

Bulletin

CUPE
ONTARIO

95% of Ontario's 1000 delegates to the CUPE National convention leave the hall Thursday afternoon in protest. Delegates returned on Friday morning long enough to make a statement to the convention

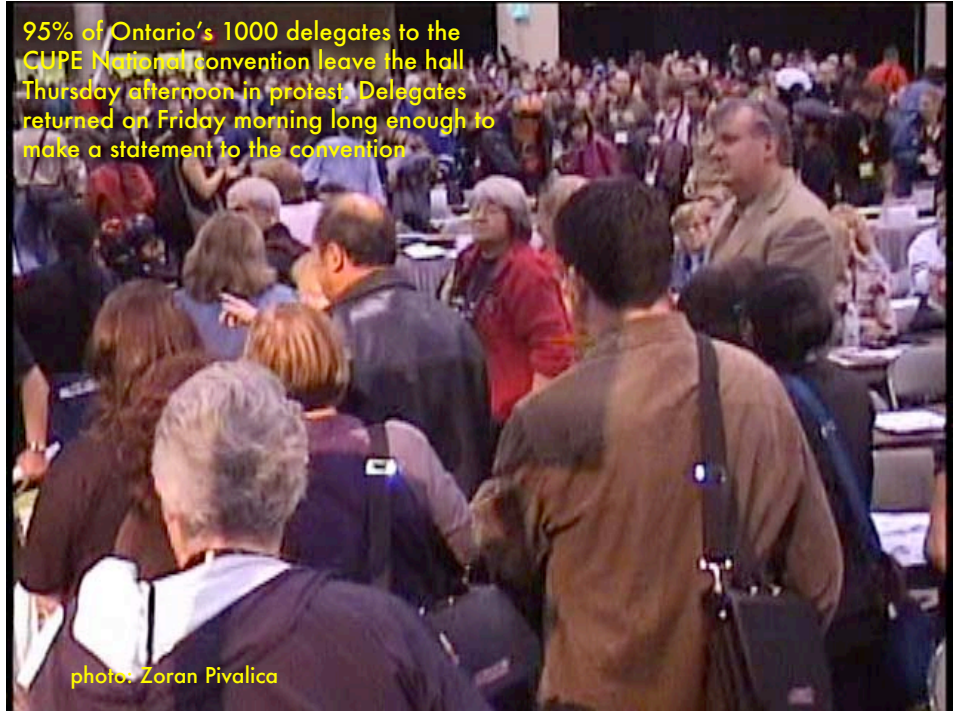


photo: Zoran Pivalica

Ontario Delegates leave National Convention in Protest

Policy defeat the latest step in a serious disagreement about CUPE's direction

At CUPE national's October convention, the defeat of a resolution from Ontario's health care workers asking for access to the strike fund for political strikes led to a spontaneous walkout by Ontario's

1,000 delegates, provoking a crisis within the Union.

Some background on this issue: in 1999 CUPE national asked for an assessment for strike pay. Healthcare workers were told that they could continue to access money from the strike fund for political strikes to fight legislation that threatened their collective agreements. In 2001 CUPE national created a separate strike

fund. When the National Executive Board wrote the regulations which set out the rules for accessing strike averting funding, the promise made in 1999 was broken.

The 2001 strike fund regulations restricted workers without the legal right to strike to strike averting funding for strikes related to collective bargaining only.

The Canadian Press Story on CUPE's 2007 convention

"We have a constitutional crisis on our hands," Ryan told the convention. "You have to contemplate whether or not you want Ontario to be part of this union." Tension, which had been building all week after a series of Ontario resolutions were voted down, came to a head when CUPE Ontario hospital workers, who have no right to strike, wanted ready access to the union's strike fund for political action. "You cannot use a majority to shut us down time and time again, even though we're funding the rest of the country," Ryan said afterward. "We should not have to come cap in hand every time we have a political strike."

CUPE national president Paul Moist was reduced to sounding like a weary finger-wagging, school teacher, chastising students for disrupting a 10th grade class when the convention was unable to continue because of the walkout. Moist was able, barely, to get the convention to adopt a \$5-million anti-privatization campaign strategy before being forced to close the gathering early.

CUPE Ontario President Sid Ryan speaks to the Ontario caucus



photo: Roran Pivalica

Strikes to stop government from passing legislation that rips job security from contracts are now not eligible. Strike averting funds pay for advertising at 100% of cost. Defense Fund monies which could be requested are at 50% .

The strike fund has \$28 million in it. The Defense Fund has \$8 million and is subject to many demands, including funding organizing (at a cost of \$2 million per year).

In 2005 legislation (Bill 36) passed by the Ontario Liberals gave Cabinet the power to order hospitals to privatize their support services. The Ontario Council of Hospital Unions applied for strike aversion funding for advertising in the lead up to a strike. This request was denied.

CUPE national says that everyone has access to the strike fund and to strike pay whether they have the right to strike or not.

Strike pay is paid to workers on strike for 10 or more days. Health-care strikes in Ontario are illegal and rarely last for 10 days. An illegal hospital technologists strike in 2005 lasted one day.

Healthcare workers voted in 1999 to support the assessment for strike pay and voted in 2001 to create the strike fund, because they were promised access to the strike fund. This promise has been broken.

This issue is the latest in a series of major policy disagreements between Ontario's membership and the national leadership. A progressive union makes decisions by consensus. Our members' 225,000 voices should be heard.

Why Are Ontario Members Angry?

1. Representation

With 42% of the members, Ontario has 4 National Executive Board (NEB) seats, out of a total of 23 which is just 17%. That would be fine if the NEB worked by consensus. But it doesn't. Ontario is consistently outvoted on matters of principle.

2. Staff Bargaining

Ontario's membership opposed concession bargaining with CUPE's staff this spring, but our objections were voted down by the rest of the country at the NEB.

3. Resources

Ontario consistently generates \$5 and \$6 million annual surpluses. Yet we have the worst staff to members ratio by far of any province and we have to beg for the money to fight campaigns.

4. Policy

Increasingly, Ontario is off-side with CUPE on policy. Take energy. Ontario delegates opposed a resolution to the 2007 convention which embraced " clean coal " technology and refurbishing of nuclear power plants, even if that is done through private-public partnerships. What's good for the banks and mining and energy industries is not necessarily good for our kids or the environment.

WHAT'S NEXT?

CUPE Ontario will hold a special leadership meeting to discuss how to proceed, Saturday December 15, in Toronto.