



# Convention Capsule 2

49th Annual CUPE Ontario Convention - Caesar's Windsor - May 25, 2012

## CUPE members demand an economy that works for everyone

For Windsor – a city where thousands of decent-waged auto-sector jobs, and now many hospitality jobs, have been lost – hosting CUPE Ontario’s 49<sup>th</sup> annual convention is a big deal and very appreciated, several speakers said at Thursday’s convention rally against provincial cuts to public services. Convention brought nearly 1200 CUPE members and staff to the City of Roses.

The dour impacts of the provincial cost-cutting announced in the 2012 provincial budget will mean more job loss as Windsor school boards, hospitals and community agencies deal with inadequate funding, said CUPE Ontario president Fred Hahn. “We need an economy that will work for all of us,” said Hahn who earlier in his convention speech called for province-wide solidarity actions similar to Quebec’s student movement.

These cuts will further hurt communities like Windsor, where one in five people is out of a job, said Paul Chislett, president of the Windsor Workers’ Action Centre. Calling for solidarity among the working class, Chislett told delegates that “we are all workers. And we (unionized workers) need to get used to showing solidarity outside

the union structure. There are many people here – as in so many Ontario communities – who are being exploited at contingent jobs, with bad wages and no benefits. Many are struggling with more than one job to make ends meet.”



Srila Perine, a developmental service worker from Essex, urged actions to fight cuts to services for those who are most vulnerable – like the individuals with intellectual disabilities for whom she provides supports. “The strong must help the weak. That’s what strong unions are built on,” she said.

Service users and workers are in the crosshairs of an enormous shift by governments and corporations away from good jobs that support local economies. We can’t go into the fight divided said Dino Chiodo, president of the Windsor Labour Council and the president of CAW 444, representing area autoworkers and hospitality workers.

Nowhere is this shift more visible than in the retail sector. The American chain TARGET bought Zellers, but is refusing to recognize workers’ existing workplace rights.

“They are telling workers that they all have to quit and reapply for their jobs. Unless we fight, unless we stand together, it is only a matter of time before this model expands to the rest of us,” Chiodo said.



## Fighting for a better future together

CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn began day two of Convention with a barn-burner of a speech that took delegates from last Convention through the provincial election, through the Toronto budget fight, the Drummond Report and this spring's provincial budget, and on to the fights ahead.

"Ontario was spared from a Hudak Majority, only to have Dalton McGuinty become possessed with the evil spirit of Mike Harris," Hahn said, noting CUPE Ontario's role in swinging votes in key ridings helped keep the Tories out and the Liberals to a minority. "Lord it has been a wild and wooly year!"

CUPE Ontario has campaigned and lobbied hard this year to shift public debate off austerity and onto prosperity. With allies in the NDP, we forced the Liberals to stop their program of corporate tax cuts and pressured them to introduce a new tax on people earning more than \$500,000. These changes are not enough to make the budget work for Ontarians, and we must continue to push for a budget that works for Ontarians, not for bankers, he said.

## Paul Moist to delegates: Yes We can!

CUPE Ontario delegates were treated to a rousing speech by CUPE National President Paul Moist on day two of the CUPE Ontario Convention in Windsor. Brother Moist applauded the resilience and efforts of Ontario CUPE members for resisting concessions and cuts to public services, and also for their fight for improved public services that benefit all Ontarians.

Brother Moist talked about the challenges of fighting the right-wing assault on trade unions. From the Harper government in Canada to the austerity agenda



of many governments in the world, including the McGuinty government in Ontario and Toronto Mayor Rob Ford's reckless campaign to cut Toronto public services, our National President stressed the importance of members working together to fight back and win the hearts and minds of Canadians.

From the budget come our next fights – against legislation that will change our pensions from defined benefit to defined contribution, against a legislated wage freeze that stomps on collective bargaining rights, against an attack on interest arbitration, against a new act that will let government privatize public services without public accountability.

"We cannot be afraid to fight – to stand up, to mobilize and join with others to build a better future together," he said to cheers. "Let's send a strong message from this convention that CUPE members in Ontario are ready to take on any challenge that comes, to defend public services and good jobs."

In conclusion, Moist asked the delegates, can we fight to defend free collective agreements, fight to defend and expand pension coverage for all workers, resist the austerity agenda and defend public services for all Canadians? The united force of Ontario delegates responded unanimously with a resounding *Yes We Can!*

## Mark the time and location! Day 3 Events

- ⇒ 7:45 a.m. – National Economic Literacy Breakfast (Promenade ABC)
- ⇒ 9:00 a.m. – Call to order/elections begin (Augustus Room)
- ⇒ 10:20 a.m. – Guest speaker: Élise Carrier-Martin, Quebec student strikes (Augustus Room)
- ⇒ 12:15 p.m. – Aboriginal Workers Circle/DVP election (Mercuri Room)
- ⇒ 2:30 p.m. – Guest speaker: Natalie Mehra, Executive Director, Ontario Health Coalition (Augustus Room)
- ⇒ 5:30 p.m. – Racialized Workers Caucus/DVP election (Luna Room)
- ⇒ 8:00 p.m. – Convention Dance (Promenade ABC)

## Secretary-Treasurer makes strong speech to delegates

Candace Rennick, our secretary-treasurer, made a stirring speech to delegates thanking CUPE members for their loyalty, setting the stage for future campaigns and giving a strong financial statement.

“The work you do day in and day out, week after week, is what makes our union strong,” Sister Rennick told the crowd. “It is truly an honour to be able to salute you in person here and now for your dedication and commitment.

“Sisters and brothers, what is going on now is a radical transformation of Ontario. And, a radical transformation demands a radical response. If we want to stop the province from being taken from us – from being dismantled and then rebuilt into something we no longer recognize – we have to step up and take action,” she continued.

This means we will have to be better organized and more determined, more strategic and even more militant, she said. Rennick told members not to fall victim to fear mongering. “That’s the whole point of austerity – it’s



about creating a climate of fear, a climate where workers are forced into retreat. A climate that dampens expectations,” she said.

“We have the know-how, we have the capacity, we have the strength and we have the financial resources. If we stay strong and act boldly, others will join us. That is how we will take back the province for our families and our communities. Together with others we will win!” Rennick concluded.

## Sound finances support your activism

Congratulating CUPE Ontario delegates on their activism in the face of attacks on our rights and a tough environment for bargaining, National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury told the Convention our national union is able to “continue providing support for what you do in the workplace and the community, and to help continue to push back against the attacks you face.”

Brother Fleury reported on the three funds that CUPE’s finances are structured around. The General Fund, which covers day-to-day operations of the union, had a budget of \$169 million in 2012. “We were able to add 9.5 new staff positions in 2012. In Ontario, we added a new National Representative position in the North Bay Office. We have also invested in Ontario with the new regional office, which is also home to CUPE Ontario.”

The National Strike Fund has never been in better shape, he said, with \$53 million. The National Defence Fund has projected revenue of \$8.1 million in 2012, with another \$2.2 million for major organizing campaigns and \$3.49 million for Strategic Directions, adopted at our last national convention. “All of this contributes to growing our union and making the membership stronger,” Brother Fleury told delegates.





## CUPE Locals recognized for standing up to hard line employers

Four CUPE Locals – 1287 Lincoln County Human Society, 4948 Toronto Public Library, 4207.3 Brock University and 966 Region of Peel Ontario Works – were presented with Certificates of Recognition by CUPE Ontario for their fights on the picket line.

“Their struggles prove that there is purpose in a union in these difficult times,” said Candace Rennick in introducing representatives of the locals. Todd Menard accepted the plaque for Local 1287 whose 11 members remained on the line for 83 long days. Maureen O’Reilly accepted on behalf of her members at the Toronto Public Library fighting off cuts to programs and services and an effort to increase the number of part time workers.

Dan Crow of Brock University told the convention how powerful CUPE remains. Mary Jo Falle and Katherine Willis of Local 966, currently on strike, said their 500 plus workers, mostly women, will stand strong against the inequality and concessions their members are fighting. Sister Rennick also acknowledged CUPE Local 4989, Ontario Works members, who could not attend the convention and are currently on strike in Renfrew County.



## Sisters in Solidarity and Injured Workers

President of CUPE 966, Mary Jo Falle, proudly accepted this year’s Sisters in Solidarity Award on behalf of all the women and men that she’s had the privilege to work with and gotten to know in her years of union activism. Sister Falle humbly and proudly thanked her now-departed mother for her strength and support through the years. Sister Falle has championed fairness and equality, not only for her own members but for all workers. Who hasn’t seen, ridden or borrowed Local 966’s famous pink bus?

The recipient of this year’s Injured Workers award, Darrell Day, is a proud member of CUPE Local 4400, a steward, a health and safety representative and chair of the CUPE Ontario Injured Workers Advocacy



Committee. In accepting this award, Brother Day thanked his personal family, including his wife and children, and his CUPE family at Local 4400, including president John Weatherup.

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