Breast cancer is a disease – not a market opportunity

By Elsie Hambrook

The breast, in this society, is not just another part of the body. So we should have expected that a breast disease such as cancer would be subject to different treatment than other diseases.

Still, some of the breast cancer related campaigns are surprising. Most are inspiring and rallying—but some are exploitative. A few weeks ago, messages were flying around Facebook inboxes, chain-mail style, urging women to paint the color of your community for the Breast Cancer Awareness Month and to confine men who would get updates with just a name of a colour. No information, no explanation—just the bra color.

Many immediately criticized this “breast-rising” technique. Newsweek blogger Mary Carmichael pointed out that “at this point, there can’t be anyone in the world who doesn’t know about breast cancer…” And awareness or education, it’s fashioned, it’s harmless, but also pointless.

A few days later, a report on CBC about breast cancer saw more images: “This bra color movement seems a desperate attempt to get you to give a damn about breast cancer by making it a sexy and fashionable, which I find not only embarrassing to women speaking out against it.”

Last September, Canadian charity Brect Cancer released an ad to promote a “Boobycall” fundraiser featuring a beautiful woman wearing a pink bra while being hugged by attendees. The camera cuts between close-ups of her 3 bras, each one more revealing than the last. But the woman’s looks and inner beauty are not important.

“Do you know you like them. Now it’s time to save the breast bra.”

Sexualized breast cancer awareness campaigns are new. We’re older, and more commonly used tactic is cause-related marketing, such as placing a pink ribbon on products and promising a portion of proceeds will go to research or awareness. This practice has been criticized because of the charitable nature, but only pass on their customers’ money while they enjoy greater profits. Some have pointed out that the main thrust of these campaigns is not to help those with breast cancer, but to make the profit that their corporate sponsor produces.

“Bra and cancer are a disease. Not a marketing opportunity.” This is an example of “pink washing,” American cancer expert Eileen voice, author of the book, The Pink/Purple Cancer.

Companies may also be guilty of “pink washing” American cancer expert Eileen voice, author of the book, The Pink/Purple Cancer.

ELISE HAMBRIOK

Canadian trade unionists stand with Filipino workers

By Julie McHaid

Earlier this year, a delegation of trade unionists from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) participated in a two-week solidarity exchange in the Philippines. In a recent CUPE convention in Fredericton, Serge Landry, President of local 2019, shared some of his experiences of this trip and the trade unionists.

Landry explained how some of the problems faced by Filipino workers are similar to those faced by Canadian workers (such as underfunding of public institutions and a constant push to privatize public services). Filipino trade unionists are also frequent targets of military harassment.

The delegation visited export processing zones, where workers’ protests are often violently dispersed and individuals are kidnapped. They also met with 3 peasant organizations who are currently being held in detention by the Philippine government.

Landry said that he was also very moved by the delegation’s visit to the largest landfill near Manila where 20,000 workers live in the landfills. “They have little food, little shelter,” said Landry.

Children are running and playing on the garbage and the mothers would go to pick through that garbage in the morning, while the fathers were up to their necks in water washing the plastic. About a kilogram of plastic fetches $1 US. It was amazing to see what they were going through. Landry said that the workers are often paid less than they should be. 

Throughout the trip, CUPE members were hosted by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) and the Confederation of Unionized Public Employees (CUPE). As part of the campaign, CUPE members are able to go on solidarity exchanges in other countries to learn more about workers’ struggles around the world and to build solidarity with workers who are involved in similar issues.

This month, the Philippines will hold its presidential elections. The Philippines is the primary source country for temporary foreign workers to Canada. It’s just one of the many reasons why we need to stand in solidarity with the workers who are fighting for their rights.

CUPE members are able to go on solidarity exchanges in other countries to learn more about workers’ struggles around the world and to build solidarity with workers who are involved in similar issues. This is an opportunity for CUPE members to learn more about the struggles of workers in the Philippines and to build a stronger connection with them.

Landry pointed out that the women who had lost family members as a result of their union activism, including the family of one of the young workers who had been killed in a recent massacre of striking sugar cane workers. “The government had ordered the shooting down of the picket line. After two unsuccessful attempts by the police to disperse the picket line, they opened fire on the workers, killing seven,” Landry explained.

Landry added that he was also very moved by the delegation’s visit to the largest landfill near Manila where 20,000 workers live in the landfills. “They have little food, little shelter,” said Landry.

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