

BUILDING EQUITY, BUILDING POWER

Labour Council's annual Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers Conference is an event unlike any other in the labour movement. Each year, over two hundred sisters and brothers from a wide variety of union affiliates get together to share their experiences and ideas, and to map out strategies for future action.

The 2008 Conference theme was “**Winning and Building Power: Towards a Broad Based Movement for Social and Racial Justice**”. It began with a powerful presentation by Chris Reid, lawyer for the Ardock Algonquin First Nation and the KI- 6, native leaders who have been jailed for opposing uranium exploration on their traditional lands.

Keynote speaker Katie Quan recounted her journey from a garment worker who led mass organizing of Chinese-American women garment workers in New York City in the 1980's to leadership of her union (UNITE) to founding of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance. She told of visiting garment factories in Asia where the owners were complaining of even cheaper wages in other Asian countries. The drive by global clothing labels like GAP and NIKE to source from places where working conditions are barely better than slavery, means that labour must build a new kind of global solidarity. Now the Associate Director of Labor Studies at UC Berkeley, Quan challenged the participants to think about our relations with China, and Chinese workers who now make up over half the union members in the world.

In the workshops, people focused on three key elements of building power:

- **Shared analysis** about the global economy and changing demographics – how they impact our jobs, communities and social movement
- **Common vision** – different issues, one movement; many campaigns, one vision; solidarity across borders and communities; labour and popular movements
- **Collective action** – linking the goals to “win” with the goals to “build”; strategies to transform tensions within our movement

After four hours of intense discussion, the groups came back to find themselves in a “General Assembly of Popular Movements” – a lively popular education format that brought home the lessons of how to win campaigns and build a strong, united movement to challenge corporate globalization. The energy in the room was matched by the determination of every sister and brother to go back to their own unions and build new labour power for the 21st century.