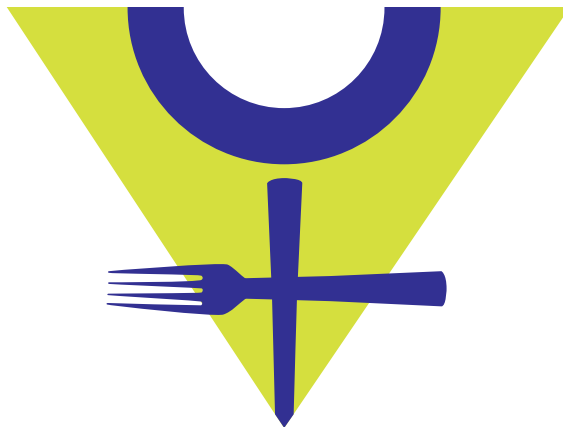




CONFERENCE REPORT

SETTING THE TABLE



NATIONAL BARGAINING WOMEN'S EQUALITY CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 2009



CUPE / Canadian Union
of Public Employees

CONFERENCE OPENING



Members of CUPE National Women's Committee reading the Equality Statement



CONFERENCE OPENING



Gloria Mills giving keynote address

Almost 500 delegates, the vast majority women, gathered in Montréal, February 10 to 13, to participate in the National Bargaining Women’s Equality Conference. The theme of the Conference “*Setting the Table for Bargaining Women’s Equality*”, rooted in the recommendations of the CUPE National 2007 Women’s Task Force had the objectives of building bargaining strength to advance women’s equality and setting achievable goals on bargaining issues for women. Links are provided to the podcasts and resources developed for the ground-breaking conference.

[Lucie Levasseur](#)¹, National Executive Board general vice-president for Quebec and member of the CUPE Women’s Task Force, greeted participants. Sister Lucie set the tone by describing the accomplishments of the women’s task force and reminding members that it is not for workers to pay for the financial crisis with less work and less money.

[Paul Moist](#)², National President, provided the background to the conference that focused on increasing bargaining power on equality for women including examining the issues of wages, benefits, protection against casualization and privatization, provisions for work and life balance, and workplaces free of violence. He emphasized that a recession should not be seen as an excuse for workers to give concessions on rights, time, or money.

¹ <http://cupe.ca/women/Lucie-Levasseur-Wome>

² <http://cupe.ca/women/Paul-Moist-Fight-con>



[Gloria Mills](#)³, Director of Equality for UNISON, the largest union in the United Kingdom gave the opening address. Sister Gloria described how women have to move from influence to power, and shared her experience of how UNISON has accomplished this by adopting a system of proportional representation for women. She also spoke about her personal struggles as a racialized woman in fighting for fairness and justice for all women. “Be impatient for equality,” she advised the CUPE sisters.

WEDNESDAY MORNING PLENARY



Panel on struggles and victories in bargaining

A panel of CUPE sisters from across the country told their stories of how they achieved success for women in bargaining. Each panelist told the story of working with members and allies to bring about substantive change which benefited women. There was an energetic exchange during the plenary session and the delegates were unanimous in thanking the panelists for their words of inspiration and hope.

³ <http://cupe.ca/women/Gloria-Mills-How-UNI>



[Maria Wahl](#)⁴, local 825, told the story of her municipal local's success in winning pension coverage for part-time, temporary and casual employees.

[Sylvie Goyer](#)⁵, local 1244, moved members with her description of her university local's 10-year struggle and victory for pay equity.

[Margaret Mukakigeli](#)⁶, local 3207, described her small social services local's 43 day strike to improve wages that resulted in a 14.4% increase with the support of CUPE locals and members across Canada.

[Shelley Poitras](#)⁷, local 3967, explained how the Aboriginal Workforce Strategy negotiated by her hospital local paved the way for her success in the workforce.

[Melanie Poulin](#)⁸, airline division local 4092, discussed the way collective agreements can acknowledge the effects of violence on workers, and help to prevent violence in the workplace.

[Monique Côté](#)⁹, local 429, recounted the breakthrough wins for her large municipal local in the area of work and family balance.

[Terri Preston](#)¹⁰, local 4400, provided an outline of how province-wide coordination achieved important gains for school board workers including measures resulting in more secure jobs.

⁴ <http://cupe.ca/women/a499442f2905b1>

⁵ <http://cupe.ca/women/a499458e933317>

⁶ <http://cupe.ca/women/a499443bce7d0b>

⁷ <http://cupe.ca/women/a499446401009b>

⁸ <http://cupe.ca/women/a499444aff3fed>

⁹ <http://cupe.ca/women/a4994459b7eb58>

¹⁰ <http://cupe.ca/women/Bargaining-Womens-Eq>



REPORT FROM WEDNESDAY WORKSHOP



Plates and serving dishes from the workshops

Participants broke into groups to discuss strategies on one of the following topics: how to raise women's wages and benefits; obtaining and improving pensions for women; negotiating provisions to improve work/life balance; bargaining secure jobs and fighting against privatization; and improving language to protect women from harassment and violence. They discussed how to set bargaining goals, how the issues impacted in equity communities, and how to strategize and prepare for bargaining.

Members outlined clear next steps for bargaining employment equity, protecting full-time jobs in workplaces free from violence with work and family balance provisions, and good pensions in retirement. These steps include: full seniority rights for all workers, conversion of part-time jobs to full-time jobs, replacement of full-time jobs with more full-time jobs, full benefits for full and part-time workers, an employment equity plan, and strong no contracting-out language. In addition, there was broad consensus that pension education for all members is essential.



EVENING FORUM ON EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

About 125 people attended the forum on [employment equity](#)¹¹ moderated by Diversity Vice-President Yolanda McLean. Sisters Joanne Martin and Conni Kilfoil provided an overview of the various components of employment equity and what actions we should be taking to pursue this important objective. There was a very lively discussion with participants.

THURSDAY MORNING PLENARY



Panel on increasing women's bargaining power

How to build women's bargaining strength to make women's equality issues a priority, given the current bleak economic climate, was the unifying theme of the Thursday morning panel. Unions need to focus on raising the wages of low paid workers – the majority of whom are women. All panelists wove women's equality bargaining issues including women with disabilities, women of colour, Aboriginal women, lesbian and transgender women, and young women into their presentations. They stressed that coalitions with community groups to advance equality issues are a key priority. All three women agreed that there will be significant challenges, but there is also significant room to move forward in bargaining equality.

¹¹ <http://cupe.ca/employment-equity/Employment-Equity>



[Armine Yalnizyan](#)¹², an economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, emphasized that it is inequality within the system that unions must stand up and fight against. CUPE can fight for social wages, too, not just money. Public services keep people healthy and these services put the ‘social’ back in social unionism.

[Darline Raymond](#)¹³, executive director of Action Travail des Femmes, emphasized that coalition building is essential to advancing equality issues in communities. It is important to be open to various points of view and to be inclusive in order to build a positive momentum.

[Judy Darcy](#)¹⁴, now secretary-business manager with the Hospital Employees’ Union explained that raising the wages of low wage workers – the majority of whom are women – will be the fundamental equity issue for our generation. The former National President emphasized bringing women to the table is integral to building women’s leadership within the union.

A lively entertaining intervention by sisters from the New Brunswick education sector – a “Bramageddon” exercise – demonstrated that imagination and ingenuity can go a long way to highlight the struggles of women.

REPORT FROM THURSDAY WORKSHOP

The workshop that followed identified many ideas of what is needed, such as more diverse representation of women at all structures of the union, mobilizing the union on minimum wage campaigns, building our alliances with community partners, developing common goals, continuing to develop coordinated and central bargaining, sharing and tracking equality bargaining gains using the web site and other communication tools, engaging and involving new members, supporting and building women’s committees at all levels of the union, building understanding and support for equity issues, examining local by-laws using an equality lens, and lobbying for legislative changes on equality issues.

¹² <http://cupe.ca/bargaining/Armine-Yalnizyan-Dea>

¹³ <http://cupe.ca/bargaining/Darline-Raymond-Buil>

¹⁴ <http://cupe.ca/bargaining/Judy-Darcy-Building>



CULTURAL CABARET

A cultural component made up of some of the best talent in Québec entertained delegates. *Women with Kitchen Appliances*, whirled, beat and mixed a symphony of sounds using every common kitchen appliance. *Sofia Baig* served up an insightful and cutting critique of the world we live in, according to her experiences as a young Muslim woman. The final performer, *Lynda Thalie*, wowed the conference with her fusion of Middle Eastern and North African music.

CLOSING SESSION

Two artists, *Queen Ka* and *Kyra Shaughnessy*, after attentively listening to the discussion over the duration of the conference, provided passionate spoken word reports¹⁵ which inspired the participants.

[Claude Généreux](#)¹⁶, National Secretary-Treasurer, recapped the highlights of the conference and described the work and strategy that needs to be developed to build equality. He pointed out the importance of being impatient while at the same time being prepared for long struggles to accomplish equality for women.

The “Town Hall” session, hosted by NEB member and liaison to the Women’s Committee, Sister Candace Rennick, allowed conference participant to discuss ideas for moving the issues beyond the conference. Brothers Paul and Claude, Sister Yolanda McLean NEB Diversity Vice-President, National Women’s Committee Co-chairpersons Helen Kennedy and Cidalia Ribeiro, and Equality Director Maureen Morrison participated in an animated discussion with delegates. Some of the ideas which were generated included developing a “Report Card” on what progress has been made for women since the Task Force, equity training for servicing representatives to ensure that equality issues are front and centre at the bargaining table, information on HEU’s Living Wage Campaign to be circulated throughout the union, improved child care allowance and child care to be provided at all conferences and conventions, and a campaign against casualization of jobs.

¹⁵ See links to the podcasts in the other conference resources section

¹⁶ <http://cupe.ca/bargaining/a499f14dcc775d>



The conference closed with a rousing rendition of *Du pain et des roses* and *Bread and Roses*, sending the delegates home with a renewed sense of commitment to achieving equality for all women.



Du pain et des roses and Bread and Roses



OTHER CONFERENCE RESSOURCES

[Conference report](#)¹⁷ by spoken word artists Queen Ka and Kyra Shaughnessy

[Recipes for Setting the Table](#)¹⁸

[Contract Language](#)¹⁹

[Employment Equity: An Overview](#)²⁰

[Employment Equity and Racialized Women](#)²¹

[Representative Workforce Strategy](#)²²

[Bargaining Women's Equality Conference Highlights](#)²³

[Conference poster](#)²⁴

Conference participant discussion and report backs

<http://cupe.ca/women?keywordType=4&extraKeywords=audio>

Photos of the conference http://cupe.ca/gallery2/v/Setting_the_Table/

[Videos](#)²⁵ of the conference including conference promotion videos and interview with Gloria Mills

<http://cupe.ca/women?keywordType=4&extraKeywords=video>

¹⁷ <http://cupe.ca/bargaining/a499f15240ea0d>

¹⁸ http://cupe.ca/updir/Recipes_for_Setting_the_Table.pdf

¹⁹ <http://cupe.ca/updir/AppendixA-Contractlanguage.pdf>

²⁰ <http://cupe.ca/employment-equity/Employment-Equity>

²¹ <http://cupe.ca/employment-equity/Employment-Equity-an>

²² <http://cupe.ca/aboriginal/Representative-Workf>

²³ <http://cupe.ca/bargaining/a49c3f3fe1063a>

²⁴ http://cupe.ca/updir/Table_18x24_Eng_2.pdf

²⁵ <http://cupe.ca/women?keywordType=4&extraKeywords=video>



APPENDIX

CUPE NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE – 2007-2009

Corrina Simmonds	Newfoundland and Labrador
Katherine Chute	Nova Scotia
Lori MacKay	Prince Edward Island
Marilyn MacCormack	New Brunswick
Joëlle Ravary	Québec
Cidalia Ribeiro, Co-chair	Airline
Rachel Besharah	Ontario
Helen Kennedy, Co-chair	Ontario
Arlene Macklem	Manitoba
Sheila Fay Bindig	Saskatchewan
Mary Ellen Gennutt	COPE
Miranda Moran	Aboriginal Member
Linda Joyce	Alberta
Debbie Taylor	British Columbia
Carol Kenzie	HEU British Columbia
Sheryl Burns	Person with Disabilities Representative
Candace Rennick	NEB Liaison
Anne McGrath	Staff Advisor, National Office
Maureen Morrison	Staff Advisor, National Office
Margot Young	Staff Advisor, National Office
Darcie Beggs	Staff, National Office
Annick Desjardins	Staff, Québec
Sheree Capar	Staff, Manitoba

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