

COCAL (Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor)

University of Alberta

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Report Submitted by Dorothy M. Reina

This is the third COCAL I've attended and, for the most part, I hear part-time faculty singing the same song, "Poor me, pity me." Instead of thinking of new and innovative ways to work with, not against, other labor groups, the part-time faculty spoke on such issues as: "Living Well in a Precarious World" which focused on Mental Health, Physical Ailments, and the toll the insecurities of part-time employment plays on temporary employees. Needless to say, this was a depressing session that offered NO constructive advice. Statistical data illustrating that part-timers suffered more migraines, heart problems, etc., was presented and one presenter began telling her life story and all the ailments, family rejection, divorce, etc., she suffered. She made it up to 2009 before the moderator finally cut her off as she had already gone WELL beyond her 12 minute allocation!

There were some sessions that addressed Job Security (or lack thereof), whether a wall-to-wall unit was better than a separate unit for part-timers or not (this was all over the map in terms of what was stated), corporatization of higher education, strategies for part-time to full-time, and the fight for Job Insecure Faculty.

To be quite honest, I benefited the most from the following:

1) General Session #1: Organizing and Reorganizing

This session was presented by faculty from Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. After hearing the plight of educators in Mexico, I wondered how anyone from Canada or the U.S. could continue to boo hoo about how bad they have it! In Mexico, one risks life and limb to teach! There are educators who are trying to organize and fight for the rights of maestros/as and they face instant firing, harassment, and, in some cases, death. Yes! The speaker told of some educators who have been forced off the road and suffered severe injuries and death!

80% of educators in Mexico are part-time. In order to teach, one must pass an exam. You have three attempts to pass the exam. If you do not pass, you can never teach. From what I gather, if you are not "desirable" (because of activism or simply because of the whims of the examiner/grader), you will NEVER pass the test! The exam is NOT a one-time thing: if asked to do so, you must take the exam again.

There has been an attempt by educators to form alliances with other labor unions. The problem is that the 20% full-time faculty are members of many of the other labor unions and they resist forming alliances.

2) Keynote Speaker – Dr. Pam Palmater, Mi'kmaw lawyer, author, social justice activist, and Chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University, Canada

Dr. Palmater spoke of the three types of genocide that have historically been perpetrated against First Nation/Indigenous people in Canada:

- a) Cultural – “schools” that attempted to rid Indigenous youth of their cultural ties
- b) Biological – forced sterilizations of Indigenous girls/women
- c) Physical – the introduction of small pox among Indigenous nations and the fact there was a period of time when the government paid for the scalp of Indigenous people.

The former prime minister, Stephen Harper, as late as two years ago stated: “Canada has no history of colonialism!”

The hostilities towards indigenous people continues today. Below are some facts and facets that contribute to the ongoing problems among Indigenous people:

- 1) Indigenous people are overrepresented in prisons
- 2) Indigenous people are overrepresented in foster care
 - a. 50% of indigenous children are in foster care throughout Canada
 - b. In Manitoba, there are 90% of indigenous children in foster care!
 - c. The reason children are in foster care is NOT because they are beaten or emotionally abused. Dr. Palmater stated they are in foster care because the parents are poor and cannot provide one bed per child or what the authorities determine to be “sufficient food in the cupboards.”
- 3) Over 120 First Nations (tribes) do not have running water
- 4) The Police continually harass Indigenous people. Sexism and racism are rampant among the police in Canada
 - a. At present, there are over 50 Ontario Provisional Police on PAID LEAVE for: possession of child pornography, physical and sexual abuse of Indigenous people.
- 5) Suicide is the biggest problem among Indigenous youth
- 6) Another ongoing problem that has been largely ignored is the number of missing and dead (killed) Indigenous women in Canada. The “official” number is approximately 1500; however, Dr. Palmater stated the more accurate number is over 4000! She also stated there is not a single Indigenous person in the Manitoba area who has NOT had a female member of their family go missing or be found dead!

There is so much more information I gained from listening to Dr. Palmater. However, I will stop here. She truly opened my eyes to the situation Indigenous/First Nation people face in Canada. I had erroneously believed the relationship between Indigenous/First Nation people and other Canadians had been far better than the situation between Indigenous/Native Americans and the U.S. population. I was very wrong.

Respectfully submitted,

Dorothy M. Reina