

A Worker Co-op Member's Perspective

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Sharing the 25th CWCF Timeline

I had the privilege of attending this year's CWCF conference/AGM. What I witnessed during the conference was a sense of history, of energy, of challenges, and an atmosphere of solidarity which rendered any challenge to feel like it could be overcome. It was a celebration of 25 years as a federation, and a visioning for the coming 25.

There was something particularly beautiful about this conference. The tagline for the gathering was "Solidarity Works", and that does in part sum it up for me; the other part being pride.

As a founding-member of a worker co-op start-up, and starting to understand intimately all the challenges that go into simply existing as a worker co-op, I found the conference to offer a wealth of learning for me to take back to my fellow co-op members. And I gained lessons from co-op members sharing many of their challenges, earnestly listening to advice, and sharing to support other members share their challenges. Sometimes ugly challenges that we don't often want to admit. Unlike many Left movement spaces I have encountered where an air of ego and posturing can bring about defensiveness and divisiveness, the conference had an air of solidarity. The atmosphere of support and genuine desire to see every co-op and individual succeed truly was beautiful, and it is why so many of us choose the co-op model.

The energy of the US movement was palpable from our guests Rebecca Kemble (formerly of the US Federation of Worker Co-ops) and professor Jessica Gordon-Nembhard (CUNY), sharing the histories and present day roles that worker co-ops are playing in transforming American society- from co-operatives' involvement in Black Liberation and survival to co-operators getting involved in electoral politics (in an impressively radical way).

This helped put much into perspective when participants did visioning exercises on the role of our federation and our sector in countering the biggest challenges facing our communities now and into the future (racism, climate change, social isolation). The conference had several sober moments of reflection on the gravity with which we as a sector need to take these challenges on. None so well put (in my view) as when 'conference listener' Greg Demmons called on us to turn our talk of diversity

into action, standing in front of a room of largely white co-operators, and as Jessica Gordon-Nembhard spoke on the need to organize as worker co-operators of colour to build a membership and leadership base, and come to the broader movement with power instead of tokenism.

Two outgoing directors shared with me their confidence with where the organization had come during their service. Outgoing director Jamie Campbell remarked at how much the CWCF has contributed to the national co-op movement and international worker co-op movement: helping build the international and US federations, and now having the US attendees at our conferences injects here the energy and vision very present in the US.

Alain Bridault is leaving the role of president after 8 years, to be replaced by Reba Plummer of Urbane Cyclist (go Reba!), and also leaving the Board. He told me he only commits to 9 years of service to any board, but that his own goal of uniting the francophone and anglophone worker co-op movement has been successful, so he can leave a year early and make room for new energy coming into the organization.

These departing remarks sum up the pride that I believe all who have played small and big parts in building and sustaining their co-ops, as well as those who have built this federation over 25 years should feel.

Big pat on the back everyone. You know who you are!