

negative example. Juxtaposing our own political climate in BC against others elsewhere helps us firmly contextualize and identify strategies and techniques society and our union can use to overcome the pressures on our current education system. Seeing the struggles that Chicago's and Mexico's teachers face really pares it down to simple terms. We are the people. We are the ones who know that government should be responsible, ethical, accessible, and we have a right to feel angry when government doesn't follow through with what's necessary to have a healthy, peaceful, educated, thriving, equitable society. The more people who understand the value system behind neo-liberalism, the better.

The Tri-national Conference deepened my resolve to help BC's teachers. Seeing work-life



balance at the root of the Quebec teachers' campaign and the deterioration of recruitment in Mexico from decreasing salaries was eye-opening. I'm more determined than ever to dig in

deep and say no to austerity cuts; that when it comes to bargaining for preparation time, for composition language, for workload issues, there is no compromising. There are concise, articulate arguments out there that help people come to a new understanding, and as a teacher I seek that language in order to best engage with my colleagues and with the public. Thriving teachers sustain thriving schools, and that is an international truth nobody can deny.

Recommended reading

From the *Chicago Union Teacher* April 2016 edition, Jackson Potter's "The Long Struggle for Sustainable Community Schools," p. 51: bit.ly/28VYxr5

Non-sexist and inclusive pedagogy: A weekend of solidarity

by Steven Lloyd, President, Sea to Sky Teachers' Association. Originally printed in Howe It Sounds: bit.ly/1XXcab8

If you take something from me, that's not right. Even if it doesn't matter much. Nobody just takes stuff. It's worse if you take something important. I'll want it back. Even if getting it back is impossible, I won't let you take more. I'll try hard to make you stop. That's what I should do—isn't it? If you take from my whole community, we all might try to stop it. Really try. Still, you might keep taking. If you do, we'll have problems...

Daysi Marquez was in BC with her friend and colleague Esperanza Tases to teach BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) members and others how to deconstruct sexism in its various forms, using methods they developed in Honduras and Costa Rica, respectively, for classroom teachers. Both Daysi and Esperanza are classroom teachers, though Esperanza has gone on to a doctorate and other teaching challenges. They taught the May 6–7, 2016, workshop in Surrey with the support of the BCTF and our partner CoDev Canada.

Daysi and Esperanza teach about changing reality. Since reality—what we understand to be true—is socially constructed (i.e., what we all decide it is), we can decide to change what reality is in our lives and culture. (Think of *Mad Men* and smoking over breakfast and the deeply imbued sexism, racism, etc., of the 1950s and 1960s, for example.) The workshop infused 30 participants with deeper understanding and provided highly useful tools—cognitive tools—to effect social change, a mind at a time.

Of course, sexism isn't just wrong. It's illegal. It contravenes the BC *Human Rights Code*, the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the UN *Declaration of Human Rights*, and on the list goes. But it's also just wrong. So are many other kinds, tools, and "realities" of oppression. Most are illegal too; but most importantly, none are immutable. None are "just how it is"—at least, not unless we add, "right now." ➡



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Oppression is theft in a real way—of dignity, of freedom, of respect, of rights—and far too often, of life. Oppression takes something, or often many things at once, that is important.

Daysi's close friend and colleague, Berta Caceres, was assassinated in March. Berta co-founded Daysi's organization Council of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (COPINH) and was awarded "the Nobel Prize of ecological defenders," the Goldman Environmental Prize, just over a year ago. Berta was murdered by several gunmen around 4:30 a.m. on March 3, 2016, as she slept. It was reported by CNN and other media on May 8 that, after an international outcry, five men have been charged with her killing.

One of the five men is reported to be "the manager for social and environmental matters" for DESA, the company seeking to transform Honduras's largest river into a series of dams and flooded valleys with international financing and support. Berta's Aboriginal people are the Lenca, who, as she eloquently described in accepting the Goldman Prize, are "the people of the river." The river and they exist as one. The dams would eliminate most of their sources and practices of sustenance, devastating the very existence of the Lenca culture—the largest Indigenous culture in Honduras. The project would erase the Lenca as a people.

It's "progress." Or is it? Who benefits? Who, and what, does not? To the Lenca it is theft at gunpoint. The dams would take from them something important. The Lenca have been adamant that they want the taking to stop—and they are devoted to stopping it.

In Canada, we're familiar with efforts to make peoples "disappear." Today we're all attempting to fully comprehend the truth of what was done to Aboriginal peoples here. We're beginning to get it, trying to make

amends as we go, and seeking reconciliation. Yet the old, old story of taking—of lands, and culture, and dignity—in Honduras and in so many other places (even here it seems, in the Peace, the Skeena, the Athabaska, etc.) continues on. It's "progress."

One wonders if there might not be a very different kind of "progress" out there somewhere.

DESA's "social and environmental matters" weren't "managed" well. In the two months following Berta's assassination, funding for the dams has dried up and left the country. Berta Caceres will never again leave it; nor will over 100 other environmental and social activists assassinated in Honduras since 2010. Many were teachers like Daysi, like you and me. There are suspects in less than 5% of those targeted killings.

The town Berta was murdered in can be reached in a day or so, or in a few days by car. It's just down the road: Hwy 99, to the I-10, to Mex 200, and you're pretty much there. Daysi thanked the group of BCTF members for engaging in the workshops, co-developed by COPINH, which had profoundly affected everyone present, and invited us all to visit her country. Daysi says it has the best beaches, people, and food in Central America (with deep disagreement from Esperanza). Several are likely to take Daysi up on it. We all pray she'll be alive and well to greet them.

I'd asked Daysi days before if it helps to have international observers on the ground with COPINH, if that makes life there any safer. She looked at me, allowed a brief moment to witness the indescribable pain behind the words to come, and said very quietly, "A little. But it doesn't stop."

Then she smiled a bit, and stood up to teach some more people about how to stop it.