

Issues and events leading to Ontario's walk-out from CUPE's 2007 National Convention

What led to 95% of Ontario's 1000 delegates spontaneously leaving the hall Thursday afternoon was the culmination of unresolved issues and a series of events.

Representation

Ontario has been requesting equal and fair treatment from the national union in terms of seats on the NEB (with 42% of the membership, Ontario only has 17% of the seats). Ontario is constantly voted down 19 to 4. We have also demanded that the imbalance in staffing ratio be fixed (we believe that it will take adding 16 staff to the Ontario complement to bring us to the national average). We have requested access to the strike fund for political strikes and have been denied both at the NEB and the convention. Our slim representation on the NEB would not be a factor if the union operated on a model of consensus building – but it does not – and as a result we are constantly out voted on matters of principle even though we represent almost 50% of the unions entire membership.

Staff Bargaining

Ontario members on the NEB took a strong position against the concessions tabled by CUPE against its own staff in March, but was voted down 19 to 4 and the national union moved forward on seeking concessions from our staff which resulted in a one day strike this past spring.

Agenda for Change

CUPE Ontario brought an agenda for change to the Windsor convention, which underscored the need for changes within our union and move us down a more progressive path that included calling on the national union to implement an employment equity plan, organize personal support workers (PSWs) and child care workers, and hire full-time coordinators for the major sectoral committees. In Windsor we passed numerous resolutions to address these issues.

CUPE Ontario has 5 key issues with our national union:

1. Access to the Strike Fund;
2. Decision making at the national level;
3. Resources;
4. Implementation of National Policy;
5. Equality file.

Several resolutions at the national convention aimed at dealing with Ontario's demands for change were rejected by the rest of the country. A resolution from the National Women's Task Force to increase representation of Women, would have moved Ontario's representation on the NEB just marginally from 17% to 20%, was defeated.

The national union also submitted to the convention an energy plan that Ontario could not support. This plan was calling for the major polluting coal plants to remain open with the help of new "clean coal" technologies, and the expansion of energy generation based upon P3 nuclear mega projects.

Chronology of events surrounding the walk-out

Thursday walk-out

I am unable to say first hand what happened on Thursday when Ontario delegates left the hall because I left the convention at noon. First I spoke at the 1750 noon rally and then I attended a retirement dinner for a brother suffering from a terminal illness. The Ontario NEB members and Ontario Vice Presidents however informed me that when resolution 333 (dealing with access to the strike fund for political strikes) was defeated health care workers and OCHU spontaneously walked off the convention floor and the vast majority of Ontario's delegates decided to follow.

At the Ontario caucus on Thursday, brother Michael Hurley suggested to go back in the convention since the point was made, but the delegates overwhelmingly did not agree with this suggestion and instead decided to meet Friday morning to discuss the next steps.

CUPE Ontario's executive board met Friday morning and decided to stand in solidarity with the hospital workers who had decided not to return to the convention on Friday.

Friday's Ontario Caucus

At the Friday morning Ontario caucus, as Division President I moved a motion that we stay out of the convention, but the division executive board go on the floor of the convention to explain to the delegates why Ontario walked out of the convention and that the rest of the country needed to decide whether they wanted an inclusive union. This motion was amended on the floor by a delegate and it was passed that all delegates return with the division executive and after the speech is given leave the convention.

December 15th Leadership Meeting

CUPE Ontario will hold a special leadership meeting to discuss the walkout and further action, on Saturday December 15, in Toronto.

In solidarity,

Sid Ryan
President