

April 23, 2014

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

"No Person is your friend who demands your silence or denies your right to grow." –Alice Walker

I announced on April 9th, that I was re-offering for the position of Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress. Since that announcement, there have been a number of things that have been posted, sent to others and said that have not been respectful or truthful.

First of all, I believe in the labour movement. It is important for me to say that because some of the things that are being said would have people believe otherwise.

I also have great love and respect for most of the staff, officers and rank and file members of my home union the Canadian Union of Public Employees. The members of CUPE and some of the leaders have been incredibly supportive and encouraging at the risk of facing backlash internally for doing so.

I have decided an open letter is necessary, given the powerful political forces that I am currently up against. I find myself in the untenable position of not only having to defend my decision not to support Ken Georgetti, who has been my abuser for the last 12 years at the Congress, but I am now also faced with clearing my name from the torrent of misinformation now being circulated against me within my own union.

Sisters and Brothers, during the first few years at the Congress when I was still trying to find my way for whatever reason I became the target of Ken Georgetti for differential treatment from the other two officers. I have known adversity therefore I thought I could handle this quietly and matters could be resolved. When my work environment was worsening I looked to my National Union Leadership for support and sadly it has not been there. Despite the lack of support I have continued to be supportive of the campaigns, members and leadership. In writing this I realize that I was in denial about what was happening to me and all the classic signs of abuse that I knew so well from human rights workshops, were at play and I found myself immobilized.

While this letter is difficult as I re-live some of what I have been through it is also very freeing at the same time to finally, publicly break my silence. If good

people who believe in a movement that should be a voice for everyone, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged are being threatened, silenced and bullied, how can we help strengthen and build a movement? How can we successfully fight back against neo-liberal, global forces and a hostile federal government?

So how did the abuse manifest itself? I was minimized, intimidated, marginalized and invalidated which was meant to make me invisible and ultimately destroy me.

As the CEO of the CLC, which Ken Georgetti regularly reminded me of that fact and with the approval of the CUPE National President the following is a brief snapshot of what I have endured:

- Almost immediately, everything that I did was questioned, he questioned my ability, my knowledge, my honesty and my integrity
- Took away my files of responsibility to ensure that my profile at the Congress would be diminished and he could say I wasn't doing my job as an officer.
- I was sent to work out of the Toronto office to exclude me from everything that was happening at the CLC headquarters including meetings with the other Officers and Executive Committee Meetings which were held as "Heads of Union" meetings
- CLC Staff at Headquarters were told to not include me in much of the work of the Officers at the Congress
- Any requests for me to speak or attend events, had to be sent to the President and most requests were denied. My strategy to offset this was to attend many events at my own expense and suffer any backlash for attending events unauthorized and, in doing what work I could was how I coped.

Sisters and brothers, I have not been the perfect Executive Vice President. I have made some mistakes along the way but none of those would I consider malicious, underhanded or not in the best interest of workers. It is almost impossible to flourish in a toxic, hostile work environment, however, for 12 years, in order to remain in a position that allowed me in some way to make lives better, I stayed quiet about the level of bullying and abuse within the CLC and my own union CUPE.

Most recently this abuse has resulted in the bullying of another sister to not run in the upcoming CLC elections. We have both been told that if we didn't support

an individual with a history of abuse and differential treatment, and since I am a racialized woman, I would add a history of sexism and racism, then we would not get the support of our Union. A Union that we both love and respect.

I am sure you are thinking why would I want to continue? The answer is simple, I haven't endured this to allow another racialized person who loves and believes in the movement to be pushed out. I still believe as I did in 2002 that by working together with community and labour we can make incredible gains and change the world for the better.

Now you tell me, based on this small sampling that I have shared, would you support the current President or want anyone like him to lead the largest labour body in this country. I can't call myself a feminist and look at myself in the mirror as a strong racialized feminist and allow this to continue.

In Peace & Solidarity,

Marie Clarke Walker

"It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite."- Paulo Freire