

Charter protection extends to unions: Labour Lawyers conference told

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Once a year, the Canadian Association of Labour Lawyers holds a conference for its members to meet and share information about recent developments in labour law, changes in legislation and strategies for the development of unionization in North America.

The Canadian Association of Labour Lawyers (CALL) conference was held this year on June 2-5 at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown St. John's, Nfld.

As always, the agenda was packed with informative and compelling presentations geared towards a practicing union side labour lawyer.

There were approximately 240 lawyers in attendance at the conference. I was fortunate enough to be one of them. One of the unique features of CALL is that it is only open to membership for those lawyers who exclusively represent the union side in labour issues. Employer side lawyers can't join the association nor can they attend the annual conference.

For each conference, CALL invites arbitrators, adjudicators, law professors,

authors, union representatives as well as members of the Association to participate in a plenary session on a general subject or provide an in-depth analysis of a specific issue. All of the presentations may be

conducted in either of Canada's two official languages (which gave me some much needed exercise of my French language skills).

The presentations this year included an in-depth panel discussion on the Supreme Court of

Canada's recent cases finding that the Charter of Rights, Freedom of Association protection extended to unions and its right to take meaningful strike action. The Supreme Court made the ruling in response to Saskatchewan Essential Services legislation that removed the ability of unions subject to this legislation to effectively take strike action.

The conference was a good reminder that although the political climate in Canada and the United States is more and more unfriendly to unions and union supporters, there is a strong group of committed professionals who continue to work hard on the side of labour, both represented and unrepresented.

