend were “You Fight, Like a Woman: Organizing for Power in Our Workplace” and “Bargaining for Inclusion.” We learned about current grievances, ongoing struggles, and the battles we won together to benefit our union and community. The union does a lot for its members by fighting for their rights.

In June 2024, I got the chance to attend an extraordinary event as a USW 1998 delegate. The 2024 Civil and Human Rights Conference took place in Detroit, Michigan. The rallying cry, “I’ve got the movement in me,” describes the heart of what this conference was all about.

Detroit was one of the key birthplaces of the Civil and Human Rights movement and this was the first time the conference took place in Detroit since the COVID pandemic began in 2019. With over 300 USW members from across North America from many different sectors and backgrounds, we all came together to fight for human dignity, which is at the heart of the labour movement.

I met many USW members from both Canada and the USA of different backgrounds, who have their own unique experiences. The Civil and Human Rights Conference was full of energy, and it was one you didn’t want to miss.

There were a lot of networking opportunities to get to know fellow USW members. There were many workshops offered to help expand members’ knowledge and understanding of the civil and human rights movement.

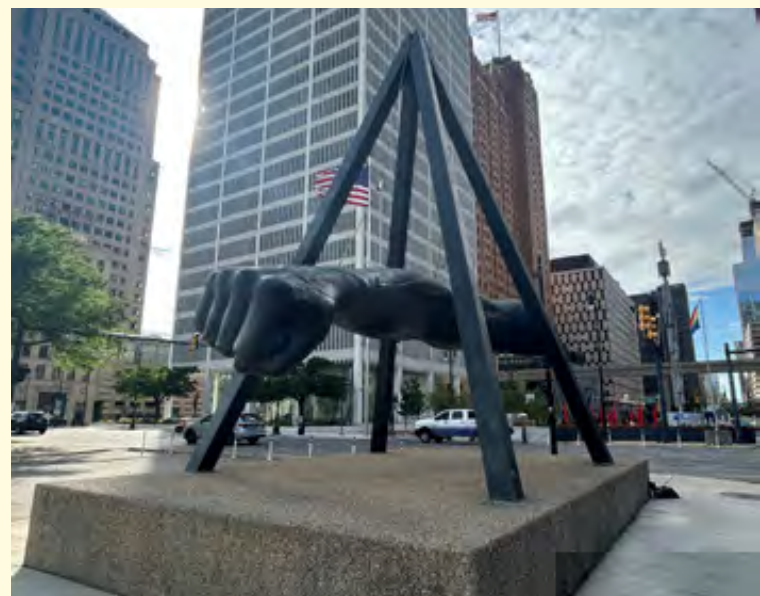
Some of the workshops were about becoming allies with Indigenous or Native American members; the roots of the regressive anti-labour right to work legislation that has proliferated in the United States; breaking the glass ceiling and surpassing gender bias; and raising the bar on women’s health and safety, just to name a few. It was hard to pick which workshops to attend since they all addressed important Civil Rights issues.

The highlight of the conference was the rally itself. We started from the Detroit Marriott Renaissance Centre and walked up Jefferson Avenue to the Transcending Arc monument, which is across from the Monument to Joe Louis, or “The Fist.” At the rally, we chanted “We are USW and we are united!” Being at the rally felt like a once-in-a-lifetime moment where we stood united as one. I was amazed to see so many of us coming together and sharing our experiences within the USW family. It was truly amazing and inspiring.

Attending this conference has opened up my eyes to issues that we need to continue to fight for. I am planning on being more active within my local union to help support and show I’ve got the movement in me.

Sundeep Battu, Faculty of Medicine

The Fist, dedicated to boxer Joe Louis, is a powerful symbol of the fight against racial injustice. Photos courtesy of Sundeep Battu



U of T and USW Establish the United Steelworkers/Leo Gerard Chair in Collective Bargaining and Worker Representation

The United Steelworkers

(USW) has partnered with the University of Toronto to launch a new USW/Leo Gerard Chair in Collective Bargaining and Worker Representation at the University's Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources.

The USW/Leo Gerard Chair will further the study and teaching of labour relations and build greater understanding among policymakers, employers, unions and other stakeholders of work and employment issues in Canada and around the world. The Chair will carry the name of the Union and its former International President, Leo W. Gerard, in permanent recognition of their contributions to the representation of worker interests.



Former Canadian National Director, Ken Neumann, speaks at the November 14, 2024 launch of the USW/Leo Gerard Chair.

The Chair was launched on November 14 at a special reception at the University of Toronto's Hart House. Dignitaries included Rafael Gomez, Director, Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources and Co-Chair of the fundraising campaign; Roxanne Brown, USW International Vice-President at Large; Bea Bruske, President, Canadian Labour Congress; Ken Neumann, former USW Canadian National Director and Co-Chair of the fundraising campaign; Kevon Stewart, USW District 6 Director (Ontario and Atlantic Canada); Alan Kestenbaum, CEO, Bedrock Industries and Co-Chair of the fundraising campaign; Ken Rosenberg, Partner, Paliare Roland Rosenberg Rothstein LLP; and Michael Psoras, Partner, KPS Capital Partners LP.

"Honouring Leo Gerard through this Chair in collective bargaining and worker representation is not only a fitting tribute to a great labour leader, but also a testament to the University of Toronto's commitment to the field of labour relations. As Director of the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, I am honoured that our centre is the home of the Chair and to be working on the future of collective bargaining," said Rafael Gomez, Director, CIRHR.

"Leo's abilities to understand, forcefully represent and embody the values and culture of working people and to be able to communicate and be understood by those at the highest echelons of power are among his most unique and admirable qualities," said Ken Neumann, former USW National Director for Canada.

Kevon Stewart, USW District 6 Director, said that "Leo Gerard has been a creative and innovative leader, unlike any other, always finding ways to advance the cause of working people. Whether it be through unusual partnerships, transnational alliances or legislative action, Leo has worked tirelessly over his decades in the labour movement to ensure working people on both sides of the border are safer, have a higher standard of living and a meaningful voice in the workplace. Over and over again, he has asked all of us to rise to the occasion and our Union is better off for his decades of efforts."

The USW/Leo Gerard Chair in Collective Bargaining and Worker Representation will focus on research related to the leverage and voice for working people and how their collective representation can improve equity, productivity and efficiency. It will also address the most pressing challenges facing workers today by:

- *solidifying teaching and research in the traditional subjects of labour relations and collective bargaining;*
- *supporting teaching and research in emerging areas of collective representation, including sectoral bargaining systems, employee involvement schemes, and the comparative study of collective bargaining and employee representation systems on a global basis; and*



USW District 6 Director, Kevon Stewart, speaks at the November 14, 2024 reception.

- *funding a new tenure-track faculty position to assist in the advancement of teaching and research around these collective bargaining and employee representation issues.*

The Steelworkers made a cornerstone contribution to the fundraising campaign which raised over \$3.6 million in donations from corporations, law firms and 26 USW local unions (including Local 1998) and area councils across Canada as well as from other unions and labour organizations. The University of Toronto matched the amount with \$2.5 million, thereby ensuring that the USW/Leo Gerard Chair will be permanently endowed at the University.

Honouring Leo Gerard through this Chair in collective bargaining and worker representation is not only a fitting tribute to a great labour leader, but also a testament to the University of Toronto's commitment to the field of labour relations

Leo Gerard is the International President Emeritus of the United Steelworkers union, serving in the union's top job from 2001 to 2019. Gerard was the second Canadian to lead the international union, following his mentor Lynn Williams, who served as USW International President from 1983 to 1994.

He was made a Companion of the Order of Canada, the country's highest civilian honour, for his contributions to the labour movement, both in Canada and internationally in June 2023.

P. C. Choo in collaboration with Brad James. P. C. Choo is a former Vice-President of USW Local 1998 and a former Editor of Steel Drum. Brad James is currently a Sessional Instructor at the Ted Rogers School of Management at the Toronto Metropolitan University. He was instrumental in the USW organizing drive at UofT.

Photos courtesy of USW Flickr

The Dr. Jean Augustine Professorship in Transformative Education

On February 6, 2025, Victoria University Board of Regents member, Mark Austin, invited my wife, Monica, and I, to attend the launch of the Dr. Jean Augustine Professorship in Transformative Education at the Isabel Bader Theatre.

The professorship is the first endowed professorship named in honour of Dr. Jean Augustine, Canada's first Black female Member of Parliament. The professorship will support the Education and Society program and Vic One Education stream at Victoria University. The \$2.5 million endowment in perpetuity will support the appointment of a leading scholar specializing in Transformative Pedagogy with the aim of addressing challenges facing Black Canadians and other marginalized communities within Canada's education system. The yet-to-be appointed professor will also provide leadership through teaching and research and develop best practices for the full engagement and inclusion of all under-represented students at Victoria University.

P. C. Choo with The Hon. Dr. Jean Augustine & Mark Austin. Photo courtesy of Mark Austin





Mark Austin with Victoria University President & Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Rhonda McEwen. Photo courtesy of Mark Austin.

The professorship is the first endowed professorship named in honour of Dr. Jean Augustine, Canada's first Black female Member of Parliament.

The event began with a screening of "Steadfast: The Messenger and the Message" which chronicled the inspiring story of Jean Augustine's journey from Happy Hill, Grenada, to being the first Black woman to be elected to the House of Commons in Canada.

President and Vice-Chancellor of Victoria University, Dr. Rhonda McEwen, said that Dr. Augustine was an inspiration to so many people, including herself and praised the "incredible work that Dr. Augustine has done and inspired others to follow the path that she has blazed."

"I'm very pleased that the word transformative is connected to my name in some way or the other because I think the things that we've done over the years as a Black community, and as a Black woman in community, and in the political arena, were really trying to transform society so that we can get to that place of equity, justice, fairness and inclusion," said Dr. Augustine.

Many thanks, Mark, for the invitation to a truly historical and transformative event!

P. C. Choo, Special Correspondent



Dr. Jean Augustine giving a speech at Victoria University. Photo courtesy of Victoria University

Indigenous Self-Governance:

Call to Action



Merv King featured on a poster at the United Steelworkers District 6 Conference in 2024 in St. John's, Newfoundland. Photo courtesy of Merv King

I would like to start by acknowledging that we are on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Huron Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations. I would like to talk about Indigenous self-governance. In particular, I'd like to talk about the allies First Nations, Inuit and Métis have found within the union movement, fighting for equality and self-governance.

Since 1982, First Nations have been fighting for self-governance and recognition as a distinct nation. First Nations want the government to negotiate with us on a nation-to-nation basis. There needs to be a real commitment by both parties if self-governance ever becomes a reality. Indigenous people have an inherent right to self-governance guaranteed in the Constitutional Act of 1982. So, what's the hold up for this in Canada?

Self-governance would give First Nations decision-making powers about how to protect our own cultures and languages, the right to manage our own lands and the right to enter into community benefits agreements and make plans and to take control over natural resources within our territory.

Right now, First Nations are struggling to get over the destruction of our traditional way of life, moving forward to regain the sovereignty of our traditional lands. The legacy of colonization is that the people have been cheated out of our lands and our riches through colonization. It's hard to believe that status Indians were not allowed to vote until 1960 in a country that proclaims a high standard of equality.

The question is not why we as First Nations want sovereignty or self-governance. The real question is why First Nations have still not regained the

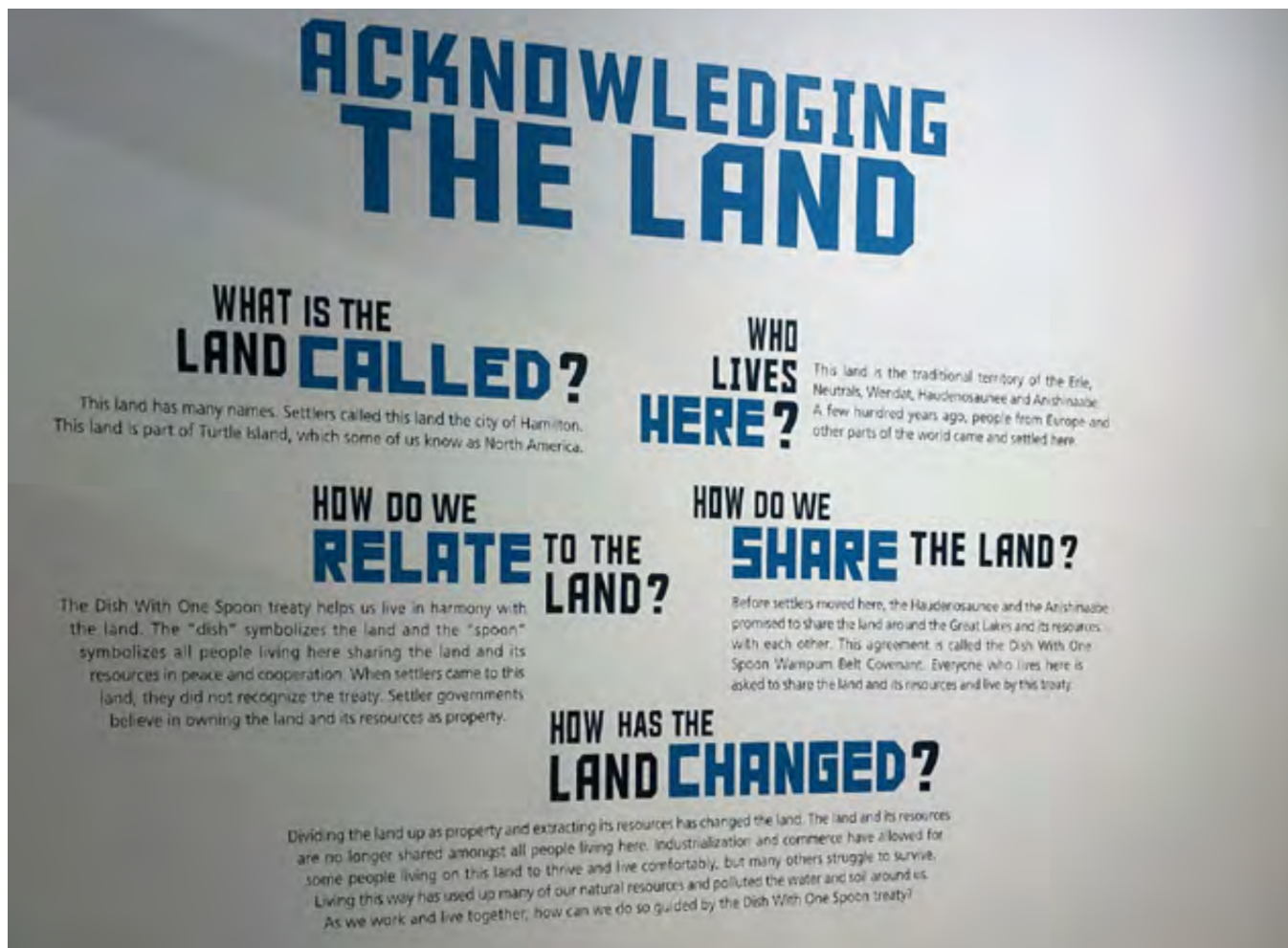


Image from Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, community museum that celebrates the history of workers and labour. Photo courtesy of Rebecca Chua

sovereignty they had over the land and our territories long before the first Europeans arrived. First Nations had their own well established political systems in place with hereditary chiefs and tribal councils. They recognized input from women and elders, taking their advice and leadership, which provided a solid foundation for good governance.

Legacy of Colonization

The British North American Act of 1867 imposed Euro Canadian laws on Aboriginal society, followed by the most racist legislation in Canadian history, the Indian Act of 1876. This legislation defined "Indian" status, imposed "democratic" norms on First Nations bands and reserves, with the goal of assimilation, attempting to "kill the Indian in the child" in residential schools, while historically not recognizing Métis and Inuit peoples.

In British Columbia, despite the Supreme Court's landmark 1997 decision recognizing Indigenous title to their lands, more than 20 First Nations, including Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, continue to struggle against the provincial government authorizing construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline on their ancestral territory.

First Nations and their fellow union activists across Canada are sparking discussions as to what are the differences between elected chiefs as opposed to hereditary chiefs. The purpose of introducing an Elected Chief was to eradicate the concept of hereditary chiefs and put in so-called democratic systems, a concept unfamiliar to Native people, and a means of oppression and assimilation.

We must stand in solidarity and only allow development with prior and informed consent for any development on our lands, including

the Ring of Fire, which refers to the region in the remote James Bay Lowlands of Northern Ontario with its rich deposits of platinum, palladium, nickel, copper, gold and zinc – and chromite, which is used in producing stainless steel and other high strength alloys, as well as in various refractory applications and chemical processes. Unfortunately, chromite is also highly toxic and has been identified as cancer-causing.

This is why First Nations also need to have the right to veto any development which threatens the health of the people and presents a danger to the environment. We only need to look at the boiled water advisories on reserves to see the pollution within our rivers and lakes due to a century of clear-cutting of forest, pulp and paper production and mineral extraction. In Alberta, we see the tar sands and the pipelines extending across First Nations territories, destroying the natural habitat of the fish and wildlife.

At the same time, education is being used as a tool for the oppression of Indigenous peoples on the premise that Indigenous cultures were inferior to white Christian cultures, when the reverse is true. Indigenous cultures took care of people when they were old, sick and disabled, and provided for their communities without profiting from each other. It truly was rooted in a sense of community. Long before the first settlers ever came to Canada or North America, a social network was already in place.

Doctrine of Discovery

The foundation for oppression and the violation of Indigenous human rights dates back to the Doctrine of Discovery, rooted in 15th century papal bulls, which is how the Pope at the time introduced the concept of Terra Nullius (Latin for “no man’s land”) to enable European colonizers to seize and lay claim to lands belonging to non-Christians on the basis that these territories were “discovered” by the Europeans. Pope Francis has since rescinded the Doctrine of Discovery but, for

Indigenous peoples, it’s too little, too late.


Sovereignty for Indigenous People would preserve our culture, allow us to exercise greater control over resources inherent in the land, administer laws and practices in our communities and provide a livelihood for members of the community. Let me say as First Nations, we have an inherent right to govern ourselves and our territories. Again, that would mean that we would have to control mineral extraction, oil and gas production, harvesting of timbers and any commercial investments within our traditional territories.

When the first Europeans came, they came with Bibles in hand, and we had the land. Now we have their Bibles, and they have our land. Little wonder that the political activism of Canada’s Indigenous people has increased over the years since the Second World War. As of the last census, there are over 1.5 million Indigenous peoples spread out over 600 recognized First Nation governments or bands with our own distinct cultures and languages.

You also need to know of the forced sterilization of young women and girls in Alberta from 1928 to 1972 and in British Columbia from 1932 to 1973 with the view that it was for their own good. There have been many atrocities that amount to genocide against Canada’s Indigenous people. Before Indigenous people can regain their sovereignty, there must be an end to systemic racism and a move toward a more open, equitable social movement which includes all people who have come from four directions to live and work on Turtle Island.

United Steelworkers Initiatives

First Nations have found allies within the labour movement like the United Steelworkers, which has gone to great lengths to welcome First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples into their fold.



*Let us put our
thoughts and
minds together,
and build a better
future for our
children.*

As early as 1991, USW Local 8533 at the Dona Lake mine in northwestern Ontario, resolved through arbitration that basic employment equity provisions for the hiring, promotion and training of First Nations employees be enshrined in their first collective agreement, where it could be enforced by the union. Last year, USW welcomed the Thessalon First Nation in Algoma District, Ontario, into the union family, a step forward on the road to self-governance.

In 2005, Steelworkers, along with the Mining Association of Canada, cofounded the Mining Industry Training and Adjustment Council, a joint labour-management initiative. One of the underlying objectives of the Council has been to strengthen the involvement of Indigenous people in the industry. Many of our collective agreements in Labrador, Northern Quebec, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, provide for Indigenous union members to be given time off to hunt and replenish their meat supply before the winter approaches.

In April 2016, the USW National Policy Conference passed a resolution, the USW Statement of Principle on Indigenous Issues, and established an ongoing National Indigenous Committee with a mandate to engage Indigenous members on a regional or district basis.

The USW has created two Indigenous Liaison Coordinator positions. Their role is to bring Indigenous issues to light and to offer support to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. They also put together a course called Unionism on Turtle Island to deepen members' understanding of our shared history as Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, and its impact on Indigenous peoples today. The course examines the ways in which continued

“Long before the first settlers ever came to Canada or North America, a social network was already in place.”

support of Indigenous people in Canada allows them to survive and thrive, and to exercise their rights in a democratic union. While exploring the many connections between Indigenous struggles and labour struggles in this country, it seeks to build

capacities of both Steelworkers and Indigenous peoples to work effectively together on a common and connected struggle.

For Steelworkers to be good allies to the Indigenous struggles and in the practice of Reconciliation, wise Lakota chief Sitting Bull once said, “Let us put our thoughts and minds together, and build a better future for our children.”

Miigwetch

Merv King is a member of the Timiskaming First Nation, coordinator of the Steelworkers Area Council Injured Workers Program and a member of the USW National Indigenous Committee

Editorial note: Annotated transcript of a speech Merv King gave at the October 15, 2024 USW1998 general membership meeting, upon invitation from the USW1998 Executive.

Selected Reading

Sherman Alexie, *The Toughest Indian in the World*, Grove Press (2000)

Charlie Angus, *Cobalt; Cradle of the Demon Metals, Birth of a Mining Superpower*, Anansi Books (2022)

Grand Chief Ronald M. Derrickson, *Fight or Submit: Standing Tall in Two Worlds*, ECW Press (2020)

Michelle Good, *Truth Telling: Seven Conversations about Indigenous Life in Canada*, Harper Collins (2023)

Michelle Good, *Five Little Indians*, Harper Perennial (2020)

Drew Hayden-Taylor, *Me Tomorrow: Indigenous Views on the Future*, Douglas & McIntyre (2021)

Tomson Highway, *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Doubleday (1998)

Harold Johnson, *Firewater: How Alcohol is Killing MY People (and Yours)*, University of Regina Press (2016)

Bob Joseph, *21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act: Helping Canadians Make Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a Reality*, Indigenous Relations Press (2018)

Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, Anchor (2013)

Thomas King, *Sufferance*, Harper Collins (2021)

Bruce McIvor, *Standoff: Why Reconciliation Fails Indigenous People and How to Fix It*, Nightwood (2021)

J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*, University of Toronto Press (2006)

Emmett C. Murphy with Michael Snell, *The Genius of Sitting Bull: 13 Heroic Strategies for Today's Business Leaders*, Prentice Hall (1993),

Ronald Niezen, *Truth and Indignation: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools*, University of Toronto Press (2013)

John Ralston Saul, *The Comeback: How Aboriginals are Reclaiming Power and Influence*, Viking (2014)

Tanya Talaga, *Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death and Hard Truths in a Northern City*, House of Anansi Press (2018)

Tanya Talaga, *The Knowing*, Harper Collins (2024)

Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Metis and Inuit Issues in Canada*, Highwater Press (2016)

Indigenous peoples believe the eagle is sacred because it flies closest to the Creator. It symbolizes respect, honour, strength, courage and wisdom.



Deepening Understanding Through Land-Based Learning



Hiawatha wampum belt, a visual record of the creation of the Haudensaunee Confederation, held by Andrea Johns, with colleague John Crouch. Photo courtesy of Kristy Bard



Participants listen to a story about the Anishnaabe trickster figure, Nanaboozhoo, and the origins of the maple tree (left). John Crouch shares star knowledge under the Knowledge House at Ziibiing (right).

Photos courtesy of Andrea Johns.

As an Indigenous Training Coordinator for the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, I have the privilege of guiding participants through Indigenous ways of knowing, histories, worldviews, and relationships with the land. As an urban Indigenous person, I know firsthand that access to land and ceremonial spaces is often limited, even on our own territories. This lack of access makes spaces like Ziibiing even more significant—they offer a rare opportunity to connect with the land in a meaningful way, to engage in ceremony, and to reclaim teachings that have always been rooted in place.

In the summer of 2024, myself and my colleague, John Crouch, developed a new addition to the Office of Indigenous Initiatives' workshop series—the Ziibiing Land-Based workshop. Each session is an opportunity to share knowledge and witness the impact of learning in a space that is both immersive and reflective.

As we lead participants through the workshop, we begin at the Eastern Doorway and with Anishnaabe Medicine Wheel teachings. We move throughout the space, exploring key themes embedded in the landscape. Cultural markers introduce the teachings of the four directions, while native plant gardens spark conversations


about traditional ecological knowledge and medicinal practices. The importance of water is central to our discussions, as Ziibiing follows the path of the buried Taddle Creek, with rainfall directed across the site to mimic a flowing stream.

For many participants, this is their first exposure to land-based learning. It is always powerful to witness how the shift from a classroom to an outdoor environment changes the way people engage. There is an openness that emerges—questions flow more freely, and participants connect with the teachings in a personal and embodied way. Being immersed in an outdoor space creates space for reflection, connection, and a deeper appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing.

One of the most moving parts of the workshop is the inclusion of ceremony. Smudging and tobacco offerings ground our experience, reinforcing the importance of reciprocity and respect in our relationships with the land. As a Mohawk/Kanien'kehá:ka facilitator, I share Haudenosaunee perspectives alongside my co-facilitator, John Crouch, who brings Anishinaabe teachings. These differences highlight the diversity of Indigenous cultures and the richness of our collective knowledge.

At the end of each session, I see the impact of land-based learning in the way participants linger, continuing conversations, absorbing the space, and reflecting on what they have learned, inviting individuals to rethink their relationship with the land and Indigenous histories.

At Ziibiing, the land itself is the teacher, offering lessons in reciprocity and respect. This workshop is just one way of continuing the work of Truth and Reconciliation, fostering deeper understanding and relationship-building within the university community. As a facilitator, I leave each session inspired by the engagement and curiosity of those who attend, hoping that the teachings, like water, will continue to flow outward into the University community.



At Ziibiing, the land itself is the teacher, offering lessons in reciprocity and respect.

To learn more about the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, please visit indigenous.utoronto.ca

Andrea Johns, a member of the Kanien'keha:/ Mohawk Turtle Clan with ancestral roots in Six Nations of the Grand River, is the Indigenous Initiatives Program Manager with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at the Faculty of Law

Indigenous Design

In December 2023, the fences surrounding the highly anticipated Indigenous Landscape Project, Ziibiing, came down. Opening this Indigenous space to the U of T community was a response to [Answering the Call: Wecheehetowin, the final report of the Steering Committee for the U of T Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.](#)

The vision for Ziibiing was developed by an Indigenous Advisory Committee in collaboration with the [Indigenous Design Studio](#) at Brook McLroy. This team, which specializes in Indigenous-led architecture and landscape design, worked closely with Indigenous students, faculty, staff, the Council of Indigenous Initiatives Elders' Circle, and representatives of local First Nations to ensure the project reflected Indigenous knowledge and values, drawing from cultural elements significant to many Indigenous communities such as fire, water and the stars. A bronze open-air pavilion featuring a sacred fire and wood seating serve as a ceremonial gathering space. Situated atop a hill, the pavilion serves as a focal point in the landscape and a beacon.

The Anishinaabemowin word "Ziibiing" means "river;" the name reflecting the history of the land and Taddle Creek (the site of the stream which, though buried, still flows under this space, and may have been named for the tadpoles that once filled the creek). The landscape project pays tribute to the Indigenous nations that lived and still exist today on the traditional Indigenous lands on which U of T is situated. Ziibiing serves as a place for learning, gathering, and honouring Indigenous teachings.

Working with local First Nations and Joseph Pitawanakwat, Indigenous Plant Specialist from Creator's Garden ensured that all the trees, plants and shrubs used in the project are native to the land. Signs with plant names have been translated into Anishnaabe, Seneca, Latin and English.

Rebecca Chua, Editor, Steel Drum



**INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE
AT TADDLE CREEK**
50% DESIGN DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATION
2020-06-17

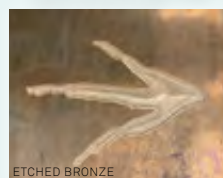
*Indigenous open-air pavilion, a
beacon on campus.*

19

*Marker lighting used at the
pavilion.*

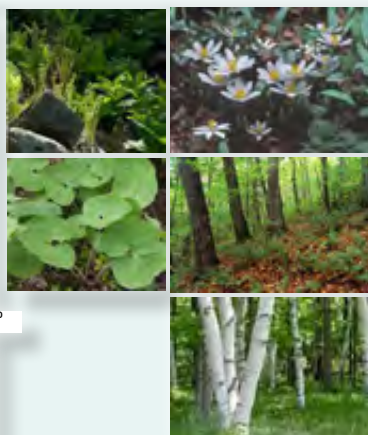


Cultural markers tell stories
of Treaties, Taddle creek and
Residential schools and are
augmented by QR code linked
to web-based content.



ETCHED BRONZE

2.1 GATEWAYS MARKERS



1.3 PLANTING WOODLAND

*All Indigenous plants and trees
are native to the land.*

Navigating Mental Health Wellness at Work and in the Union



Delegates at the Steelworkers Toronto Area Council (STAC) course, "Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace and in the Union". Photo courtesy of Mary-Marta Briones-Bird

Mental health affects us all. Be it through a family member, friend, coworker or our own personal encounters, many people have experienced a mental health issue at some point in their lives. Mental illness, like any other health condition, can be treated effectively when recognized early. However, it often goes unnoticed, leaving individuals to suffer in silence, afraid of stigma or judgment from friends, family, or coworkers. In the workplace, mental health can present unique challenges with unique needs and unique accommodation plans for employees. Through the "Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace and in the Union" course, the four of us had the opportunity to learn how to recognize, talk about, and assist members with mental health needs and concerns.

Navigating mental health in the workplace can be daunting. Even talking about it can be uncomfortable. One of the main goals of the course was to provide participants with

opportunities to learn how to have difficult conversations. We were taught the "Five- Step Process" developed by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA):

1. Start the conversation by saying: "I have noticed..." or "It's been brought to my attention..."
2. Listen compassionately and encourage the sharing of more detail by saying "Tell me more..."
3. Follow this with "I am worried if we don't take action, something might happen."
4. Ask: "Is there anything else going on?"
5. Find possible solutions involving all parties such as the affected employee, the union representative and the employer, and share community resources.

Through various in-class activities, we were made aware that the situation for workers has become progressively worse today compared to the past five years. Fellow course participants reported that employees in their workplaces are encouraged to work at a faster pace, asked to multi-task more, and to work during unpaid time (i.e., taking work home, working outside regular hours, working through lunch and break times). They reported an increase in workload, less time to spend with family and friends, less time to participate in hobbies or leisurely activities, and less time to exercise, eat, or sleep well. Studies have shown that all these stressors inflicted upon workers significantly increase their risk of suffering from depression and anxiety and can even double or triple the rate of developing cardiovascular disease and can increase susceptibility to infectious diseases. By its very nature, work itself is becoming an occupational hazard. All these factors have led to an increase in disability claims, which also has a negative impact on the economy and productivity, which inevitably affects us all.

This course taught us ways of speaking up about mental health in the workplace. Recognizing signs of someone struggling and knowing the steps to get them the help they need, along with working around accommodation plans are key elements to support members who are going through difficult times. Our efforts should be concentrated on taking on a proactive approach and taking steps to prevent employees from reaching a point of crisis, whether it be mental or physical. Our goal is to learn strategies to live a mentally healthy lifestyle ourselves as well as helping others at the University to do so as well.

STAC courses such as “Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace and in the Union” play a critical role in breaking down the stigma associated with mental health, fostering open conversations, and ensuring people feel safe to seek the help they need. We strongly encourage collaboration with the University to make these resources accessible to everyone, creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for all.

Katrina Marshall, Faculty of Dentistry

Ileana Murray, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)

Duc Goi, Facilities & Services

Angel Ly, Faculty of Medicine

Editorial Note: The Steelworkers Toronto Area Council (STAC) course, “Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace and in the Union” from November 4 – 8, 2024. They share what they learned about how to assist members navigating mental health issues in the workplace.

CRISIS RESOURCES LINKS:

[988.CA](https://988.ca)

[GERSTEINCENTRE.ORG](https://gersteincentre.org)

[USW1998.CA/LIFELINE](https://usw1998.ca/lifeline)

[PEOPLE.UTORONTO.CA/EMPLOYEES/EFAP/](https://people.utoronto.ca/employees/efap/)

By its very nature, work itself is becoming an occupational hazard.

Ontario government passes Bill 229 Working for Workers Six Act, 2024



Changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act

- Introduced a mandatory minimum fine of \$500,000 for corporations convicted of a second or subsequent offence that results in the death or serious injury of one or more workers in a two-year period [Section 66 (2) (b)]. Previously, fines for employers convicted of repeat offenses were not explicitly outlined. What remains to be determined is what is meant by "serious injury", as only "critical injury" is currently defined per OHSA Regulation 834.
- New duties for employers to ensure that personal protective clothing and equipment (PPE) provided, worn, or used are appropriate and fit properly [Section 25(1) (b.1)]. The government would also be given the authority to make regulations requiring the assessment of PPE and prescribing the requirements related to the conduct of those assessments. These changes are intended to ensure that all workers, in particular women and workers with diverse body shapes, have access to proper fitting PPE appropriate for their work.
- Expanded powers of the province's Chief Prevention Officer (CPO) to include the authority to establish criteria to assess training programs delivered outside of Ontario for equivalency to training programs approved under the OHSA [Section 7.2.1]. Additionally, the CPO may establish policies regarding general training requirements (e.g., learning outcomes, training design, delivery methods). These changes are intended to strengthen and standardize health and safety training requirements within the province.

Bill 229 (**Working for Workers Six Act**, 2024), introduced on November 27, 2024, received Royal Assent on December 19, 2024, just before the Ontario Legislature adjourned for its winter recess. This bill builds on the government's five prior Working for Workers acts (2021 - 2024) by introducing further amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act (the "**OHSA**") and the Employment Standards Act, 2000 (the "**ESA**").

Some of the Bill 229 amendments that may be relevant to USW1998 members include:

- Mandatory minimum fines for repeat offenders of qualifying offences;
- Properly fitted personal protective clothing equipment;
- Enhanced powers for the Chief Prevention Officer;
- Placement of child leave for employees who become parents through adoption or surrogacy; and
- Long-term illness leave.

These changes may have varied impacts on union workers covered by existing collective agreements.

Changes to the Employment Standards Act

- A new parental leave for employees who become parents through adoption or surrogacy (Section 47.1). Employees who have been employed for at least 13 weeks would be entitled to up to 16 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave for the placement or arrival of a child into the employee's custody, care, and control through adoption or surrogacy. This would align with upcoming federal changes which will create employment insurance (EI) benefits for adoption.
- A new long-term illness leave for employees who are unable to work due to a serious medical condition (Section 49.8). Employees who have been employed for at least 13 consecutive weeks would be entitled to up to 27 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave if the employee is unable to perform the duties of their position as a result of a serious medical

condition (chronic or episodic). The employee will be required to provide a supporting certificate issued by a "qualified health practitioner" which states that the employee has a serious medical condition and includes the time period during which the employee will be unable to perform the duties of their position.

Should you have any questions regarding the impact of these changes to your workplace, please [contact your local union representative](#).

To review the full list of Bill 229 amendments:

<https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-43/session-1/bill-229>

For a summary of the Bill 229 amendments:

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1005404/working-for-workers-six-act-2024>

Ronald Ng, Environmental Health and Safety

Radon In Your Home: What You Need to Know

The information in this article does not constitute advice, and homeowners should consult a certified professional for testing.

From January 13-22, 2025, Health Canada's National Radon Program distributed approximately 680,000 postcards to Canadian households in regions where homes have previously tested above the Canadian radon guideline of 200 Bq/m³ (becquerels per cubic metre). Launched in 2020, this postcard campaign aims to raise public awareness about the risk of radon exposure and promote public health.



RADON GAS CAUSES LUNG CANCER

Lung cancer is the **most common cancer** in Canada and has a low survival rate. Long-term exposure to radon is the **#1 cause of lung cancer** for non-smokers.

Too many non-smokers do not think they are at risk of developing lung cancer.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| 3,000+ CANADIANS a year die from radon-induced lung cancer. | 30% OF CASES are non-smokers. | 19% PROBABILITY of surviving lung cancer (5 years). |
|--|---|---|

All homes have radon gas, the question is – how much?

 You can reduce your risk of radon-induced lung cancer. **The first step is to test your home.**
www.takeactiononradon.ca

Find out more:
www.canada.ca/radon

Canada

Now in its fifth year, the campaign has expanded to areas of Canada considered lower risk for radon exposure, with Ontario as the primary focus. Approximately 550,000 households in Ontario are expected to receive the radon awareness postcard during the 2025 distribution. Members of USW1998 are encouraged to look for this postcard in their mailboxes.

Note: Due to the Canada Post strike in late 2024, there may be variability in the timing of postcard deliveries, which could affect when postcards reach households. Image of the radon postcard to be distributed across Canada in January 2025. Photo provided by Health Canada.

What is radon?

Radon is a radioactive gas that is both colourless and odourless. It forms from the breakdown of uranium found naturally in soil, rock, and water. As the gas can move freely through the ground, it can seep into buildings that are in contact with the soil.

Why is radon a concern?

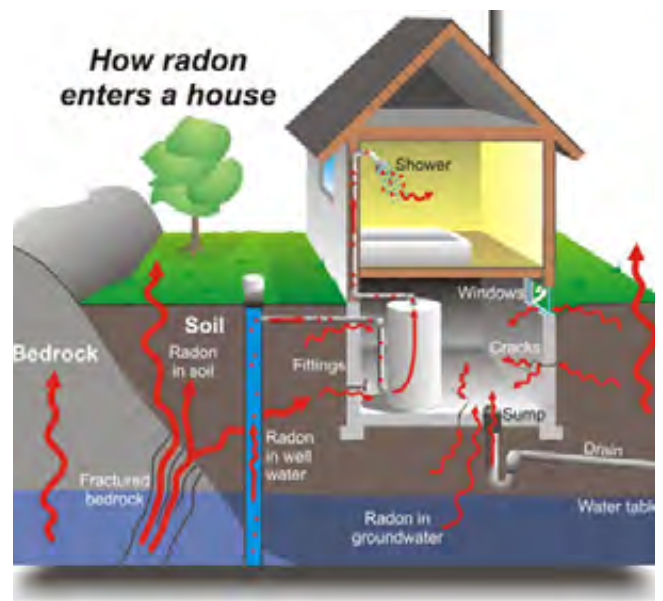
Prolonged exposure to high radon levels increases the risk of lung cancer, with the risk growing as radon concentrations and exposure durations increase.

According to Health Canada, radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking and is responsible for approximately 3,200 deaths in Canada each year.¹

How does radon enter a home?

In an outdoor environment, radon released from the ground is diluted by fresh air, keeping concentrations too low to pose a health risk. However, in an enclosed building or poorly ventilated space, such as a home's basement, radon can accumulate to levels that may become hazardous.

Radon can enter a home through various pathways, including cracks in the concrete slab or foundation walls, sumps, joints, gaps around pipes, crawlspaces, and basement drains.



How radon enters a house. Image by Ontario Home Builders' Association

What level of radon is considered too high?

Health Canada has established a guideline of 200 Bq/m³ for radon levels in homes. If the annual average radon level exceeds this threshold, mitigation measures should be taken to reduce exposure.

Is radon a concern in Canada and Toronto?

In the report titled, "2024 Cross-Canada Survey of Radon Exposure in the Residential Buildings of Urban and Rural Communities" published by Health Canada, approximately 1 in 5 (17.8%) homes in Canada were found to have radon levels at or above the Canadian guideline of 200 Bq/m³.² Additionally, 24.2% of Canadians lived in homes with radon levels between 100–199 Bq/m³.²

While radon is more common in certain regions of Canada, primarily due to variations in soil and bedrock geology, elevated radon levels can be found in homes nationwide. No region in Canada is entirely "radon-free". In Toronto, an estimated 7% of buildings—including homes, workplaces, and schools—have radon levels that may pose a health risk.³

Because radon levels can vary significantly even within the same building or neighbourhood, the only reliable way to determine if a home has elevated radon levels is through testing. Health Canada recommends that every home be tested, regardless of its location or building type.

How is radon addressed in the workplace?

Currently, radon is not specifically mentioned in the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) or its regulations. In the absence of radon-specific legislation, employers are required to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from hazards, including potential exposure to radon.

The Canadian Guidelines for Management of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORM) recommend 200 Bq/m³ as the workplace action level for radon. Health Canada also recommends this action level for public buildings, including schools.

How do I test my home for radon?

Testing for radon is straightforward and does not require specialized training, but it is essential to use an approved testing device and follow the instructions properly.

To obtain an accurate representation of a home's average annual radon level, Health Canada recommends testing be conducted for a duration of at least 3 months (i.e., no less than 91 days) and ideally during the heating season (October to April) when indoor radon levels are highest. The testing device should be placed in the lowest

occupied level of the home where a person would spend at least 4 hours per day. Many homeowners choose to place the device in their basement, as it is in direct contact with the soil, generally poorly ventilated, and likely to have the highest radon levels (i.e., worst-case scenario).

Radon measurement devices fall into two categories:

- **Passive radon devices**, such as alpha track detectors and electret ion chambers, rely on natural air movement and do not require an external power source. These devices contain material that interacts with radon gas or its decay products. After the test period, the device must be sent to a laboratory for analysis.
- **Active radon devices**, such as continuous radon monitors, are electrically powered and actively draw air through the detector. These devices sync with your phone via a mobile app to provide continuous, real-time data.

Regardless of the device type, Health Canada recommends choosing radon monitors that have been performance-tested and approved by the Canadian National Radon Proficiency Program (C-NRPP).

USW1998 members interested in learning more about conducting radon measurements in their own homes should review the "Guide for Radon Measurements in Homes" published by the Government of Canada.⁴ You may also consult a radon measurement professional to test your home: <https://c-nrpp.ca/find-a-professional/>



Examples of continuous radon monitors.



Examples of alpha-track radon detectors (passive detectors). Photo courtesy by Take Action on Radon.

What happens if my home tests high for radon?

Health Canada recommends taking mitigation measures if the average annual radon concentration exceeds 200 Bq/m³ in the lowest occupied level of the home. However, any remedial action should be based on the results of a long-term radon test (>3 months).

If your home tests high for radon, be aware that not all contractors are trained or qualified in radon mitigation. It is important to consult a certified C-NRPP radon mitigation professional in your area who can design and install a radon mitigation system for your home.

How do radon mitigation systems work?

A radon mitigation system is the most effective way to reduce radon levels in a home. Most radon mitigation systems employ a technique called **sub-slab depressurization**.

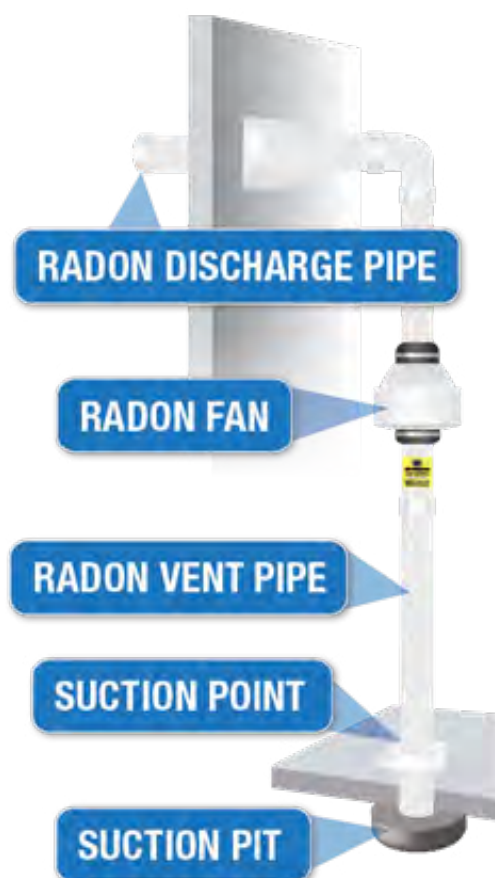
How it works: A fan and piping are installed to create a pathway that actively moves radon beneath the slab of the house directly outdoors, preventing it from entering the building.

With a properly installed radon mitigation system, even high radon levels can be reduced to well below the Canadian guideline level.

What additional measures can homeowners take to reduce radon exposure?

Homeowners should first determine if there is an elevated level of radon in their home through testing. If elevated radon levels are detected, installing an active radon mitigation system is the most effective way of reducing radon levels. Other strategies that homeowners can apply include:

- Sealing gaps, cracks, or openings in the foundation to prevent radon entry
- Increasing natural or mechanical ventilation in areas prone to radon accumulation
- Installing a vapour barrier over exposed soil (e.g., crawlspace)
- Conduct regular testing to monitor radon levels



Note: Although air purifiers can filter out various airborne particles and pollutants (e.g., dust, pollen, pet dander, odours and certain chemicals), they do not remove radon gas.

A radon mitigation system provides a pathway for the gas to reach the outdoor air without entering the home.

Radon control in new homes

The 2024 Ontario Building Code (OBC), which came into effect on January 1, 2025, requires new homes in Ontario to include a rough-in for a radon mitigation system.

The rough-in does not directly reduce radon but provides the starting point for a system. It is included in new construction to make it easier and more cost-effective to install a radon mitigation system should one be required. Homeowners will need to test their home for radon and determine whether the rough-in needs to be converted to a full mitigation system.

For USW1998 members considering the purchase of a new home built after January 1, 2025, be sure to check for the presence of the radon rough-in in the basement of the home you are considering buying.



Radon rough-in.

Are radon mitigation systems covered under Ontario's New Home Warranty?

By law, all newly constructed homes built in Ontario are provided with a warranty through the builder, administered by Tarion. This warranty provides coverage for construction defects after you take possession of your home and remains in effect for up to 7 years from the signing of the Agreement of Purchase and Sale.

Ontario's New Home Warranty provides up to \$50,000 in coverage for radon remediation, valid for the full duration of the warranty.⁵ If radon test results indicate levels above 200 Bq/m³,

you can submit a warranty claim to your builder through Tarion using the applicable warranty form. Your builder will be required to take the necessary steps to reduce radon levels in your home, which usually involves installing a radon mitigation system. This coverage also extends to condominium units.

Resources

¹ Government of Canada: Radon – What you need to know:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/reports-publications/radon-what-you-need-to-know.html>

² Health Canada: 2024 Cross-Canada Survey of Radon Exposure in the Residential Buildings of Urban and Rural Communities:
<https://evictradon.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-Cross-Canada-Radon-Survey-Report-V24-ISSN-Approved.pdf>

³ City of Toronto: Radon & Your Health:
<https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/radon-and-your-health/>

⁴ Government of Canada: Guide for Radon Measurements in Homes:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-risks-safety/guide-radon-measurements-residential-dwellings.html>

⁵ Tarion: How your new home warranty protects you against the dangers of radon gas:
<https://www.tarion.com/media/how-your-new-home-warranty-protects-you-against-dangers-radon-gas>

C-NRPP: <https://www.c-nrpp.ca>

Take Action on Radon: <https://www.takeactiononradon.ca>

Ronald Ng, Environmental Health and Safety

SPOTLIGHT ON STANDING COMMITTEES



BIPOC Committee

Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) members' lives are rooted in intersectionality, neurodivergence, and multi-cultural/multi-ethnic identities and abilities. The BIPOC Committee is committed to equity, inclusion, dignity, and social justice for everyone, and, much more crucially, to dismantling the systemic barriers and distinct silos that keep us divided. We welcome BIPOC members as well as allies of every gender, generation, philosophy, and persuasion to be a part of the change you expect to see. While our key initiatives revolve around anti-racism and amplifying the voices of the disadvantaged, we are, above all, committed to building a community of individuals with disparate lived experiences and perspectives.

Current Chair

Rebecca Chua trained in Alternative Dispute Resolution at the University of Waterloo and has worked as both a family and small business mediator. She also brought a corporate governance and equity lens to her work in the finance and communications arenas before joining the Temerty Faculty of Medicine Standardized Patients Program. She is a Steward in the Casual Unit.

Recent Highlights

All events featured representation and participation from tri-campus members.

- Black History Month Keynote Speakers include MP Jean Augustine, the first Black woman to serve as federal minister of the Crown; Andria Babbington, President of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council; and Senior Justice of the Peace Samantha Burton
- Lunch and Learn sessions on Truth and Reconciliation, Universal Design for Learning and Anti-Asian Racism

- Film screenings of *Origin* and *The Boy and the Heron* (and impassioned discussions)
- Chinese banquet

Looking Ahead

- Expedition to Woodlands Cultural Centre (formerly Mohawk Residential School)
- Panel Discussions on Women in Leadership, the Model Minority, Internalized Oppression
- Salmon Spawning Trip
- USW's Got Talent Expo
- Community Feast
- Game Night in collaboration with Steel Pride

To join the BIPOC Committee mailing list, or to get involved with organizing events, please email bipoc@usw1998.ca.



BIPOC Logo Courtesy of Ronald Ng

The BIPOC Committee's multi-coloured logo is designed by Ronald Ng to reflect how connected and intertwined members' lives are.

- In many Indigenous cultures, orange represents fire, hope, and defiance. It signifies

truth-telling, healing, and the resilience of Indigenous peoples in the face of adversity, particularly in relation to the legacy of residential schools. The colour orange is also associated with sunshine, health, and regeneration.

- Earth tones were chosen to honour the land and the different hues of the peoples of this earth, while green and blue were chosen to represent the plants and trees, as well as the colours of shallow and deep waters –the colours of the planet.
- Purple is often associated with creativity, dignity and spirituality; and recognizes the intersectionality of our multi-cultural identities and abilities.
- The font chosen is pulpo rust and has a rustic and faded appearance to convey a sense of history and a reminder not only of how we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, but how we must plan for the next seven generations.
- Above all, the overlapping hands demonstrate unity and togetherness



Up Close and Personal with Justice of the Peace Samantha Burton. Photo courtesy of Samantha Burton

Hayao Miyazaki's The Boy and The Heron. Image courtesy of Ghibli Studio



Communications Committee

The Communications Committee serves as a vital resource to USW Local 1998 by offering recommendations and providing insight on matters related to the Local's communications tools. These include the website, the Steel Drum magazine, and the weekly e-newsletter. The committee's goal is to support transparent, accessible, and engaging communication with all members.

Current Co-chairs

Margaret Bucknam brings creativity, dedication, and a strong sense of community to her role as Outreach and Communications Coordinator at USW Local 1998. An avid traveller who loves exploring new places and cultures, she is also a motorsport enthusiast with a particular love for F1 and IndyCar racing.

Rebecca Chua is an award-winning short story writer who has also travelled the world, and enjoys both international cuisines and movies rooted in different cultures and languages. A dog and cat whisperer, she finds conversations with Margaret and her beloved parrot, Daisy, particularly engaging.





The Communications Committee Team on winning the CALM Award in 2024. Photo courtesy of CALM



Dons at Ice Cream Pop-Up. Photo courtesy of Meredith Rappaport

Recent Highlights

- One of our proudest achievements: winning a prestigious award from the **Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM)** in 2024 for our Steel Drum magazine—recognized as one of the best publications in the labour movement.
- A few years ago, the committee-initiated discussions on revamping our website, with the goal of creating a more modern, user-friendly platform for members.
- Pub night at Hemingway's in Yorkville, offering members a chance to connect in person and build community in a relaxed, informal setting.

Looking Ahead

The committee is also focused on making recommendations and providing insight to enhance **member engagement** through:

- Expanding our presence and activity on **social media**
- Exploring new formats such as a **Local 1998 podcast**
- Finding innovative ways to make our communications more useful, accessible, and impactful for all members

We welcome feedback and ideas from members and are always looking for ways to improve how we connect and communicate.

Steel Pride Committee

The Steel Pride Committee works to foster equity in the workplace, at the bargaining table, and in our communities. We seek to create safe, educational, and fun spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ (2 Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex and Asexual) folks and their allies. Steel Pride organizes events and supports campaigns related to 2SLGBTQIA+ issues in our workplaces and in the wider community.



Current Chair

Dinah Thorpe (she, they) works part-time at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. She is also a working artist who loves biking, basketball, and making habitat for pollinators.

Highlights of past events or activities

Solstice Fire at Christie Pits, Arcade Night, and a fabulous Pride Party at Glad Day.

Looking Ahead

Yoga in collaboration with Women of Steel, Games Night in collaboration with the BIPOC Committee, Upcoming Campaigns.

Please get in touch if you have suggestions!

To join the Steel Pride mailing list, or to get involved with organizing events, please email steelpride@usw1998.ca.



Steel Pride at the Arcade Night Poster. Photo courtesy of Dinah Thorpe.

NextGen Committee

The NextGen Committee is dedicated to engaging and empowering the next generation of union members.

Current Co-Chairs

Ryan Lahti, Technology Adoption Consultant at OISE, enjoys cheering on the Leafs and playing with new technology! From winter camping in the Arctic to backpacking across Central America, Ryan believes travel is the best way to learn and grow. He attended the USW NextGen Conference in 2024, and found it to be an incredible experience, as it offered a unique platform for networking, learning, and personal growth.



Blake Smith (he/they), Registrarial Services and Academic Advisor at Woodsworth College. An avid reader, he is currently working on a vinyl record collection and is always happy to receive and share book/music recommendations.

Recent Highlights

For more on NextGen conference last year, check out Ryan's video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F45lg90JQ7Q>

Looking Ahead

Pub Night, Clothing or Food Drive, Union 101: Basics of Collective Agreement, Grievance, Benefits



Participants at the USW NextGen Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Ryan Lahti proudly displays his champion belt.
Photos courtesy of Ryan Lahti

Whether it's a social gathering, a workshop, or a community service project, your suggestions are invaluable in helping us create a vibrant and inclusive NextGen community. Take a moment to share your thoughts and ideas by filling out our [NextGen Ideas Form](#).

To find out more about the NextGen community and how you can be involved, contact nextgen@usw1998.ca

P. C. Choo Acclaimed as SOAR Trustee

Former USW Local 1998 Vice-President, P. C. Choo, has been acclaimed as one of three Trustees for the Steelworkers Organization for Active Retirees (SOAR) Chapter 1 (Toronto/Mississauga).

Also acclaimed were President, Brando Paris; Vice-President, Abdul Samad, Recording Secretary; Mike Danbrook; Financial Secretary, Linda Urquhart; and Trustees, Graham Dean and Connie Ferrante.



P. C. Choo, SOAR Correspondent

EQUAL PAY DAY: A SHAMEFUL SECRET

Equal Pay Day in Canada this year was April 10th. This date highlights the fact that, on average, women in Canada must work more than three months longer to earn what men earned in the previous year, and are still not at parity.

It draws attention to the persistent gender pay gap, which is exacerbated by intersectionality for women who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, 2SLGBTQ+, immigrants or have disabilities.

On average, a woman earns only 68% of what a man earns for work of equal value. It gets worse. Indigenous women earn just 61%, Black and racialized women earn 64%, and women with disabilities earn 57% of what their male counterparts earn.

In Canada, 60% of minimum wage workers are women and 70% of part-time, casual and seasonal workers are women. Only 26% of unemployed women receive regular EI benefits because they don't have enough qualifying hours. Food insecurity remains highest among female lone-parent families.

Formed in 1976, the Equal Pay Coalition is comprised of dozens of trade unions, women's and businesswomen's groups, and community organizations seeking to end gender pay discrimination and close the gender pay gap through legislation, collective bargaining, and social initiatives. Over the years, the Coalition has met with a succession of Ontario governments calling for action on many fronts to bring economic equality to women in all their diverse circumstances. This includes strong enforcement of the Pay Equity Act, access to affordable childcare, increases to the minimum wage, and reinstatement of Ontario's Employment Equity Act.

Most recently, the Coalition is calling for the Federal and Ontario governments to address the root causes of the gender pay gap, such as discrimination, bias, and undervalued work by developing its strategy "Securing Justice for Women's Work."



The Gender Pay Gap in Ontario.



Liesl Joson, Rebecca Chua and Mary-Marta Briones-Bird at the Equal Pay Coalition lunch and learn on April 10, 2025. Photo courtesy of Mary-Marta Briones-Bird

Their 12 Steps to Closing the Gap is a clarion call to policy-makers and employers, demanding:

1. Emergency Income support of \$600 weekly at minimum
2. Employment Insurance reform including expanding the wage earner protection program and raising the threshold to qualify to 360 hours and the duration to 45 weeks
3. Secure \$10 a day Childcare and ensure that childcare workers' wages are pay equity compliant
4. The recognition and upholding of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) so that Indigenous peoples have a right to participate in decisions that impact their lives, territories, cultures and ways of life
5. Investment in affordable housing and supports for social, transitional housing and shelters for women and gender diverse families
6. Support for the Care Economy including healthcare, social services and public transit
7. Expansion of public infrastructure including pharmacare, telecommunications and public media
8. Protection government revenues to deliver public services
9. Expansion of the scope and enforcement of pay equity and minimum wage laws
10. Promotion of access to unionization and collective bargaining, especially for women and gender diverse groups
11. Reinstatement of the position of the federal Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth
12. Investment in services to support women and gender diverse people facing gender-based violence

Rebecca Chua, Editor, Steel Drum

USW 1998 Happenings

Photos by: Meredith Rappaport



April 25, 2025. Job Evaluation & Pay Equity Analyst Kim Walker meets with USW Local 1998 members at an outreach event at the Faculty of Dentistry.



May 27, 2025. Vice-President Tamara Vickery and Grievance Officer Anil Purandaré speak with Local members at the union's Summer Social at the University of Toronto Institute for Aerospace Studies (UTIAS).



June 17, 2025. Financial Secretary Zack Sholdra shares a laugh with USW Local 1998 members at the union's Summer Social at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM).



June 17, 2025. NextGen Committee Co-Chair Zhanina Bregu greets a USW Local 1998 member at the union's Summer Social at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM).



July 8, 2025. President John Ankenman connects with USW Local 1998 members at an ice cream truck pop-up event on the University of Toronto St. George Campus.



June 17, 2025. Outreach & Communications Coordinator Margaret Bucknam talks with USW Local 1998 members at the union's Summer Social at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM).



**SCAN THE QR CODE
TO FIND YOUR USW
1998 STEWARD**



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.

**The following Communications Committee
members assisted with this issue of Steel
Drum**

Margaret Bucknam (Co-Chair),
Rebecca Chua (Co-Chair & Editor),
Kristy Bard (Co-Editor),
John Ankenman, Mary-Marta Briones-Bird,
Liesl Joson, Tamara Vickery.

Production: Richard Waters


To contribute to the next issue, please email
submissions to steeldrum@usw1998.ca by
September 15, 2025.


Special thanks to all our contributors!

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

USW Local 1998 Office

25 Cecil Street
Third Floor
Toronto, ON M5T 1N1

 (416) 506-9090

 info@usw1998.ca

