

Thursday, May 24, 2007

CUPE Ontario most powerful political force in province - Ryan

Calling CUPE Ontario the most powerful political force in the province, CUPE Ontario President Sid Ryan laid out plans to put pressure on government to gain wins at bargaining tables and change public policy over the next six months leading into the October provincial election.

“We’ve got to stop McGuinty’s agenda to privatize health care. In North Bay, we’ve got a \$1.1 billion dollar P3 hospital that was supposed to cost \$200 million,” said Ryan in his president’s address. “To deal with the cost over-runs, they are shutting down a hospital laundry and sending the jobs to Sudbury. This is the private health care and LHINs model in action.”

By using our collective bargaining clout as leverage, Ryan said that the union can force the Liberals to fix education funding. “We’ve got 24 school board locals with contracts expiring on August 31st along with 28 OSSTF locals. We’re going to tell the Premier that the choice is his- he can face 52 locals on the picket line or fix the funding formula.”

Along with pressing the government for a 3.5 hour standard of care in long-term care homes, Ryan said that it’s time to put tuition fees front and centre in the coming election.

“The October election gives CUPE Ontario a golden opportunity to force McGuinty to meet our demands,” he added. “We made him pay when we combined the pressure of 46 ACL locals with our political campaigning, resulting in a \$200M investment in the sector. That’s the model we’ll continue to pursue.”

Quote of the day! “My name is Amanda Binetti and I am the next Sid Ryan.” Speaking on resolution 86, to develop a mentorship program for young workers.

Alicia Reece: People without a vision will perish



Saying that ‘people without a vision will perish’, keynote speaker Alicia Reece challenged delegates to educate, energize, mobilize, and embrace an agenda for change when it comes to jobs, health care, privatization and the downsizing of services.

“You can put an agenda together, but you’ve got to hit the streets and keep it in legislators’ faces,” said Reece, a former Vice Mayor of Cincinnati, who grew up as the daughter of an African-American postal worker, and first ran for office at age 27.

“I was tired of the downsizing of healthcare, jobs and wages and the movement to privatization,” Reece told delegates. “I was told that you can’t win with that kind of agenda—and that I needed big money. I said I would mobilize people around a People’s Agenda. That was how I was elected.”

Over three terms in office, Reece fought to increase healthcare budgets, push for a living wage and jobs. “We got it done. We proved that the People’s Agenda matters when we mobilize.”

Kudos to Windsor District Council

For the first time ever, delegates have shuttle bus service from their hotels to the convention centre, thanks to the dedicated work of CUPE Windsor District Council members. Amenities also include the biggest on-site day care facilities ever.

Convention delegates are being treated to a discount coupon book for deals on local restaurants. District Council members went to a number of local businesses to get these discounts.

Health care 'not for sale'

Convention delegates rallying in support of public health care chanted 'not for sale' as they listened to calls for a resurgence of a national fight to keep health care public.

"Windsor Liberal MPPs are complicit in the introduction of a health care market in Ontario and in this October's provincial election CUPE members must hold them accountable for their part in privatizing the health system," said OCHU president Michael Hurley.

"Small hospitals like Leamington will suffer under the Liberal plan to privatize and regionalize health care. And let's not forget the provincial Tories have a commitment to transfer our surgeries to for-profit clinics," added Hurley.

With the towers of Detroit in the background, CUPE national president Paul Moist made the point that the private health care system in the U.S. means that more than 40 million Americans have no health care. "We believe that the size of your wallet should not affect your access to health care," said Moist.



While the Liberals promised to put standards of care in the new long-term care legislation (Bill 140), they have so far failed to deliver, said health care committee chair Sue Schmidt.

OMERS told "No investment in P3s"

In a convention first, Chair of OMERS Administration Corporation David Kingston addressed delegates, saying that he's committed to building bridges with CUPE. "I want OMERS to be a place where all parties are treated fairly and I'm committed to working with CUPE leadership to make this pension plan stronger."

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While CUPE Ontario President Sid Ryan gave Kingston credit for reaching out, he sent an unequivocal message to him on P3 investments that drew a standing ovation. "We want a letter from OMERS and a commitment from the Sponsors and Administration Corporation that they will work together and agree not to invest in P3s using our pension plan money."

Brian O'Keefe, who has worked on OMERS for almost a decade, said that the new Sponsors Corporation, of which he is Co-Chair, has been constituted, is operational and working through issues with the Administration Corporation in a cooperative manner.

Call to mobilize and organize in health care

CUPE public health care activists urged delegates to support a resolution (#3) calling for a public campaign against P3 hospitals, that includes community votes in support of universal health care, and funding resources from CUPE National to support paid advertising, community mobilizing, public meetings and legal challenges.

We need to talk about a national campaign focused on P3s," said Michael Hurley, first vice president of CUPE Ontario and President of OCHU. "The loss of employment, income going offshore and the transfer of workers to for-profit corporations overseas is not the future we want."

As the lowest paid workers in the health care system, home care workers deserve to have union representation to improve their wages and working conditions, said Patricia Pitt (CUPE 3808) a personal support worker with a Toronto community agency.

She appealed to delegates to support resolution #16 calling for CUPE to prioritize a resolution to develop a comprehensive organizing campaign that was originally passed in 2003 by both national and Ontario conventions.

Echoing Pitt's call for action, CUPE 4308 president Kelly O'Sullivan told delegates that while home care workers have made gains, "we are not strong enough. Unless we organize to raise the workplace standards of home care and community care workers nothing will change for them."

