



CONVENTION CAPSULE

CUPE Ontario Convention 2015

Friday, May 29, 2015



Whose power? Our power! Hydro's not for sale!

More than a thousand activists chanted, cheered and shouted their determination to Keep Hydro Public as they converged on the lawn of Queen's Park on Thursday at noon.

It was a sea of pink flags as CUPE Ontario members joined members of OPSEU, Unifor, other unions, and student and community groups to protest the planned sale of Hydro One by the Wynne government.

Emcee Candace Rennick introduced speakers just as MPPs inside the legislature began their clause-by-clause review of Bill 91, the omnibus budget bill that includes changes intended to make the sale

legal. It also strips Hydro One of its status as a public entity and ends public oversight and accountability.

Members of the NDP caucus, including leader Andrea Horwath and energy critic Peter Tabuns, joined the rally to call out the premier for her betrayal of public trust. A chorus of voices followed, calling on the Liberal government to Keep Hydro Public, including ACORN, TTCriders and the Canadian Federation of Students.

CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn concluded the rally with a barnburner of a speech that left the crowds echoing his cry, "Hydro belongs to us! And it's not for sale!"

Historic restructuring

Following a year-long formal review, a large majority of delegates voted in favour of "historic change," as CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn put it, by changing the CUPE Ontario Executive Board to meet the needs of our diverse membership.

The new structure moves from three diversity vice-presidents to

six equality chairs and a representative from the Northern Ontario caucus. The equality chairs will be elected in their respective caucuses and will serve as co-chairs of the equality committees.

The new structure maintains the positions of president, secretary-treasurer, four vice-presidents, six members at large and sector chairs.

Ready for the austerity fight

CUPE Ontario Secretary-Treasurer Candace Rennick greeted delegates in dramatic fashion Thursday morning.

Holding a copy of our loan agreement, Sister Candace informed delegates that every penny of CUPE Ontario's debt has been paid off. Then, with a flourish, she tore up the agreement.

"The good news I bring to you is that we did it ... together. CUPE Ontario is now debt free," Sister Candace said to loud applause from the convention floor.

She added that with the debt fully paid off, CUPE Ontario will be able to devote more resources to fighting the austerity agenda.

"For the first time in a while, we have real resources to fight back...we can focus our resources on resisting the Austerity Agenda, to stop the sale of Hydro One and other public assets. We can put boots on the ground where they are needed," she said.

Continuing the good news, she noted in the past year CUPE Ontario has grown by 2600 members as more locals chose to affiliate.

Reflecting on a year which saw the birth of her son Jackson, Sister Candace closed by telling delegates she looked forward to even more dramatic changes in the coming year.

"I want my child and your children to grow up in a province where all the wealth that we and other workers generate through our labour is put to the common good, not into the hands of profiteers," she said.

Resourcing union power

Invoking the power we have when we stand together, and citing recent victories across the country, Brother Charles Fleury, National Secretary-Treasurer, addressed delegates about the strength of our union’s resources.

Highlighting the nearly \$4 million CUPE National committed to Ontario in 2014, Brother Charles addressed our election work, cost-share campaigns to stop privatization and contracting out, and precedent-setting legal cases. He told delegates that in the first quarter of 2015, CUPE has already committed more than 2.5 million dollars to Ontario campaign work. He praised the impressive capacity of Ontario members to mobilize across sectors, and assured them they will continue to have the support of CUPE National.

Brother Charles outlined a National Strike Fund that has grown to \$80 million, and highlighted the investment CUPE will make in fighting hydro privatization, organizing new members, and in federal election work.



How austerity failed the U.K.

Austerity is a self-perpetuating policy, akin to economic masochism said Lucia McKeever the president of UNISON, the UK’s largest public sector union.

She recounted how, in a short five-year span, the UK’s Conservative-Liberal Democrat government pushed an “unprecedented assault on the public sector. And privatization is rampant.” They have shed services and hundreds of thousands of jobs. They have passed new anti-labour legislation known as the “gagging Act.” All the while doling out £ 7 billion in tax cuts and eroding workers’ wages.

“These polices have failed to reduce the deficit. They’ve failed miserably to bring people out of poverty. They have not led to prosperity. A million more public sector jobs will be lost by 2020,” she said.

Throughout these challenges, said McKeever, UNISON has learned to step out of “our comfort zone” and campaign, recruit and organize differently. Using a dedicated team of organizers, UNISON has been able to increase membership considerably, and mobilize against these cuts.

Sisters in Solidarity Award

This year’s Sisters in Solidarity Award was presented to Pam Parks of CUPE Local 1999 in Oshawa.

Sister Pam, who works at Lakeridge Health, was nominated for her support of social justice, union solidarity and fairness. Her nominees cited her encouragement of new and young workers, which led one of them to join the CUPE Ontario Health & Safety Committee.

Politically active, Sister Pam worked hard on campaigns for NDP candidates Jennifer French and Trish McAuliffe and is very active with the Durham Health Coalition and the Health Accord Campaign. In 1999, she was elected President of Local 1999.

AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

Day 3

- 9:00 am** **Call to order**
- Guest Speaker:**
Tom Mulcair – Leader of the NDP of Canada
- 12:00 pm** **Equality Lunch**
- 1:30 pm** **Call to order**
- Retirees Recognition**
Injured Workers Award
- 3:00 pm** **Guest Speaker**
Hassan Yussuff – CLC President
- 8:00 pm** **Dance/Social**