44th Annual PNLHA Conference, “Mining Our Past”

Posted on October 16, 2013 by Rosemary Feurer

The 44th Annual Conference of the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association (PNLHA) takes place in the historic village of Cumberland, B.C., **June 13-15, 2014**. Proposal deadline is **December 13, 2013**. The conference is held in conjunction with Cumberland’s own Miners Memorial Weekend, which commemorates the thousands of miners who were killed and injured in the coal fields of Vancouver Island, while celebrating the spirit of resistance of labour leaders like Ginger Goodwin and Joe Naylor. For more information, see the official flier for the 2013-14 PNLHA Conference, or see below.

The PNLHA Conference is hosted by the Cumberland Historical Society (Cumberland Museum) and sponsored by the Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council, and of course the PNLHA.

Cumberland’s colorful and rich history dovetails nicely with the theme of the conference – “Mining Our Past: Conflict and Solidarity in a Resource Economy.” As an old coal-mining town where immigrants from across Europe, Japan, China, and the USA came to make a life, Cumberland is typical of the hundreds of small towns and villages that sprang up in the Canadian and American West in the exploitive rush for minerals, fish and timber. That rush led to many conflicts along with many great acts of solidarity. The local PNLHA committee is seeking proposals for workshops and presentations that both illuminate the past and help us learn how to organize and mobilize for the future.

Coal mining in Cumberland began in the 1880’s with the Union Colliery Company, owned by the Dunsmuir family who were rabidly anti-union. Cumberland’s diverse workers found themselves in a very exploitive and dangerous workplace. This led to a struggle for a union; a goal that was not achieved until the 1930’s. The miners of Cumberland were part of the Big Strike of 1912-14. Cumberland was also the home of Ginger Goodwin, a labour organizer who was shot in 1918 by special police, and

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home also to Joe Naylor – a major mover for the One Big Union. The last mine closed in the 1960's with many workers shifing to jobs in the timber industry.

An important thematic thread within the conference is "Indigenous Workers, a Hidden History". It is our goal to feature presentations around the role of Indigenous workers in the resource economy over the past 200 years, and the past and present relationship between Indigenous workers and labour unions. Given the increased awareness of the historical and systematic racism Indigenous people faced, and still face, many people are unaware of the important work First Nations did in the economic growth of the USA and in Canada. Papers and presentations illuminating this area would be most welcome.

Another inportant thematic thread we wish to feature is the evolving role of women over time in boom-and-bust towns. From the frontier towns of the 1880's, to the industrial cities of the 20's, to the company towns of the 50's, how did unions react to the growing 'feminization of the workforce'?

Submissions

Proposals for workshops and presentations should include:

- A 1 to 2 page summary of your workshop or presentation
- Presenter(s) name(s) and contact information
- A short bio and vitae of presenter(s)
- Audio / Visual requirements

Although there is no guarantee, we will attempt to fit your presentation in. Acceptance is based on relevance to the theme and topics outlined above, and scheduling considerations.

The deadline for proposals is **December 13, 2013**. We will notify you as to the status of your proposal by Jan. 13, 2014

Submit your proposals via e-mail to Brian Charlton, for the Local Organizing Committee at: bcharlton@shaw.ca

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Author

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