

FACT SHEET

George Brown College's 28th Annual LABOUR FAIR

Organizing in the Burning World: Unions, Workers, and Climate Justice

Monday, March 23 – Friday, March 27, 2020

What is the Labour Fair?

It is safe to say that George Brown College's Labour Fair is the biggest – in terms of scope, size and breadth – event to profile the labour movement to post-secondary students at **any college or university in Canada!**

The Labour Fair emphasizes the added rights and benefits that a union brings into the workplace, the ways that unions help to narrow the gap between rich and poor in our society and the importance of unions' work defending our social safety net, equity and democracy. We also highlight struggles against classism, racism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, heterosexism, discrimination against people with disabilities and other forms of economic and social injustice.

Furthermore, the Labour Fair has grown into one of the largest events at George Brown organized specifically for students. It is:

- An annual, week-long event that brings trade union speakers into about 80 college classrooms across 3 campuses
- An opportunity for **over 3000 students** to hear the *union* perspective on the issues that they face when they get jobs in the sectors they are training for – the challenges the sector is facing, strategies to overcome occupational problems.
- Not just talks, but also cultural events! Music, films, information tables, virtual reality experiences, theatre and performance art – to highlight workers' issues and issues of social justice in a creative and imaginative way, as well as the labour movement's artistic contributions.

What's the Labour Fair's theme this year?

Organizing in a Burning World: Unions, Workers, and Climate Justice

Canada is heating at twice the global rate. Scientists have given us until 2030 to cut fossil fuel emission by half in order to avoid the worst of the climate catastrophe. Meanwhile social inequality grows both globally and locally as Indigenous and racialized people, workers, migrants, and poor communities face the brunt of the crisis.

Global capitalism and industrialization are massively socially and environmentally destructive. Individual solutions don't work. We need bold new policies and a sustainable economy. Students and workers need a Green New Deal that is science-based, Indigenous-centred, worker-focused, and socially just.

That is why the Canadian labour movement is working to win a just transition away from fossil fuels to a sustainable green economy. This calls for fresh ideas: such as re-envisioning industries, expanding collective bargaining to include demands for sustainability, retraining and income supports for affected workers, investing in strong public services to deal with extreme weather events and other effects of the climate crisis.

What does this mean to students and workers? From livable wages to livable futures – let's come together through this year's Labour Fair to heal a burning world!

What do students and teachers say about the Labour Fair?

- In our last survey of students and teachers, 100% said the relevance of the talk they heard was good or excellent
- 100% said the speaker's expertise was good or excellent
- 88% said the union rep's talk was well presented.
- A consistent theme in teachers' responses to their Labour Fair speakers is captured here: "Thank you for all the work you have done to arrange for the speakers who came to my three classes. They extended and enriched my students' learning experiences. They provided knowledge and experience that will continue to be significant to my students' personal and professional growth."

How is the Labour Fair organized?

- By a committee of 20-25 students and staff, from all campuses
- We always welcome new members (students or staff)
- We meet once a month from October-March
- The School of Labour at St. James campus has the coordinating responsibility
- The College's President contributes annually, as do the 2 OPSEU locals and other outside unions, The GBC Community Action Centre, the College's Diversity, Equity and Human Rights office, and the Toronto/York Region Labour Council, to pay for printing, musicians, the poster contest prize, etc.
- We circulate a **Call to Teachers** asking professors to request speakers (human rights, health & safety, unions in their sector, etc) of interest to their students and to return the *Call* to the School of Labour
- The School of Labour finds speakers and makes arrangements, and asks that the teacher and the speaker connect before the class

How do we publicize the Labour Fair?

- In late February, we print a poster and the full *Labour Fair Program* listing all the speakers in all the classes (and of course we use green union labour for our printing!)
- We rely on the committee and the participating teachers to distribute the program, promote the Labour Fair and make sure their colleagues and their students are aware of it

How long have we had a Labour Fair?

- Since 1992! Ryerson's Union Fair was our model, and it has grown from a one-day event to a week-long event.
 - Over the years, we've had lots of big name speakers – Olivia Chow, Kent Monkman, Sarah Polley, Naomi Klein, Buzz Hargrove, Bob White, Linda McQuaig, Jack Layton, Maude Barlow, Chief Serge Simon, Charlene Bearhead and others
 - We've also used the Labour Fair to host some very impressive displays, like the Ontario Workers' Arts and Heritage Centre's 2002 display on *All We Worked For: 100 Years of Canadian Workers' History*
 - We are committed to hosting annual performances, comedians and musical artists like d'by young anitafrika, The Delightful Divas, Evalyn Parry, Arlene Mantle, and Sistah Lois to recognize the importance of the arts in labour and social justice issues.
 - Theatre performances have included The Turtle Gals' "The Triple Truth," Sulong's "Future Folk", Native Earth Performing Arts plays, and a production of "Stitch" for Fashion students
 - We've also worked with Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts to host performance artists like *Pretty, Porky and Pissed Off*
 - And we have partnered with the Canadian Labour International Film Festival to bring even more film offerings to our students!
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