

SIXTY YEARS
BUILDING JUSTICE
FIGHTING FOR EQUALITY
AND WINNING FOR
WORKERS



Delegates return Fred Hahn and Yolanda McClean to office



On the second day of CUPE Ontario’s sixtieth convention, delegates re-elected Fred Hahn as president and Yolanda McClean as secretary-treasurer.

“I am so thankful to delegates for again putting their trust in me,” said Hahn, who was first elected president in 2010. “I will do my best to represent the interests of our members... and to make sure we elect a federal government that isn’t as bad as the one we have here in Ontario. I will continue to be a voice for and stand with all of you, all across this province.”



He thanked the other candidates who stood for president in the election, saying “democracy is what makes our union strong.” Hahn is a proud member of CUPE 2191, where he worked as a residential councillor for children at Community Living Toronto; he was president of his local for many years. When first elected president of CUPE Ontario, Hahn made history as the first openly gay president of a major union.



Yolanda McClean was also re-elected for a second term as secretary-treasurer.

“My commitment remains steadfast: to continue building this strong union and making sure we maintain healthy finances to ensure we can keep doing the work we do every day,” McClean said. “We are stronger together and I remain committed to making sure we have spaces where everyone is seen and valued.”



First elected as secretary-treasurer in 2021, McClean was the first Black woman elected to office in CUPE Ontario. Active in her union since 1989 when she became a library technician at the Toronto District School board, McClean is a member of CUPE 4400.

“Mutual care binds us all”

In the spirit of international trade unionism, where we recognize the connections between the struggles of workers and peoples from around the world, the keynote speaker at this year’s CUPE Ontario convention was the South African High Commissioner to Canada, Rieaz Shaik.

“The death of the Palestinian people diminishes both you and I,” he said to the delegates, powerfully connecting the work of our union and that of South Africa’s with the current struggle facing Palestinians. “All signatories to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide must demand without hesitation nor ambiguity that Israel abides by the ruling of the World Court.”

It was a reminder from a person who has known the importance of fighting injustice and apartheid. Shaik fought apartheid in South Africa, first as a student leader and then as an active member of the African National Congress (ANC).

It was a powerful address, and a powerful reminder of our commitments to all, within and beyond our borders.

And quoting journalist Dr. Don Pinnock, author of “Seven Pledges for a Harmonious Earth,” Shaik left us with remarks that will surely stay with us: “These pledges, etched into our hearts and laws, shall guide us towards a future where life flourishes, peace prevails and mutual care binds us all.”



Congratulations to CUPE Ontario VPs

Congratulation to the vice-presidents who were elected. CUPE Ontario welcomes and appreciates the skills, activism and passion for justice that they bring CUPE Ontario’s executive board.

- Michael Hurley – First Vice-President
- Aubrey Gonsalves – Second Vice-President
- Dawn Bellerose - Third Vice-President
- Dash Lavender - Fourth Vice-President



“For true leadership, look to members”: Mark Hancock

Flanked onstage by members of CUPE Ontario’s Executive Board, CUPE National President Mark Hancock told delegates, “Being a union leader is important, sometimes thankless work.” His remarks weren’t addressed to the leaders sharing the stage – they were directed to the local leaders and rank-and-file members who will take the priorities from CUPE Ontario’s sixtieth convention back to their locals and their communities.

Unstated but implicit throughout Hancock’s report was a powerful theme: the work of building a stronger union and a better province is not accomplished by elected officers but by the effort of members.

Fittingly, the biggest applause came in response to a shout-out to CUPE 1490, municipal workers in Black River-Matheson, who just concluded a bitter months-long strike that proved the power of even a small group of organized workers.

“We are Canada’s biggest, strongest union. With that comes a huge responsibility,” said Hancock, shifting from the bargaining table to the political sphere to encourage all members to guard against the threat of a Conservative federal government. “Our commitment to defending and strengthening public services and workers’ rights mean winning more elections.”

Racialized Worker’s Award

Longtime CUPE member and labour activist Marie Clarke Walker is the recipient of this year’s Livingstone Holder, Mervis White and Muriel Collins award, commonly known as the Racialized Worker’s award.

Clarke Walker is a member of CUPE 4400 and served as CUPE’s first national diversity vice-president and CUPE Ontario’s Equity VP. Marie made history in 2002 when she was elected as the first racialized woman and youngest person ever elected to the position of Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). She served in that position for five terms before once again making history in May 2017, being elected as the first-ever racialized woman to serve as CLC Secretary-Treasurer.

“This award is very important to me, it’s probably the most important award I have received,” said Clarke Walker. “My life has been dedicated to that, to make things better for the next generation. I will continue to push for change, and I ask that you all do the same.”



All of us Sisters in Solidarity

To kick off Thursday afternoon, Yolanda McClean, newly elected secretary-treasurer of CUPE Ontario, introduced the Sisters in Solidarity Award, a tribute to the tireless dedication of women within CUPE Ontario. McClean presented the award to all female-identifying delegates in attendance at the convention.

“How exhausting it must be to feel the weight of the world on our shoulders, often doing thankless work but getting up and doing it all over again, day in and day out, despite it all,” said McClean, before inviting all female-identifying delegates to stand as they were met with a round of applause.

Every woman who registered for the convention will receive a certificate via email to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of CUPE Ontario and this prestigious award.



Stopping the “rise of the right”



Politics was on the menu Thursday morning as CUPE National’s President Mark Hancock and Secretary-Treasurer Candace Rennick hosted breakfast for convention delegates. They used the occasion to urge local leaders and members to get involved in the coming federal election. Both cautioned against being taken in by claims from Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre: “The decisions he makes are not going to work for us. While he’s talking to [unions], he’s in the pocket of big business,” said Hancock, with Rennick warning, “Poilievre is an extremist who will move to diminish our power as workers. Look past the cheap talk; commit to doing whatever you can to get educated on the issues and talk to your friends and families.”