

# Canada's biggest union supports missing and murdered Indigenous women

By Jim Windle

**TORONTO** – Jerry Dias, the president of Unifor, Canada's largest union, came out swinging at the Ontario Regional Convention last weekend in Toronto, throwing the weight of Canada's largest union against Ontario's proposed healthcare cuts, but in support of Aboriginal Rights and the call for an inquiry into the 1,200 missing and murdered Indigenous women across Canada.

The conference was opened by Onkwehon:we union member Candace Lavalley conducting a traditional smudging ceremony for the delegates.

Among the topics covered by Unifor was a list of recommendations on violence against women and missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

"I recommend that Unifor Ontario Council continue to support the struggle to stop violence against women in all its forms by supporting fur-



Unifor National President Jerry Dias.

ther calls for action on violence against Aboriginal women and girls by joining the Native Women's Association of Canada in its demands for a national inquiry into the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, and that Aboriginal women are included in the design, decision-making process and

implementation of this inquiry," said Unifor Ontario Regional Chair, Dino Chiodo.

"The number of missing and murdered Aboriginal girls and women in Canada continues to grow to the point where it can be called an epidemic.." he added.

The Union came out

in support of "Shine the Light on Woman Abuse" as well as "Light the Night Against Violence" campaigns. Both campaigns call for peaceful demonstrations in communities across Canada with the aim of raising awareness around gender-based violence.

Women are dying at the hands of men but they are also dying at the hands of governments that have systematically underfunded women's shelters, second stage housing and emergency shelters, virtually eliminating affordable housing, drastically slashed social assistance and unemployment insurance, denied meaningful Aboriginal self-governance and funding cuts for Native services and housing.

National President Dias brought the 600 delegates to their feet with loud cheers of approval when, as a part of his speech, he publicly told ultra-rightwing columnist and TV personality Michael Coren, to "kiss

my union ass."

The response came in response to Coren recently naming Dias "one of the five most dangerous people in the country" on his weekly TV show.

In Coren's worldview, unionism is a blight to the Canadian economy as he believes Unifor to be the worst of the worst, being the largest national union representing more than 300,000 members Canada-wide.

On Saturday, the gathering left the Sheraton Centre Hotel in Toronto for a march on Queens Park against Premier Kathleen Wynne's announced healthcare cutbacks and a plan to privatize Ontario's health care services.

The union flexed its muscle, calling for Unifor activists to work with other allied unions across Canada and around the world to advocate and campaign for a just and balanced world trade system that would seek to reverse the trend of corporate-rights agree-

ments at the cost of human rights and workers rights, based on principles of democracy, justice and sustainability.

The union also doubled its efforts in opposing the Harper Conservatives' proposed free trade agreements with Europe, Korea, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Foreign Investment Protection Agreement with China.

Looking forward to the upcoming 2015 federal election, there was much discussion towards how to stop Harper at the polls by organizing a new Ontario Political Action standing committee.

Also on the table was a strategy to fight against the Harper government's union-busting legislations through lobbying for labour reform. This would include a plan to address employment standards for all Ontario workers, including temporary and part-time workers.