**February 1, 2024**

CUPE Trades conference 2024 Richmond Hill

I was able to attend the trades conference of 2022 in Niagara Falls. I was reacquainted with many familiar faces from that conference.

It started with **Fred Hahn, the CUPE Ontario president** with a very animated passionate welcome. If any of you have met Fred, you’ll know what I mean.

He is advocating for trade wage equalization regarding private sector jobs. We, in the public sector are still very much below the average. He also spoke about conservative government being behind the times regarding human rights and being out for themselves rather than trade workers and all working class. The rich get richer!

**Chris Yates is the co-chair as of late (not sure if this was his local or if he is with CUPE Ontario).** Chris was very vocal at the last conference I attended in 2022. We will see a lot more of him in the CUPE world. Chris spoke of C14 (regarding wage equality)

**Jason DeFraga is a representative at CUPE National and Darren Pacione (research officer at Public Service Alliance of Canada)** talked about mapping trades and compensation equality research. They mentioned how contractors are working with us, doing the same jobs and making better wages and at the same time asking us questions about how to do the job. There were many folks asking questions about this and comparing wages based on company size, location, sector, and municipality.

**MPP Wayne Gates Niagara Falls.** Talked about province wide solidarity for injured workers. Wayne spoke of inflation and food costs going through the roof and wages not increasing nearly enough. Meanwhile, last year Loblaw reported 529 MILLION in profit and some Canadians can’t afford groceries. Wayne also really wants to get “shop” classes back in high schools.

**Kirk Mercer CUPE BC Skilled Trades committee** is lobbying to bring back compulsory trades in BC. Lisa Scott Licensed Electrician in BC spoke of apprentice advisory guides.

**Kimalee Phillips is a social justice and organizational learning consultant** and spoke to us about AROAP; this is a CUPE program which stands for Anti-racism-organizational-action-plan. It was established in 2018 with a goal to address underrepresentation of Black, racialized and indigenous members in the union.

**Laura Walton from Canadian Union of public employees**, Ontario school boards council of unions and serves on CUPE Ontario executive board talked about how underrecognized trades are in the fact that we go to school for upwards of four years and require between 3 and five years of practical (in the field) work training to become certified and the pay does certainly not equate to the education and work put in. to be compared to a bachelor degree of other post-secondary education finished wages. Companies are also hiring unskilled workers to do jobs that certified trades people should be doing to get the work done cheaper, this is bullshit.

Panel discussion with **Ticha Albino**, **Aleq Farquar,** and **Laura Walton** talked more about this same topic and ways to get more funding for apprenticeships.

**Angela MacEwan is a senior economist with CUPE** and talked about inflation

**Alia Karim is member of CUPE at York University** and talked about how CEO’s make up to 200 times that of an average “worker” how the hell does that make any sense? She spoke about the systematic deterioration of public jobs. We don’t have enough people and poorer wages; this leads to shottier work being performed due to lack of employees; this leads to unsettling of public eye on “what are we paying for”? then private sectors move in for the kill to take the jobs and the vicious cycle continues. If our funding comes from government this could be a valid devious description of the cycle.

**Jim VanAllen** **Vice President CUPE 132** and **Sabrina Dubeau Canadian Union of Public Employees** talked about anti-harassment and bystander training and had interactive workshops to discuss.

**Yolanda McClean CUPE Ontario regional vice president** talked about black history month starting. Also, fought for no cuts to OMERS pensioners. She also talked about fighting back against privatization. Yolanda also talked about WILD which stands for Women in Leadership Development.

**Chris Yates** talked about the action plan; topics included

**-Equality within the union**

**-recruitment and retention**

**-public awareness of trades in CUPE**

**-coordinating a mid-year call to trades people**

**-planning the 2025 trades conference**

**-meet and lobby skilled trades to advance CUPE Ontario trades priorities**

**-continue to participate with Ontario Federation of Labour, trades and apprenticeships to ensure they are advocating for CUPE workers**

**-plan a lobby day for ministry of labour training and skills development**