

**CUPE National University Workers Meeting
Montreal, QC**

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Panel on Coordinating Bargaining

Presentation by: Janice Folk-Dawson

I am inspired to be in a room full of post secondary workers who have the next two days and I sure well into the night, to share our experiences, successes and challenges working in this sector. For the first time CUPE post secondary workers have not just an hour or so before a national convention to coordinate and considering we got too this room by coordinating during those hour meetings so that many of us were at mics at those national conventions requesting that CUPE give us the opportunity to realize our full potential both as a vibrant sector inside of CUPE and as an active opponent to the aggressive privatization of the public sector. The possibilities sisters and brothers of a national coordination strategy that we can build this weekend is incredible and totally within our reach. I have no doubt that now given the opportunity post secondary workers will mobilize nationally to achieve our rightful potential and place in our union.

My name is Janice Folk-Dawson and I am from CUPE Local 1334 at the University of Guelph in Ontario. My local represents trades, maintenance and service workers. I have worked at the university for 20 years and although I am on a book off as President, I am classified as a Senior stores keeper which means I hand out the pieces and parts including the duct tape to the skilled CUPE sisters and brothers who are holding together the billions of dollars of deferred maintenance on our campuses. I have been on my locals bargaining team 3 times, the last two times have been honoured to serve as spokesperson.

I am privileged to be here this morning as Chair of Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee to talk about two of my passions – coordination and bargaining. The Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee (OUWCC) represents over 20,000 university workers including academic workers, support workers and workers who work at universities but are not employed by the university - mostly in student services. We have members on 18 different university campuses. Most of our campuses have two to three sometimes 4 different CUPE locals and often those locals will have 2 or 3 units with individual collective agreements. We are a committee funded by CUPE Ontario and as chair I hold one seat on the CUPE Ontario executive board.

Our committee structure is 1 elected chair, 1 health and safety rep, 1 injured worker rep and one delegate per university, which means that the locals on each campus must elect a representative for their university. We also have a coordinator who although is extremely dedicated in not full time and a national researcher.

We are a very diverse and active group representing many perspectives on what the working conditions are like for a variety jobs on a variety of campuses. We have been mobilized in the last few years with the realization that the fight back and coordination has a much stronger impact both with our employers and the provincial government with the combining of our skills and strengths. The Ontario University Workers coordinating committee has been in existence for approximately 10 years now – we used to be included with school board workers in the education sector.

The first few years as a committee we had five area reps plus a chair and health and safety rep. It was a period more of sharing of local reports, handouts of national language proposals, we did work on issues around mergers and job registry and the gathering and sharing of recent negotiated settlements. We were not organizing and planning as a sector and often there was little or no communication or connection between the different CUPE locals on each university campus never mind between universities. It was when we changed our by-laws approx 5 years ago and moved from the 5 area reps to each university having a rep, that campus coalitions were the natural next step. The CUPE locals outreached to the student unions both undergrad and graduate and other bargaining units on our campuses. Coalitions were formed. Finally workers and students were presenting a common front on issues such as the lack of government funding, the elimination of health and safety hazards in our learning and working environments, the reversal of the privatization of the post secondary education system and the advancement of human rights with the removal of the class system between administration, staff, students and faculty. Not only were these coalitions very effective at organizing campus action, lobbying MPPs and directing the agendas at university convened meetings, they demonstrated the power of solidarity during recent rounds of bargaining, when the support was critical to obtain fair contracts. Not only was the support from the other workers important the solidarity demonstrated by the students empowered CUPE rank and file members to start to understand they were not alone and could become part of larger movement.

During the formation of the campus coalition the OUWCC supporting the building of coordination began the first of our CUPE Campus Checkups. We conducted the first checkup which was unranking of the MacLeans poll. Most importantly it took myself as chair and Mary Catherine McCarthy our coordinator to 11

campuses to meet with local leadership and activists. Locals convened a meeting of the student unions, other unions and employee groups.

It was one of many of the successful activities undertaken by the campus coalitions and supported by OUWCC. The report from that checkup became the tool we used during the Rae Review – a provincial review of post secondary education to raise the deferred maintenance at Ontario universities. Over the last couple of years we have watched as both university administrations and the provincial governments were forced to put financial and physical resources into the deferred maintenance on our campuses. Proof again that a small group of people can change their world.

Once the locals at each university were connected thru the coalitions when the committee came together the university delegates were finally able to bring the perspective and issued from all the CUPE Locals on their campus. It didn't take long to come to the conclusion that most of the issues that we faced whether academic or support workers were the same.

We also came to the conclusion that there existed a disparity between universities on wages, terms of employment, pensions, benefits and tuition fee protection, and that that disparity would not be eliminated unless we actively coordinated to change it.

We knew we would be foolish to ignore that university administrations through their organizations COU – council of Ontario universities are in coordination, sharing bargaining strategies and are key players in the privatization and corporatization of the post secondary education system in the province of Ontario. We knew we must be coordinated in bargaining to ensure we would not be defeated by isolation. While university administration compete for inadequate government funding and private dollars with all the corporate strings attached, we must remember our union principals of just, fair and equitable working conditions for all workers regardless of classification or geographical location, and our CUPE social justice principal of a publicly funded, fully accessible post secondary education system in this country.

At our annual 2005 OUWCC conference we held coordinated bargaining sessions where locals democratically decided job security, tuition fees and wages were the three issues that they would coordinate around. The 2005 coordinated bargaining group organized into academic or support workers and discussed and decided as those sub groups how they would participate in coordinated bargaining. Sample language on the agreed to issues was provided to the locals for use at their bargaining strategy sessions. At least two opportunities were provided for locals at the bargaining table to meet face to face with other locals in bargaining. Locals shared proposals, surveys, membership mobilization strategies and the more experienced or seasoned member negotiators were able to share the nuts and bolts, or steps of the bargaining

process. As a sector I don't believe we were all ready to wrap our heads around the power and potential of common expiry dates, and I would suggest that the 2005 group worked in cooperation with each other rather than in coordination. But the positive experience that it was, promoted the idea that coordinated bargaining had to be on the agenda for our 2006 OUWCC conference. We had guest speakers from two or the other jurisdictions health care and social services who talked about the successes of coordinated bargaining in their sectors.

Then a turning point happened for OUWCC at the 2006 conference when because of a shortage of time in the agenda, we divided ourselves for the first time by years and not academic or support workers. We haven't looked back since and now there's quite the buzz happening in Ontario and we have a vision for 2008. Imagine if all post secondary education CUPE locals in Ontario had a common expiry date in 2008, and instead of bargaining in isolation against university administration, who insist on competing with each other for funding, we could force the provincial governments to participate in and develop the funding solutions for our sector.

We had 12 locals involved in the 2006 round of coordination. This group is coordinating on a couple of different fronts – one putting common proposals on the table including a common expiry date of 2008 and the second front is coordinating the timeline of the bargaining process.

We are very proud of this group because they are including the political battle for increased government funding and membership mobilization that is occurring on these campuses and in particular McMaster Local 3906 and Carleton Local 4600 is evidence of the power of grass roots solidarity and it's power of changing the bargaining agenda and achieving real gains for our members.

As a committee we decided we want to tip the bargaining scales in our favour and submitted a coordinated bargaining campaign proposal to CUPE National as a cost share. The short term objectives include educating all OUWCC locals on the strategic importance of coordinated bargaining, to establish a commitment from locals on participation, to have a 2006 group coordinate on wages, job security and tuition fee protection and to establish a 2007 end date working group. The long term objectives include having all locals participating in the coordinated bargaining campaign, and the protection of university workers work and the enhancement of working conditions. We are pleased to report that this campaign has been approved for 100% funding from national and the campaign is in full swing educating our members and supporting those locals who are in bargaining – we have 3 locals who have settled with 2008 end dates, 5 locals at the table, 1 local waiting for dates, 2 locals in conciliation and one local with a no board report with the deadline of Oct 23rd. Those three locals the two in conciliation and the one with a no board report are in the room and we need to hear from them this morning as they bring real input into our discussions. I also

hope that we as a gathering of national post-secondary workers offer our full and powerful support in all the creative ways we can think of.

A common communication strategy, a democratic decision making process and the development of a trust relations between locals are key to the success of coordinated bargaining. The 2006 locals are participating in conference calls where updates are provided and strategies develop. We are also producing bargaining bulletins to be distributed at the local level so rank and file members are plugged into the campaign. We want to promote the concept that coordinated bargaining actually enhances local autonomy by ensuring each local has all the information, tools and resources to achieve the best collective agreement for their membership. We also want to promote not only to the bargaining committee and local leadership but also to every CUPE member that they are not alone in this process. We understand that just as you need to mobilize the rank and file thru the whole process of bargaining, it is their participation, belief and trust that will determine the success of coordinated bargaining.

We recognize in Ontario our work is just beginning. We are here this weekend to share our experiences, to learn from other provinces and do I dare suggest to participate in the development of a national coordination aimed at the federal government and the urgency for adequate public funding, the reversal of the corporatization and privatization of post secondary education and most importantly to initiate the discussion as a nation on the social good of publically funded, fully accessible post secondary education system in this country.

Imagine sisters and brothers 2010 – and all Post secondary education CUPE locals across this country had a common expiry date – just imagine sisters and brothers!

Peace and solidarity,

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