

Constitutional Changes Improving Equity

by Janice Hagan, Region 5 Constitution Committee

Two new Equity Committees, the [Rainbow Alliance](#) and [Coalition of Racialized Workers](#), were enshrined in the OPSEU/SEFPO Constitution at this year's Convention on their own terms, which means allowing the groups to select their own Regional Representations instead of having them elected by all delegates at a full Regional Meeting. This will allow the committees to do broader outreach and ensure diversity within their representation, and in the case of the Rainbow Alliance, create a safer environment for participants to come forward to serve. The constitutional status not only guarantees funded meetings across Ontario, but also allows these new Equity Committee reps to attend and submit Resolutions to Convention. The Union now has seven Constitutional Committees, also including the [Women's Committee](#), [Human Rights Committee](#), [Francophone Committee](#), [Indigenous Circle](#), and [Young Workers' Committee](#).

Changes to the constitution require approval of 2/3rds of delegates at Convention. 2022 delegates changed our Union's name, now officially OPSEU/SEFPO, to recognize our bilingual intent. We added an Indigenous Territorial or Land Acknowledgement to the agenda of every OPSEU/SEFPO meeting, something most Locals have been doing in response to the Truth and Reconciliation process. We also voted to make the language of our Constitution gender-neutral, recognizing that gender is not binary. Finally, the delegates voted to make "dismantling Indigenous and Anti-Black racism" one of the official Aims and Purposes of OPSEU/SEFPO, and to require elected leaders from stewards to the Union Executive to undergo approved, anti-racism training within 60 days of taking office. A resolution was also passed to create a committee to find solutions where the lack of child care is preventing participation in union activities. Last, but certainly not least, a Resolution was passed to establish a committee of Executive Board, Constitution and Equity Committee representatives to develop a proposal for next year's Constitution, to allow for the election of Equity Seats on OPSEU/SEFPO's Executive Board.

The delegates also passed an amendment that requires the agenda of Convention to include more debate and decision making, rather than leaving critical choices to the Executive Board alone. And a few motions were passed to make OPSEU/SEFPO work better for precarious units like our Part-Time Support Staff. We got rid of the restrictive structures for Locals like our's with more than one Collective Agreement. Locals can now develop a structure that works best for them. This means we can have our Chief Steward positions back, allow ALL stewards the right to run for officer positions, and allow stewards who move from part-time to full-time to maintain their steward or officer positions. In addition, Locals and Committees of the Union can elect as many alternates as they want, which will help precarious units and sectors maintain healthy representation at all times. We also passed a policy which will allow part-time, casual and seasonal workers elected to bargaining teams to be paid a regular day's wages when they are caucusing or meeting with the employer, even if they are not scheduled to work that day.

On a personal note, this was my last year as the representative for Toronto Locals on OPSEU/SEFPO's Constitution Committee, having served for over fifteen years, most of that time as Vice-Chair. We have come a long way as a Union from the days when power and politics won over equity and fairness at every step of the process. I leave knowing this important work is in good hands.