

Conference Report – Lynda French

Toronto 2017 National Convention

Be Bold, Be Brave, Demand Better

October 1 to 6, 2017

First of all, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my Local 1334 Executive Board for giving me the opportunity of attending my very first National Convention! Especially after attending the CUPE Ontario Conference in June 2017. I was able to connect with most of the resolutions that CUPE Ontario put forward.

Sunday Oct 1, 17

We arrived in Toronto at the Fairmont Royal York hotel in time to drop off our suit cases and head over to the Toronto Convention Centre, South Buildings. We registered, received our bag full of delegate documents and Translator and off to our Sectorial Meeting.

- 1:30pm Post Secondary Education Panel: Strength in Solidarity

Speeches from the panel talked about precarious employment, privatization, contracting out, PSE (Post Secondary Education) funding and the impact on staff and students.

1. Tracy Carmichael, Local 1870, University of Prince Edward Island
2. Luc Brouillette, Local 2500, Universite Laval
3. Janice Folk-Dawson, Local 1334, University of Guelph
4. Craig Hannah, Local 1975, University of Saskatchewan

The next speaker was Abigail Perez Llanes, Secretary General SNTAP, Cuba. He spoke about raising the educational bar, so that all Cubans can receive a Grade 12 replacing the now acceptable Grade 9.

- 4:00pm Pension Forum

Kevin Skerritt had an excellent speech and power point discussing the how and then, why and now of the C.P.P. He also showed that the Public Pensions are growing, workplace plans remain under attack. There are a few financial companies who get involved in the operations of pensions and sometimes their involvement has not been to the workers favor.

- 6:00pm CUPE Ontario Caucus

After the Equality Statement was read, introductions of the Executive Board, Ontario Convention Committee Members were made. Discussion on Ontario Delegation floor seating, Diversity Vice President Caucus election, review of Convention agenda/events.

- 8:00pm

We headed back to the Fairmont Royal York. We collected our room keys, dropped off of our suit cases and headed down to the DELEGATES RECEPTION. The band they hired was a very entertaining band! They displayed a very high energy level and were very entertaining! Lemon Bucket Orchestra, a Toronto based group described as: Balkan-Klezmen-Gypsy-Party-Punk-Super-Band.

Monday Oct 2, 2017

- 9:30am Convention Opens

The morning started off with a wonderful greeting from Fred Hahn, President CUPE Ontario. Order of business was set into motion with financial reports, National Presidents report, then off to debate presentations

- 12:00pm CUPE Ontario Caucus

Lunch was provided. Discussion on the proposed Diversity seats on the National level. Review of Resolutions 24 and 318 campaigns.

- 2:00pm Convention Business Resumes

Presentation of the Health and Safety Award, National Secretary-Treasurer and National Trustees Reports. Election Forum – National Officers.

- 6:30pm Equality Forum

I really enjoyed this forum. There was so much to learn, to see and to hear. The theme of this forum was focused on the Resistance Against Precarity. All speakers are committed to the struggle of decent wages, job security, safe and healthy working conditions. The Panelists were: Syrus Marcus Ware, Black Live Matter, Toronto, Tzazna Miranda Leal, Justice for Immigrant Workers, Florence Berinstein, Labour Arts Activist. The forum then moved into audience participation leading with the most impressive group activity I have ever seen. Each person was paired up with someone they did not know. The one person asked the same question ten times “Who are you?” Each time the person gave a little more information about who they were. Then they asked “Why are you here?”, again ten times. Then the roles reversed. I was very impressed with this activity as you get to really understand: Who. You. Are!

Next we divided into two groups. The one group did an improve using a game style, then showed how certain things in life can hamper a person leading to a precarious work set. The other group made posters using the supplies on the table. It was very impressive to see the creativity behind so many people.

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Tuesday Oct 3, 2017

- 8:00am Women's Caucus

A lot of discussion was around the C8 to increase the number of Diversity seats at the National Level

- 9:00am to 6pm Convention Business Resumes

There were 2168 delegates at this day. Awards were presented to:

1. Sister Janice Foote (HEU) Hospital Employees Union received the Grace Harman Award
2. Sister Yolanda McLean of Local 4400 received the Ed Blackman Award

The keynote speaker for today was Nesrine Malik, columnist, The Guardian. She spoke about her personal feelings about how life was grand, then to wake up to the bombing in Britain. She spoke about the night before the American Election, thinking Hilary would win. Through her speech of world events and tragedies, she had a clear message – DON'T GIVE UP HOPE!

Constitutional Amendments and resolutions were debated, only one was referred back to the committee.

Videos and reports were received and carried. National Health Care Issues, National Women's, National Contracting Out and Privatization, National Literacy, National Global Justice, National Post-Secondary, and National Pink Triangle.

- 12:00pm CUPE Ontario Elections

Fred Hahn, Candice Rennick and Michael Hurley all re-elected into their positions.

- 6:00pm Persons With Disabilities Caucus

Discussed the Diversity seats, talked about Accessible Issues at convention and solutions that have been made.

- 7:00pm Health and Safety Forum

Unfortunately there was no agenda for this forum so I do not know the names of the speakers. I can say that they were all very powerful speakers expressing true life accidents and how management places blame on the worker. We all received Health and Safety Tool Kits that had info. from bargaining language to investigating incidents.

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Wednesday Oct 4, 2017

- Over 2000 delegates at Convention
- 9:00am to 6:00pm Convention Business Resumes

The Convention opened with a powerful Performance: Have You Seen Our Sisters? Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. A Rally was done and a lunch break with Red Dresses.

The Re-election of President Mark Hancock and Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury and election of General Vice Presidents. Disability Rights Activism Award. Key note speaker today was: Armine Yalnizyan, former senior economist and media commentator for Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives.

- 8:00pm Global Justice Forum

This forum featured emcee, poet, author and activist Mohammad Ali, who ups the bar in protest music. Unfortunately I did not get the names of the three ladies who spoke as well at this forum. All three spoke about precarious work and migrant workers in their respective countries: Indonesia, Britain and Korea. The pictures they shared were very powerful, especially the one showing the one million people taking their rally to the streets in Korea.

Thursday Oct 5, 2017

- 9:00am to 6:00pm Convention Business Resumes

Early morning entertainment by The Raging Asian Women.

It was a sad morning as C8, the extra diversity seats was defeated.

Videos and reports were received and carried. The results of the General Vice President elections were in: Judy Henly, Marle Roberts, Daniel Legeres, Denis Bolduc, Fred Hahn. Regional Vice Presidents Candice Rennick and Michael Hurley.

Yolanda McLean and Gloria Lepine two Diversity Vice Presidents.

Luc Cyr National Trustee.

Sister Maria Moriarty of Local 1582 received National Literacy Award.

Key Note Speaker was Dalia Awada anti-racism activist, co-founder of Parates de Femmes.

Many were sad from the morning's debacle around the C8 vote. We noticed resolution 318 was at the bottom. No way would that reach the floor. Somebody called a recess from the one resolution to the one just before 318. In hindsight I wish I would have recorded Janice Folk-Dawson's speech. Brilliant is all I can say. After a standing vote – We Won! First day Strike Pay from National. We were ready to Celebrate!

- 8:00pm to 10:00pm – Fairmont Hotel – Ontario Social

Live Band, food and free pop! We were all very, very happy.

Friday Oct 6, 2017

- 9:00am Convention Business Resumes

The main event was the Keynote Speaker, newly elected NDP Federal candidate Jagmeet Singh.

It was obvious by 12:00 noon, there was not enough for quorum, so finally the convention came to an end.

We had very mixed emotions. We were so happy to get First Day Strike Pay but sad on the loss of the Diversity Seats. But not all is lost, it just means folks have two years to plan a new strategy.

Aug 30, 2017

CUPE Ontario Conference 2017

Conference Report – Lynda French- July 18, 2017

It has been 10 years since I had the honour of attending a CUPE Ontario Convention

“Be Bold Be Brave” truly are the best words to describe the CUPE Ontario members who were honored at this convention.

The most noticeable change in CUPE was the amount of strikes CUPE members faced this past year. These brave folks stood their ground. It did not matter how cold it got or how wet they were, from a 2 hour strike to several months they stood firm.

During this convention Local 1600 (Toronto Zoo) were on strike, I was very impressed by the solidarity in this Union. To show support for Local 1600, these folks at convention raised \$100,000 for their Strike Fund. Not only did they raise money, but many offered hours of support for their picket line.

We also participated in rallies, one at the Ministry of Labour for the injured workers, and the second at Toronto City Hall for Local 1600.

The sea of Pink CUPE Flags at both rallies ... ASTOUNDING!

From this convention, I have never been more proud to be a member of CUPE as I am now, to see the support that has been given to others was overwhelming.

March 4, 2017

Ouwcc 2017

February 23, 2017

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After a rousing Solidarity Squad rendition of Solidarity Forever, OUWCC 2017 began Thursday evening with an Aboriginal opening and land recognition by Dawn Bellerose, our new Aboriginal Workers Rep. There was a moment of silence, and recognition of the work, and the loss of Mat Nelson, by Pam Griffin-Hody.

Sonia Yung, President of Local 4914, Peel Children's Aid Society, talked about her experiences – challenges, but also pleasant surprises - during their strike from September 2016 until just before Christmas last year.

Deena Ladd from the Workers Action Centre talked about the food service workers at York University, who are bargaining and need support. Please go to york15.ca if you haven't already, and send a message to President Shoukri.

Solidarity Squad performed another song (with some impressive moves!) to end the evening.

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February 24, 2017

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After smudging Friday morning, we were back at it with greetings from John Cartright from Toronto and York Region Labour Council. There was some history, encouragement, and a reminder to keep doing the hard work we do.

In a panel on funding, Graham Cox, CUPE researcher and 'smartest man in the room' discussed (increasingly political) changes to universities and the way they are being funded. Graham's comment 'Where are we going to train people to accept precarious work' hit the nail on the head – the answer being 'Universities' as he went on to explain. 'Disincentivization' – making less politically desired majors more expensive, to reduce numbers of students in those programs, then blaming students – 'millennials are lazy' when it didn't work. He pointed out that it was not always an 'evil director,' but sometimes structural. 'Directed funding' – dividing funds for directed use – is an effective way to get out of funding certain areas for political reasons, reducing certain programs ... and thinking. Another 'weasel word' is calling students 'learners' – taking the onus off of universities to actively teach, and expecting 'learners to access information online.

Peggy Sattler talked about tuition fees for three different sets of students:

1. Domestic – regulated increases ‘to 2018’ (important)
2. International – unregulated (which to me says ‘unlimited’)
3. Grants for most needy continue. She made the point that 2018 is the next election. She made the connection for me that 2018 is when the regulated increases end. She also talked about chronic underfunding and differentiation policy, and said that in 2015, private funding surpassed public funding. (So, ‘publicly assisted’ universities.)

After lunch break, we did a workshop with Canadian Roots, which is a youth organization that does exchanges across Canada, a youth reconciliation initiative, and a conference (coming up March 27-29, 2017.) Please check out canadianroots.ca for more information.

We first did a timeline of events over the last few centuries. It was challenging, as some of us thought things happened recently, but they had actually happened decades ago. Next, we looked at and discussed various aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations. The last part of the workshop was a visualizing exercise to consider our own stereotypes and biases. We were asked to imagine we were getting on a bus full of a variety of people, including a couple holding hands, and tell what we saw. Nearly everyone saw the couple as elderly, white, and heterosexual.

I joined the breakout group talking about getting more Indigenous studies in our education system. We need to reach out to groups on campus. We could be writing letters to university admin., Professors, etc. to ask for more Indigenous content. We also need to continue learning and passing along the histories of our own communities. Union educationals ie: Learning about First Peoples .

There was a caucus on sexual violence in the workplace from 5 – 6 pm. A number of campuses have been working on policy around the issue. We’re hoping to gather all of the campuses and their policies to sort through and get best practices on all campuses.

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February 25, 2017

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After smudging Saturday morning, we had an issues panel. Chris Sutton, CUPE National’s Health and Safety resource person for CUPE Ontario, talked about violence in the workplace – particularly sexual violence. New policy was implemented January 2017, which meant no input from workers. We can (must) make recommendations. There presently is no separate legislation for universities. We discussed how we need to be cautious about using policies/programs that universities so far have in place. We will be working together across the sector to come up with better ways to deal with the problem. We need to keep in mind that universities have uppermost in their thoughts that they need to limit liability, not so much prevent it from happening or helping the survivors. They find ways to stop complaints from being reported. York University seems to have the best policy/program, even including a definition of ‘rape culture’, which is absent from other campuses.

Rajeon Hoilett from CFS (Canadian Federation of Students) spoke about the importance of student/worker solidarity. He pointed out that as the largest segment of people on campus, and as people often doing precarious work themselves, they understand and are in a good position to be in solidarity, but also that, often having two and three jobs themselves, can find it difficult to join the fight.

Graham Cox (SMITR) gave a presentation (with work by Mark Jensen) on pensions ‘Why Our Pension System is Not Working, and What To Do About It.’ It was pointed out that pensions being looked after ‘by the private sector’ means banks and insurance companies, therefore focused on profits. We need to expand CPP, as that is the pension plan most helpful for more people in times of precarious work.

Catherine Fife, NDP MPP from Kitchener/Waterloo, talked about precarious work as well as university funding. ‘I’m trying to follow the money.’ She said that there has been a 40% increase in funding to the top level administration on campuses. ‘I feel that our universities are becoming corporations.’ \$70 million was spent in advertising the proposed ‘Ontario-grown pension plan. University campuses should not be a part of the problem of precarious work.

Chandra Pasma talked about the post-secondary task force ‘Precarious Worker’ campaign, with the reminder that the working conditions at universities are the learning – and the living! - conditions for students. There will be seven Precarious Worker Town Halls, the first in Guelph March 1st at 7 pm at the Italian Canadian Club.

After lunch we had a panel on supports and resources. Candace Rennick (OD Secretary Treasurer), Anne Healy (Executive Assistant, National Secretary), Graham Cox (National Research/SMITR), and Russ Armstrong (OUWCC coordinator) talked about resources for campaigns and for strike support (financial and non-financial): immediate – flags and whistles, swag, buses and rallies; cost shares, research, social media, etc. as well as scholarships - Bev Smales (for members) and Lois Hill (for a child of a CUPE member.)

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February 26, 2017

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Action Plan:

We adopted a four-part action plan on Sunday morning, including:

1. Bargaining: Coordinated bargaining (end date 2019);

Develop outreach tools for solidarity actions; sort out expiry dates, common language, etc.; continue developing a database re: who, where and when Locals are bargaining to support coordination.

2. Funding: Strengthen and support Cross-Campus Alliances; Develop educational materials re: changes to PSE funding and impacts on working conditions; campaign on Strategic Mandate

Agreement changes; continue working with CFS and OCUFA to build common campaigns on 2018 funding model priorities through a Ontario University & Colleges Coalition.

3. Equity: Campaigns – develop campaigns with Aboriginal community organizations on representative workforce and hiring on campuses; bargaining – create workforce composition study language for coordinated bargaining; Political Action – build support for mandatory education on Canadian history specific to indigenous peoples.

4. Issues:

Sexual violence – Work with health and safety committees to address issues within current legislation; with Cross Campus Alliances to collect and centralize policies to improve supports re: prevention, reporting, etc. on university campuses.

Pensions – work to expand CPP and coverage of the workplace pension plans, and defend defined benefit pension plans.

Precarious work – work with MPPs Fife and Sattler to promote the petition on changing workplace laws to protect precarious workers.

Resolutions – there were five or six resolutions brought forward (most of them from our Local) regarding making our ORO a better place to work in and use more fully, around support for Locals - we passed a resolution that was about a task force to look at servicing Locals in conciliation or strike position, around labour laws, and around chronically underfunding, with no accountability for senior administration.. All passed unanimously.

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Election of Employment Equity Rep: Stephanie Villers was acclaimed.

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New business:

Saturday March 4th, there will be a number of protests to rally against a group who will be out in force. They are some ‘pretty nasty white supremacists.’ (Toronto at 11 am, not sure about other times or locations.)

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There are a few dates to be aware of re: possible strike dates.

1. Brock University – March 3rd
2. Carleton University – March 6th
3. Guelph CUPE 1334 – March 13th

There are 20 Collective Agreements coming to the table in 2017, so we are setting the bar.