

ORGANIZE



Finding their place: CUPE's young workers

National
Aboriginal council
takes flight



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Soaring with the eagles: CUPE's new national Aboriginal council



Paul Moist at the founding of the national Aboriginal council.

In May, I had the great privilege to attend the founding meeting of our national Aboriginal council held at the beautiful Wanuskewin Heritage Park, a First Nations historic site and interpretive centre just outside Saskatoon, Sask.

It was a truly historic occasion. As delegates spoke, eagles soared overhead – an

auspicious sign in many Aboriginal cultures. I was deeply moved by the stories I heard there, and left feeling inspired and hopeful. The pressing issues facing Aboriginal people now have a permanent home within CUPE.

I know we will be a stronger union when we increase the visibility and involvement of our Aboriginal members. When those members feel respected, represented and welcomed in our activities and structures, we all win.

I also left Saskatoon feeling more convinced than ever that we need to be lending our voice to the struggles Aboriginal people face, from deplorable housing conditions and unsafe water on reserves to their ongoing fight on issues such as land claims and residential schools.

Like Aboriginal workers, our young workers often feel they don't have a place in our union. CUPE recognizes that today's youth will be tomorrow's leaders. Just as they need us to protect their rights,

we need their energy, passion and ideas to help build a better CUPE.

Finally, we continue to update you on our national women's task force. They have been holding consultations with members in every region, collecting information on the experiences of women in our union. I urge you to participate in this process, either by attending a consultation, completing our online membership survey, or contacting your regional task force member directly.

In solidarity,

Paul Moist

Paul Moist
National President

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By Dan David



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Spotlight on LGBT workers' rights at Montreal Outgames

When sport, culture and social issues came together for this summer's inaugural World Outgames in Montreal, CUPE helped place labour issues in the forefront.

The games attracted lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) athletes and artists from around the world. A key event was a major international conference on LGBT human rights. CUPE was an official partner of Workers Out! Making the Difference, a component of the conference dedicated to LGBT issues in the workplace.

CUPE's national pink triangle committee, members and national office staff attended the conference. National Secretary-Treasurer Claude Généreux, CUPE Ontario secretary-treasurer Fred Hahn and pink triangle member Jean-Pierre LeClerc were among the speakers.

"The labour movement has always been a strong ally in the fight for LGBT rights," said LeClerc, a library technician at the University of Montreal and member of CUPE 1244. "The union's structures and values make it a natural partner."

CUPE has been involved in Workers Out! since 1998. That year, Dutch labour groups organized a conference to coincide with the Amsterdam Gay Games. (The Outgames were created after a controversy over the hosting of the 2006 Gay Games.)

In 2002, the Gay Games were held in Sydney, Australia, leading to the second Workers Out! conference, with almost double the participants. Again, CUPE participated fully.

Close to 350 delegates attended the Montreal Workers Out! They tackled issues like discrimination in the workplace, educating colleagues about sexual diversity and special challenges facing trans workers.

The highlight was the adoption of an action plan co-written by the Canadian Labour Congress, the Quebec Labour Federation, the *Conseil des syndicats nationaux* and the *Centrale des syndicats du Québec*. The plan calls for unions to safeguard LGBT rights and fight homophobia; to educate members; and to establish LGBT rights defense committees at all levels.

The human rights conference also produced the Declaration of Montreal, which will be presented to the United Nations and to governments to mobilize international support for LGBT rights. The Declaration was read out



Tara Robertson, member of CUPE 391 (Vancouver public libraries), and Martine Stonehouse, member of the national pink triangle committee and of CUPE 4400 (Toronto school support workers).

loud at the games' opening ceremonies by tennis legend Martina Navratilova and Canadian Olympic swimmer Mark Tewksbury, both prominent gay rights activists. It was an emotional moment for LeClerc and everyone in attendance.

"Canada is better than most places," LeClerc said. "LGBT people have more or less achieved legal equality. But we haven't achieved social equality yet. We want to

reach the point where everyone is indifferent to differences, whether it's LGBT, people of colour, people with disabilities – all equity-seeking groups."

Visit www.montreal2006.org for more on the World Outgames.

■ David Robbins and Natasha Gauthier

Women's task force shifts into high gear



Barbara Moore

Things have started to shift into high gear for CUPE's national women's task force.

Task force members have begun holding consultations, talking to members and locals across the country about the barriers and frustrations CUPE women face in their union.

"It seems like just yesterday that we launched the task force, and it felt like we had all the time in the world," says task force co-chair Barbara Moore. "Now all of a sudden, we're on a really tight timeline."

The task force needs to prepare its reports on the consultations by the end of November, to have them ready for the national executive board meeting in January 2007.

"In my home province of Nova Scotia, we've targeted 15 to 17 communities for consultations and focus groups," Moore said. "Locals are teaming up so that we can reach more people. Of course, ideally, I'd love to be able to talk to every Nova Scotia member."

The task force met in Ottawa in June to finalize plans for the consultations. "We also provided facilitation training for task force members that needed it, since some members have had more experience with the investigative process than others," Moore said.

Members also reported on presentations to their respective division conventions over the winter and spring. "I myself gave the presentation in Nova Scotia, and it was very well received," Moore said. "On the whole, feedback from the conventions was mostly very positive."

Moore says the key to the consultations' success lies in reaching as many

people as possible. "We hope that anyone we miss or who can't attend the focus groups in person will complete our online survey." The survey can be accessed at www.cupe.ca.

Moore adds that anyone can call her at anytime if they have something to say or an experience to share about women in CUPE. "I'm glad to chat. And I want to assure members that their comments will remain confidential. We want people to feel free to speak without fear of retribution."

In the meantime, several provinces are organizing their own activities to promote the task force locally. For example, in June, CUPE Quebec hosted a successful forum on women in the union. More than 80 women and 24 men attended workshops and presentations and debated issues. They returned home prepared to spread the word about the consultations in their locals and regions and to help drum up as much participation as possible.

■ Natasha Gauthier

Meeting the bosses yields positive results



CUPE was highly visible at the Canadian Library Association conference in Ottawa.

workshops and built up relationships with employers.

"Meeting outside the workplace always brings a fresh perspective to labour-employer relations," said National President Paul Moist, who attended the FCM meeting in Montreal along with several members from municipal locals.

CUPE met with dozens of delegates and collected overwhelmingly positive feedback through its booth at the trade show and at conference workshops. Mayors, councillors, city staff and other officials have high regard for the women and men of our union.

"Collecting such diverse and positive comments about CUPE members across the country is extremely gratifying,"

(Cont. next page)

Labour Peace Forum inspires activists to address global issues



CUPE members giving peace a chance in Vancouver.

Union members are often asked why the labour movement gets involved in global issues like the campaign for international peace.

For CUPE 407 president Michael Potts, the British Columbia Federation of Labour motto provides a useful answer: “What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all.”

Potts was one of several CUPE members who attended the Labour Peace Forum, part of the World Peace Forum, which brought 4,500 peace

activists to Vancouver in June. They shared stories, identified common goals and developed collective strategies on the issues of war and peace.

The labour forum, sponsored in part by CUPE National, CUPE BC and CUPE locals, has set a major precedent for union activism.

“While much of our print and television news coverage focuses on war, very little if any is given to the ravages of armed conflict,” Potts said. “At the forum we heard many heart-wrenching

accounts of the devastation wreaked upon civilian populations in Iraq, Palestine, Israel, Colombia and other countries. This was truly a global coming together.”

For many delegates, the forum confirmed how the simple act of building bridges and forming links across borders and time zones can make the crucial difference in securing human rights, improving wages and working conditions, and organizing the unorganized.

Delegates were challenged to come up with ideas on how unions should support immigrant workers in North America. CUPE members suggested translating union documents into more languages, pushing employers to enact equity hiring policies, and providing more union activities that promote inclusion both in society and the workplace.

CUPE will be thinking about these strategies and more this November at its own human rights conference in Vancouver.

■ Dan Gawthrop

Moist said. “Employers really appreciate the community work our members do as well as their efforts to foster more cordial labour relations.”

One city manager from Grande Prairie, Alta., had particularly high praise for CUPE. At last year’s FCM meeting, he collected some brochures on CUPE’s literacy work. Inspired, he began a partnership with CUPE 787 to build a successful, active literacy program in that municipality.

CUPE received a similarly warm welcome at the CLA’s conference in Ottawa. “The reaction has been great, very enthusiastic and upbeat,” said Pam Hambrock

of CUPE 905, which represents library workers in York Region near Toronto. “Even a lot of library managers, former CUPE members, are saying that it’s great that we’re here.”

Hambrock and other CUPE members staffed the busy booth at the CLA’s trade show. CUPE’s table was the lone labour voice in a sea of private companies and government departments pitching their services or technologies.

Handing out information kits, bookmarks and pens and engaging people face to face on CUPE’s work to keep libraries public motivates Hambrock. “With funding

drying up, contracting out is increasing,” she said.

Kim Perry, also of CUPE 905, detects a shifting attitude in library leadership. “There isn’t a sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ anymore,” she said. “Successful libraries work with their unions to reach out to marginalized people in their communities, and make them feel welcome.”

People at the CLA are saying it’s about time that CUPE got more involved at this level, Perry added. “People ask me, ‘what took you so long?’”

■ David Robbins



L to R: National Secretary-Treasurer Claude Généreux speaking in Manitoba; National President Paul Moist at a memorial procession in Vancouver; Marlene Crozier, president of CUPE 606, at the Vancouver march.

Remembering the dead, fighting for the living

On April 28, the Canadian flag on the Peace Tower in Ottawa flew at half-mast to honour workers killed on the job. And across the country, CUPE members, wearing the CUPE canary, gathered to pay their respects and protest Canada’s failed health and safety record.

“It is a day to mourn and to acknowledge that each worker’s death is not only a tragedy for families,” said Paul Moist, CUPE’s national president. “It is a tragedy for co-workers and for all of society.”

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards found that Canada has one of the worst workplace health and safety records in the industrialized world. Canada has the highest number of workplace-related deaths (proportional to population) of any country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) except Italy.

Each year in Canada, about 1,000 workers are killed on the job. One million are injured. Even conservative estimates of annual deaths due to occupational disease range from 6,000 to 8,000. In Britain, work-related deaths and injuries are less than one-seventh compared to here. The United States rate is less than half the Canadian rate.

Across the country, enforcement of provincial health and safety laws has been reduced as workplace inspectors have been laid off. And legislation has

failed to keep pace with the changing demands and risks of today’s jobs. For example, despite the rising prevalence of repetitive strain injuries, only British Columbia and Saskatchewan have ergonomics regulations.

Here are a few of the events that marked this year’s Day of Mourning:

- Paul Moist and CUPE BC president Barry O’Neill marched with hundreds of CUPE members in Vancouver. Marchers carried 188 caskets representing the number of workers killed on the job last year in B.C.;
- National Secretary-Treasurer Claude Généreux addressed delegates in Dauphin at the Manitoba Division convention and attendees at a commemorative ceremony at city hall;
- In Montreal, CUPE members and other workers gathered for a 10-hour vigil in front of the *Commission de la santé et de la sécurité au travail (CSST)*, the provincial workplace health and safety board, to protest the lack of enforcement of health and safety regulations and legislation;
- Danny Cavanagh, president of CUPE Nova Scotia, called for stronger safety enforcement at a ceremony in Sydney;
- CUPE members gathered in Sudbury, Ont., to remember the dead and injured. Wyman

MacKinnon, president of CUPE 4705 and a CUPE regional vice-president for Ontario, pointed out that among developed countries, “Canada has the worst record for reducing workplace fatalities over the last 20 years”;

- In Saint John, N.B., members joined other workers at the International Longshoremen’s Association monument to mourn the dead and call on the provincial Conservatives to carry out an inquiry into the workers’ compensation system;
- In Regina, Sask., about 60 CUPE members and staff joined Anthony Pizzino, director of the research, job evaluation and health and safety branch, for a ceremony outside city hall. The names of 34 workers killed on the job in Saskatchewan in 2005 were read out. About half the victims were in their 20s and 30s.

■ Barry Doyle



This member of CUPE 30 in Edmonton is lucky: less than 6 per cent of Canada's young workers have public sector jobs.

THE YOUNG AND THE RIGHTS-LESS

Today's young workers are underpaid, underemployed and at high risk of exploitation. **Ian Clysdale** looks at how CUPE is reaching out to youth and investing in its own future in the process.

Have you ever wished you could turn back the clock and be young again? If you saw what conditions are like for today's young workers, you might think twice. Overeducated, underemployed, underpaid and exploited, today's youth are the first generation that stands to have a lower standard of living than their parents.

According to the Canadian Labour Congress in a July 2005 study of young workers, the situation looks grim. Youth unemployment has been very high since the mid-1970s, never falling below 11 per cent and reaching a high of 17.3 per cent in 1992. One in three unemployed workers in Canada today is a young worker. (For statistical purposes, a young worker is generally age 15-24, although in the union the term usually designates anyone under the age of 30.)

Not surprisingly, unemployment rates are even higher for Aboriginal youth and young people of colour. However, since the early 1990s, young women have enjoyed consistently lower unemployment rates than young men.

Even if you have a job, it can still be a struggle to make ends meet. Take-home pay for young workers has fallen to less than 80 per cent of what it was 20 years ago, even though education levels (and corresponding student debts) have risen.

These are just some of the reasons young workers need strong unions. But there are just as many reasons why Canadian unions need youth. CUPE recognizes the important role young workers play in revitalizing the union at all levels.

"We have to be relevant to those workers," says Michelle Day, co-chair of CUPE's national young workers group. Day, 28, is a health care aide and a member of CUPE 408 in Lethbridge, Alta.

"If we don't start involving more young members in the union movement now, there won't be any leadership for our union in 20 years," Day notes. "And if we allow public sector jobs occupied by young workers to drift away, there won't be a union left to lead."

Her concerns are warranted. While it's true that unionization rates for young workers in the public sector remain much higher than for those in the private sector, more than half of young public workers are now in non-unionized positions. And they're staying in those low-end positions for longer than ever before.

Even more alarmingly, fewer public sector jobs are available to young workers. Less than 6 per cent of young workers are able to find work in the public sector. Every public service job eliminated through downsizing – even attrition – is a job that a young worker will never have.

This especially hurts young women. "The unionization rate has been consistently higher among young men than young women, in contrast to the overall unionization rate in Canada which is now almost exactly the same for men and for women at just over 30 per cent," the CLC study notes. "This gender gap reflects the fact that young people are less likely than older workers to be employed in the highly unionized and disproportionately female public sector."

Privatization is another threat to young workers. Many of the jobs they typically occupy – child care centre workers, lifeguards, park landscaping – have been disproportionately hit by privatization. Jobs that were already precarious have become even more so, not to mention increasingly de- or non-unionized.

The solution, according to Jordan Iannone, is the same as with other cases of privatization of public services: if you can't stop the sell-off, follow the work. Iannone recently worked as a member-organizer for CUPE, coordinating a union drive at a private swimming pool in Surrey, B.C. Lifeguards there were making less than at the public pools.

Despite the clear financial and protective benefits of unionization for young workers, organizing them can be challenging, Iannone says. Young workers, especially if they are still in school, are often seasonal, casual or part-time, meaning traditional ways of organizing don't always work.

"Not only is there significant turnover, which makes both organizing and communicating with members difficult, but there are unique challenges," he says. "For example, when you're dealing with minors, you not only have to convince them to sign a card, you also have to convince their parents, because they have to give their consent. Also, because they're new to the work environment, the kids are often much more easily intimidated by employers."



CUPE pool workers in Brossard, Que., on strike in 2003.

Photo: Info SCFP-Quebec



It's hard to organize seasonal workers, like this Edmonton lifeguard.

In addition, organizers acknowledge that many youth view unions as being old-fashioned and not for them.

To help with these challenges, CUPE National recently approved a sponsorship program that allows a young member in each province to attend member-organizer training. Day sees this as a step in the right direction, but notes that unions need to first find young members who can take on organizing drives, and encourage and support them in their work.

Again, the transient nature of the jobs occupied by younger workers makes this problematic. Some CUPE locals have managed to overcome those barriers and find ways to reach out to young workers. Last year, the Ottawa and District Association for People with Developmental Disabilities offered an orientation course to its new employees. CUPE 1521, which represents staff at the organization, approached the employer and negotiated for time to provide union orientation as part of that training.

"We created a half-hour presentation that explained everything we thought they absolutely needed to know about being in a union and being in our local," says Anne Cole, a 28-year-old residential development counsellor with CUPE 1521 and a member of the local executive. "It allowed new members to put a face to the union. As a result our casual and relief staff have been far more willing to actually contact us when they run into problems."

Other locals have arranged to offer the "Know Your Rights" course, a three-hour workshop that helps young workers and new union members to understand their collective agreement rights. Ken Hawkins, a member-facilitator who has been teaching the course for several years in B.C., says that by keeping it short and active, it stays interesting and relevant.

"Many young workers and new workers are actually extremely curious to find out what the rules actually are, and there's nowhere else they're going to get that information," Hawkins, 30, says. "But the biggest hurdle is often actually reaching people. Too many locals don't know where their young workers are." Hawkins is an assistant head lifeguard in Surrey and member of CUPE 402.

Day is quick to note that just identifying young workers isn't enough. As with any equity-seeking group, these members need to feel respected and valued. If not, they'll take their loyalty, energy and commitment elsewhere. After all, unions have to compete for the attention of Canadian youth, just like everyone else.

"Even once you know who your young workers are and they know who you are, you need to find the people who want to play a role in the union, and mentor them so that they'll have the skills for the future," Day says.

"Help them find opportunities for union training, think of them first when you need someone to replace a shop steward or an executive position, and just encourage them to stay involved with the union," she says. That's the only way we're going to be able to move forward." ■

E-mail youngworkers@cupe.ca or visit www.youngworkers.cupe.ca for more information on the programs mentioned in this article.

KEEPING YOUNG WORKERS SAFE AND SAVVY

Every summer, thousands of young people across Canada enter the workforce for the first time. Sadly, for too many of them, that first job may be their last.

The evidence shows that, on average, one in seven young Canadian workers (ages 15-24) will be injured on the job. The workplace injury rate for young workers is more than twice that of the general population. After car accidents, the leading causes of death among young people are machine injuries and electrocutions.

In 2005, in British Columbia alone, 11 young workers died on the job, 151 were seriously injured and more than 9,000 were injured, according to WorkSafe BC. Every year in Manitoba, more than 15,000 15- to 19-year-olds get hurt badly enough to miss work and report the injury to the Workers' Compensation Board. In Quebec, according

to the provincial *Commission de la santé et de la sécurité au travail* (CSST), 24,000 people aged 24 and under are hurt at work each year.

The types of injuries sustained by young workers range from the dramatic, such as the inexperienced tree cutter maimed by heavy machinery, to the less obvious, like the store cashier who develops tendonitis. Poor training, insufficient supervision and young people not knowing their rights – such as the right to refuse unsafe work – are largely to blame. That's why CUPE, other unions and provincial workplace safety organizations have made it a priority to educate young workers and their employers.

"CUPE is making special efforts to ensure that young workers know about their legislated right to safe and healthy workplaces," says Anthony Pizzino, director of CUPE's national research, job evaluation, health and safety branch.

"Young workers are more likely to sustain work injuries than more mature workers. When these injuries happen at the start of a worker's career, they can have long-

term consequences for their health as well as our communities. Young workers should know that they can turn to their unions, who can help make their workplaces safer."

A recent incident at a Quebec Wal-Mart illustrates the work that needs to be done. According to media reports, the store manager was alerted to a bomb threat and asked store clerks to help search for the device. One young employee, badly shaken, later complained to her parents and the story went public. Wal-Mart defended itself by saying it didn't force anybody to participate in the bomb search. But it's clear the workers were not aware they could have said no.

CUPE supports and encourages initiatives that raise awareness of young worker health and safety. Most provincial workplace safety boards now have campaigns and resources aimed specifically at youth. WorkSafe BC's new Demand Safety campaign uses graphic images of severed hands and torn eyeballs to drive its message home.

The Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation Board used the same gory images successfully last year. This summer, the NSWCB's new youth campaign is called Not Worth It, and features an interactive website where visitors learn about injuries and hazards by "shopping" for replacement body parts. Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has a separate website for young workers, while Quebec's CSST launched a two-year youth action plan in 2004.

"CUPE will continue to work with its partners to ensure that young workers and their employers know their respective rights and responsibilities," Pizzino says. "No parent

Ontario's WSIB uses real stories to talk safety to youth.





Doug Lavallée

A new voice for Aboriginal members



Dan David
*writes about the founding of
CUPE's national Aboriginal council,
an event fired up with
a sense of hope and optimism
tempered by determination.*

Doug Lavallée wanders to the head table at the front of a meeting room at the Wanuskewin Heritage Park, a First Nations arts and heritage centre just north of Saskatoon. The occasion is the historic founding of CUPE's national Aboriginal council.

Lavallée is retired now, but he was once the regional director of CUPE in Saskatchewan. He is an honoured guest; held up as someone owed a great debt, referred to as one of a number of past CUPE members "who struggled for years to see this day." He looks slightly embarrassed by the attention. He's got a kind face that seems ready to crack a smile or a joke at the slightest provocation. But there's a set to his jaw as he prepares to tell the audience a story.

In a low voice, he begins to describe a day from his childhood. He was with his grandmother that day. As they walked toward the government office on the reserve, he noticed her hand shaking. He didn't understand why, but he didn't ask. Instead, hand-in-hand, they continued to walk toward the government office. The closer they got, the harder her hand shook.

"I suppose she was going in to pick up a welfare cheque or something," Lavallée remembers. There's a look in his eyes, and the room, usually filled with the sound of papers rustling or whispered conversations, is noticeably hushed.

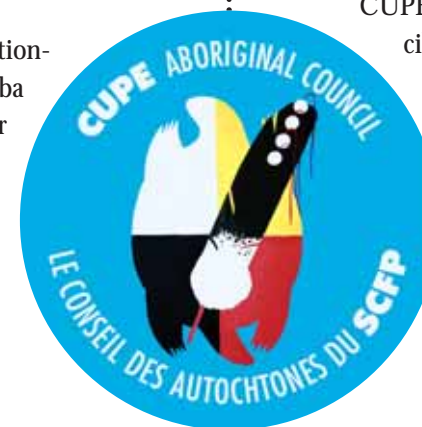
"We went up to this window. There's a man holding a cheque. My grandmother is standing in front of the window. This guy takes that cheque, and he's pulling it back and forth in the window. It's like he's teasing her. He's saying something like: 'Come on, smile for me. Smile or you don't get the cheque'."

Lavallée pauses and looks toward the ceiling, remembering the humiliation, before continuing. "I promised myself

that when I grew up, and I came across that guy, I'd squish him," Lavallée says with a grin. One feels the tension collapse as the crowd chuckles. "I never met that man again," Lavallée says, more seriously, "but I met a lot of people like him over the years. That's why we worked so hard to change things."

Lavallée is one of the trailblazers who helped push CUPE to this day, says National President Paul Moist. "In 1996 or so, Doug was telling the CUPE national executive to get our act together," he says. "That the population of Saskatchewan, the workforce of the province, was going to be increasingly Aboriginal. And that we hadn't done enough to reach out."

At the time, Moist sat on the CUPE national executive board representing Manitoba and Saskatchewan. "Doug was crystal clear



The council's logo uses symbols from Aboriginal cultures, like the turtle and eagle feather.

Delegates came from almost every province to talk about Aboriginal issues.



on what needed to be done," Moist recalls. "Health care needed to be restructured; it is – now. School boards had to be restructured; they have been. Finally, Doug said that Aboriginal Peoples would have to become a priority for the union. We're finally moving on this."

Moist spoke about the need for labour to address issues such as contaminated water on reserves, stalled and unresolved land claims, substandard education, and a lack of training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples. "These issues deserve to be on the agenda of Canada's largest union," he said.

Shared values

"It's been a long time coming," National Secretary-Treasurer Claude Généreux said at the founding of the council. He reminded people that there would be a lot of work ahead. He cited the \$5.5-billion deal between the federal and provincial governments and Aboriginal groups reached last fall in Kelowna, B.C.. The agreement set targets to improve housing, health, education and economic conditions for Aboriginal Peoples over the next five years. However, in their first budget, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives failed to honour the agreement.

The 50 or so people who attended the Wanuskewin gathering came from almost every province, even though CUPE has only three provincial Aboriginal councils: in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. (CUPE Ontario recently passed a motion to create a council.) They were



Leo Cheverie,
CUPE national diversity VP
for Aboriginal workers.



National President Paul Moist with co-chair
Joanne Webb.



Co-chair Brian Barron with CUPE
Saskatchewan Aboriginal council
senator Gerri Harris.



Young Aboriginal dancers
entertained the delegates.



Richard Gauthier

Mapping to organize in B.C.

This summer, an agreement in principle was signed between the federal and British Columbia governments to create a professional, First Nations-run school district to manage on-reserve schools.

“This represents a major organizing opportunity for CUPE,” says Richard Gauthier, a

member of CUPE 3523 (Central

Okanagan School District) who recently completed an Aboriginal mapping project for CUPE National.

Gauthier, drawing from an employee list representing more than a third of all bands in B.C., reached nearly every corner of the province in a quest to identify potential union members among First Nations employees. The project ran from mid-October 2005 to the end of March 2006.

The bulk of Gauthier’s work was to research where Aboriginal people live and work in B.C., determine who their employers are, and identify potential organizing opportunities.

“The government’s announcement is very timely,” he says. “There could be provincial school districts where you have only one employer, which from a union perspective could be a good thing, instead of dealing with little districts with eight staff. If they do move to forming a provincial school district, it will make it easier to negotiate contracts.”

Meanwhile, CUPE BC plans a follow-up to its successful Aboriginal gathering held in Kelowna two years ago. The second province-wide gathering will be held in Victoria Oct. 13-15.

“We’re really excited that this is happening,” says CUPE BC diversity vice-president John Thompson. “There have been so many positive outcomes from the first gathering in Kelowna, like the [B.C.] Aboriginal council being formed and the mapping project, to name just two. I’m sure the energy will be very high.”

■ Dan Gawthrop

there, says equality branch staff member Connie Kilfoil, because they understand the “very real shared values between those involved in Aboriginal rights and labour rights.” She attended as part of the B.C. delegation.

“Unions strive to protect workers from exploitation by bosses,” she explains. “In Aboriginal societies, the concept of sharing resources for the common good amongst members of the collectivity, is consistent with a saying in the labour movement that an injury to one is an injury to all. The tradition of decision-making by consensus is very compatible with the CUPE model of local autonomy, which respects the rights of locals to decide on their own affairs.”

Leo Cheverie, CUPE’s national diversity vice-president for Aboriginal workers, is from Prince Edward Island. He says CUPE needs the council for tangible reasons: jobs, equal opportunity and human dignity.

“Aboriginal workers aren’t represented in workplaces,” Cheverie says. “There are a lot of young Aboriginal workers entering the workplace, working for municipalities, in education and health care. We have to make sure there are opportunities for Aboriginal workers now, but also in the future. We need to make sure that CUPE, as an equal opportunity employer, employs more Aboriginal people to make sure they have a place in our union. We need CUPE to show leadership as a way of making sure that we stand up for all of our members, that we are able to grow stronger by being more inclusive.”

Aboriginal baby boom

To put this into perspective, consider the population boom occurring in Aboriginal communities.

In the general Canadian population, the post-war baby boom peaked more than 50 years ago, meaning more people will soon be leaving the workforce than entering it. However, the Aboriginal baby boom is still in full swing, as

figures from the 2001 Statistics Canada census of Aboriginal Peoples show. In 20 years, Winnipeg’s Aboriginal population grew from 16,000 to nearly 56,000. The most dramatic increase has occurred in Saskatoon, where the Aboriginal population grew from about 4,200 in 1981 to more than 20,000 in 2001.

The challenge facing employers lies in recognizing – and meeting – the employment and training needs of this growing population. This is particularly important in western Canadian cities, where First Nations, Métis and Inuit may comprise 8 to 15 per cent of the urban populations. Unless these challenges are recognized and met, Aboriginal people will continue to have a much lower share of jobs in the workplace – not for lack of trying, but due to decisions that fail to provide for them.

Some of these issues came forward throughout the two days of the conference. Delegates also discussed representation in bargaining groups, more and better training as facilitators, adapting materials to include more relevant content, and better support and networking within the union for Aboriginal members.

Participants shared their disappointments and frustrations, but also their successes. B.C. participants proudly described the advances they’ve made since founding their council two years ago. One positive outcome was a four-month mapping project, funded by CUPE National, to show where more organizing is possible in B.C.’s Aboriginal communities (see sidebar).

The council also chose two senators, Joanne Webb and Brian Barron, to act as co-chairs.

Webb is a member of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation in southern Ontario. New Credit is located beside the Six Nations territory, just down the road from Caledonia, where the recent occupation of a housing development

turned into an ugly standoff, with violence on all sides.

"As someone who has friends on both sides of the river, so to speak, it seems as though we've gone back quite a few pages," Webb says. "Divisions have appeared among people who have lived side-by-side peacefully for decades. Now this has happened and it's as though all of that progress in bringing people together has been destroyed, and it's affecting us as members too."

Webb says the tense situation in her backyard has underlined for her the necessity for a national Aboriginal council that can act as a place to identify concerns. "We need to give a voice to our Aboriginal members who often feel as though they can't speak about certain things," she says. "[The council] is important for getting those voices out there, to encourage people to be more assertive, to express themselves, and to assert their rights."

A huge step forward

For Webb's co-chair, the forming of a national Aboriginal council sends a clear signal, and not only to members in the union. "What CUPE has done may not have been accepted 100 per cent by everyone," says Barron, a member of CUPE 500, Winnipeg civic workers. "But it took the step to do it."

Barron says that how CUPE went about creating the council is as significant as why it did it. "The biggest thing is that CUPE asked for the help of Aboriginal Peoples," he notes "CUPE has educated and communicated with Aboriginal people in the past, but for the first time [nationally] it's asked Aboriginal people for help in making a place within the union where they can meet and discuss things among themselves."

"It's a huge step forward for the organization to ask for [our] help. Anyone who knows a little bit about Aboriginal cultures knows that something like that shows respect – and that means a lot to Aboriginal people," he adds. "CUPE is the only organization I know that has tried to deal with us respectfully. That's why I think it's now up to us all to make sure this works."

Gerri Harris is a senator on CUPE Saskatchewan's Aboriginal council. She believes the national council isn't just about the big ideas; it will also benefit the average Aboriginal worker.



Don Moran



Personal approach needed in organizing Aboriginal workers

CUPE's Aboriginal organizing strategy has been evolving over the years. As we started organizing workplaces or started making contacts on reserves, we faced many obstacles. These included a lack of understanding about unions in the Aboriginal community, opposition from Aboriginal leadership, questions regarding jurisdiction in labour relations matters, and the need for different approaches to organizing.

We learned that we had to build a positive image of our union and unions in general and to tailor our materials to the Aboriginal community. From the start, we realized that organizing Aboriginal workers couldn't be done in the traditional way.

First, organizers themselves should be Aboriginal so they understand the culture and traditions and can establish trust. A more personal approach is required, compared to the traditional strategy of calling a meeting of interested workers. Our Aboriginal organizers spend much time sitting and talking one-on-one with people.

We have also had to adjust our expectations of how an organizing drive should develop. Once, we were organizing a large Aboriginal workplace in Saskatchewan. After many meetings, just as it looked like the workers were about to sign union cards, they told us they had to talk to their elders first. It was frustrating because we were so close. But we had to respect their process and be patient.

CUPE has discussed different approaches to organizing in Aboriginal communities, such as holding a feast, an activity that involves the whole community and not just potential members. One of our contacts suggested that the idea of forming a union be put to a vote by the whole community. Our organizers have also developed a database and contact list for all the reserves and urban Indian

and Métis institutions in Saskatchewan. They have also been making presentations to some of the reserve schools.

These different approaches make us ask, what is the role of the union in the community? Unions such as CUPE subscribe to the idea of social unionism – that unions are not just fighting for bread and butter issues but have a role to play in creating a better society. When we look at the conditions on reserves – high unemployment, substandard housing, tragic suicide rates and poor drinking water – it becomes obvious that the union can play a broader role.

One way CUPE does this is by raising the issue of unsafe water on reserves and challenging the dominant strategy of turning to public private partnerships (P3s). As well, the union tries to educate its members to debunk racial stereotypes and myths about Aboriginal Peoples and seeks to develop broader support for the right to Aboriginal self-government, respect for treaties and so on. We use June 21, National Aboriginal Day, to raise awareness of these concerns.

In our strategy meetings with other Aboriginal CUPE activists and staff from across the country, we spend a lot of time discussing the social and economic conditions in Aboriginal communities. The only solution is to get Aboriginals working and contributing to the tax system rather than living off it.

■ Don Moran

Don Moran is co-chair of CUPE's Saskatchewan Aboriginal council. He has been involved in organizing Aboriginal workers for 25 years as a union activist and now as a CUPE national staff representative. This article is an edited excerpt from one that appeared in the Spring 2006 issue of Just Labour. It was based on a presentation to the Advancing the Union Equity Agenda conference in March 2005.

"The work situation is so unstable sometimes, but especially so when you have band councils that think they can fire you for no reason," she says. "With the union, people can have some job security. If someone feels they've been fired for no reason, the union will protect their rights. In the past, people didn't have things like health benefits or pensions. They can now, because the union is changing this. People can have some peace of mind that they might not have had before."

Harris has a lot of hope for the future of the national Aboriginal council, as well as for regional councils like hers in Saskatchewan. She sees the Internet as one way of establishing a network of Aboriginal councils in every province and territory.

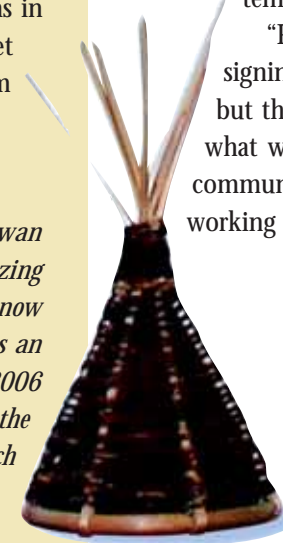
"We're building a national Aboriginal information superhighway," she says. "Everyone's very excited about this, because it means we can now email each other right across the country to stay in touch and trade information about what's happening."

By the end of the Wanuskewin meeting, the gathering had identified 22 issues the new council needs to address in its advisory role to CUPE's national executive board. The five top issues were youth awareness, organizing, underrepresentation in the workplace and in CUPE, Aboriginal awareness training and the formation of provincial Aboriginal councils. The council will meet again in November 2006, in conjunction with CUPE's national human rights conference in Vancouver.

"There is racism and there always will be," says Barron. "[But] instead of accepting or expecting paternalism, it is now incumbent upon us, the Aboriginal members, to step forward and engage others within the organization, take on those leadership roles, start working on some of the problems we have."

Webb is fired up with a sense of hope and optimism tempered by determination.

"People say, 'Oh, you're just interested in organizing, signing up new members,'" she says. "I tell them: yes, but that's really a small part of what I'm trying to do – what we're all trying to do. We're all trying to help our communities first and foremost. That's what we're all working for – our communities." ■



Innovative partnership agreement brings health care jobs to Saskatchewan Aboriginal workers

When employment equity plans began in the 1980s in Saskatchewan, about 2 per cent of the workforce was Aboriginal. Today, in workplaces with employment equity plans, the participation rate for Aboriginals is between 7.6 to 9.8 per cent. In workplaces without a plan, the participation rate is still at a dismal 2 per cent.

In November 2000, CUPE signed a partnership agreement with the Saskatchewan government to promote a representative workforce strategy. A representative workforce is one where Aboriginal people are present in all classifications and at all levels in proportion to their working age population.

From this general agreement flowed a tripartite agreement between the CUPE health care council, the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO) and the provincial government. A committee was formed to promote the strategy, to identify barriers in collective agreements and to make recommendations for change to the executive and bargaining committees from both the employer and the union. The health care sector was chosen because it was the largest public sector employer in the province and had the largest variety of job classifications.

The first changes were to the language of the collective agreement covering 14,000 health care workers in Saskatchewan. The tripartite committee of government officials, union, and employer representatives drafted contract language to provide for education, succession planning and retention of Aboriginal workers. The proposed language was presented to the members, who endorsed it. It was then presented to the union-employer bargaining committee, which agreed to it without making any changes at the bargaining table. The members ratified the contract.

The partners then successfully lobbied the executive council of government for funding of all educational programming needed for the strategy. This had to include preparing the workplace for Aboriginal people and vice versa. Overcoming

negative effects of equity programs and misunderstanding of Aboriginal people was a priority. A workshop was developed to dispel the myths and misconceptions. By February 2005, about 6,700 CUPE health care workers and managers had received the training.

CUPE also hired an Aboriginal education co-ordinator. At present, CUPE and the provincial government share the funding for this position.

Changing the attitudes of Aboriginal people toward unions, and particularly toward the health sector, was another focus. We found barriers to Aboriginal involvement through the partnership studies. We saw that seniority clauses in agreements were viewed negatively. As well, Aboriginal people were not applying for jobs because they felt they had little chance of being hired. This perception was reinforced by low representation of Aboriginal people in the health sector workforce.

Training was another key component. We worked with other stakeholders, such as Aboriginal and educational institutions, to ensure that Aboriginal people could receive training for health care positions. Meetings were set up to assure the training institutions that jobs would be provided and that enough training spaces would be available for Aboriginal students.

A “train the trainer” workshop was offered to workers in the health sector to ease the workload of the two facilitators from CUPE and SAHO. Three CUPE members took the training.

Today, more Aboriginal people work as special care aides, home care workers and licensed practical nurses, and there are more Aboriginal students entering the health care field, particularly in nursing.

About 1,500 Aboriginal people have been hired since the partnership agreements were signed. The participation rate of Aboriginals in Saskatchewan's health care sector was 1 per cent. It is now at 5 per cent.

■ Don Moran

ACROSS CANADA



Whistler is pretty, and still public

When you think about Whistler, B.C., you probably think about skiing, snowboarding, beautiful mountain scenery and all things healthy and outdoors. But if you're a water activist, you're thinking about a successful community campaign to keep Whistler's new sewage plant publicly operated.

In June, the council of the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) voted against going to referendum on a proposed public private partnership (P3) for a sewage treatment plant upgrade, effectively ending a proposal to privatize plant operation.

CUPE 2010, which represents municipal workers, was part of the Whistler Water Watch community coalition. Whistler Water Watch participated in a local public consultation called the alternative approval process (AAP).

“The key ingredients to success were the community coalition mounting an incredible campaign and the RMOW council listening to its community,” said Pete Davidson, president of CUPE 2010.

Because the proposed partnership agreement was to last longer than five years, the municipality was required by the community charter to consult electors. Under the AAP, 10 per cent of Whistler's electors had to complete response forms by a given deadline. If the minimum number of people signed the forms, council would then decide to either scrap the P3 plan or hold a referendum on the issue.



Betty McWhinnie and Pina Belperio of Whistler Water Watch.

By the deadline, thanks to a vigorous campaign, Whistler Water Watch had helped collect 1,848 forms – more than double what they needed. Council voted five to two not to take the issue to a referendum, and requested that RMOW staff proceed with a traditional design-build approach for the wastewater treatment plant.

Pina Belperio, a member of Whistler Water Watch and co-founder of Whistler's Council of Canadians chapter, helped deliver the signed forms to the municipality.

“Pretty quickly after we started the campaign, it was clear that the community did not want our sewage plant privatized,” she said. “This should be a lesson

for other municipal councils not to get sucked in by these P3 promoters.”

CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill congratulated the coalition on a successful campaign. “Make no mistake,” he said. “These types of campaign will be fought over and over throughout B.C. in the coming years and we want to see communities winning the fights against privatization, just like they did in Whistler.”

CUPE is expanding its Water Watch program into other regions of B.C. facing water privatization threats. Meanwhile, the fight against P3s in other areas, including recreational and health care facilities, continues. The lessons learned during the Whistler campaign will assist in future battles.

■ Roseanne Moran

Ontario university unions fight tuition fee hike



The Ontario government's decision to raise university tuition fees – by an average of 5 per cent and up to 8 per cent for professional programs – has had one positive effect. CUPE's university workers have strengthened their resolve to move forward with coordinated bargaining.

On June 5, five CUPE locals filed notice to bargain with their employers in an effort to coordinate their fight against tuition fee increases, among other issues at the bargaining table. Several other locals, representing both



academic and support workers, were already in negotiations.

“We cannot continue to bargain as if our employers are independent of the provincial government when so many provincial decisions, like lifting the freeze on tuition fees, affect us in the workplace,” said Janice Folk-Dawson, chair of the CUPE Ontario university workers’ coordinating committee.

“Members will be going to the table looking for language to protect our incomes from erosion due to tuition increases, protection from the increasing encroachment of the private sector into universities through contracting out and other security measures for both academic and support staff units,” she said.

CUPE locals filing in June were 233 (Ryerson University), 3902 (University of Toronto), 3907 (Ontario Institute

for Studies in Education at U. of T.), 3906 (McMaster University), and 4600 (Carleton University). Already at the table were CUPE 793 (University of Waterloo); service Local 3261 and child care Local 2484 at U. of T., CUPE 3905 (Lakehead), CUPE 229, 254 and 1302 (Queen’s University), and CUPE 2361 (University of Western Ontario).

“Coordinating our efforts means we all stand a better chance at bargaining collective agreements that give university workers the respect and dignity that comes with decent wages and working conditions,” Folk-Dawson said. CUPE represents about 20,000 university workers across Ontario. The coordinated bargaining effort will go hand-in-hand with a tuition fee campaign waged in coalition with students, faculty and the public.

■ Pat Daley



PEI paramedics join CUPE

Paramedics across Prince Edward Island have voted decisively for CUPE to represent them after the amalgamation of the five ambulance services on the island.

Tracy Fall, president of Neil’s Ambulance Services, CUPE 3324, says that our multi-sector pension plan was key to convincing paramedics to choose CUPE.

“When we went into this campaign, three unions – CUPE, the Union of Public Sector Employees and the International Union of Operating Engineers – represented the Island’s 67 paramedics. CUPE only had 23 members,” Fall said. “During the two-week campaign, we decided to focus on what CUPE offered as a union, and a big selling point was the multi-sector pension plan.”

CUPE campaigners also used the fact that they are in the smallest province in Canada to their advantage. “We decided to try to meet every paramedic on the island at least once,” Fall said. “We also kept our campaign to the facts, and it worked. We even received an e-mail from a paramedic who was overseas on a special project, telling us he supported CUPE and wanted to know if there was a way he could vote.”

When the Conservative government announced, just prior to Christmas, that PEI’s five ambulance services were going to be amalgamated, CUPE launched a campaign to change ambulance services from private to public delivery. Although CUPE was not successful in convincing the Conservative Pat Binns’



government to make ambulance services public, PEI paramedics appreciated our efforts.

“CUPE members talking about the value of the services they offer to Islanders resonated among the paramedics,” said CUPE PEI president Donald MacDonal. “I’m convinced this was a contributing factor in our victory. The message was clear. The members are CUPE’s strength and in our union, they come first.”

■ Danielle Savoie

Wait times top unionized worker concerns in N.S.



The biggest issue for unionized households in Nova Scotia is health care wait times, according to a Nova Scotia Federation of Labour survey conducted in the lead-up to the provincial election in June.

The NSFL carried out the first such province-wide poll to find out what topped members’ list of concerns. The province’s labour sector wanted to mount an “issues campaign” inspired by similar initiatives launched in Saskatchewan and during the January federal election.

More than 700 random interviews were conducted with adults in households where at least one occupant was a current or retired union member. Respondents were asked to rank 12 issues by importance.

After wait times, respondents said they were most worried about the high cost of home heating fuel, poverty and workplace health and safety.

“Wait times and home heating fuel should not be a big surprise,” said CUPE NS president Danny Cavanagh. “But the fact that unionized workers – supposedly the ones with the decent-paying jobs in our province – have named poverty in the top three reflects just how big a problem this issue is for Nova Scotians.”

“I was also very pleased to see healthy and safe workplaces in the top four. This tells us the hard work CUPE and other NSFL affiliates are doing to bring issues like workplace violence and on-the-job fatalities to the fore is starting to pay off,” he said.

The four top issues formed the basis of election campaign materials. These included leaflets distributed by NSFL affiliates and radio ads that aired during the final week of the campaign. For the first time, CUPE also direct-mailed over 8,000 leaflets to rank and file members. That’s more than half the provincial membership.

The provincial New Democrats gained five seats in the election. They now hold 20 seats, their highest-ever showing and just three fewer seats than the Progressive Conservatives’ minority government.

■ John McCracken

Atlantica free trade alliance protested in N.B.



CUPE members participated in a protest march at the “Atlantica” conference in Saint John, N.B. The conference examined the idea of an “economic alliance” between Atlantic Canada and the eastern United States. CUPE division presidents from the four Atlantic provinces also attended, urging public debate and warning against the implications of such trade agreements.

Top concerns for union households in N.S.

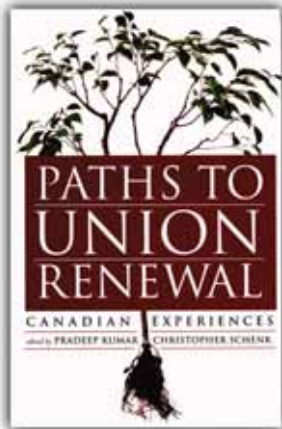
On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is unimportant and 5 is very important



Paths to Union Renewal

Edited by Pradeep Kumar and Christopher Schenk
Broadview Press

People who say unions are “passé” may be surprised to learn that, while union participation is falling all over the developed world, Canada’s labour movement has actually continued to grow. *Paths to Union Renewal* looks at some of the reasons behind this success, while offering insight into how we can maintain our strength in the future.



The first chapter offers an overview of the state of Canada’s unions. Brief, well-researched articles by a range of labour scholars and activists examine topics such as the ongoing struggle to increase union density. Of particular interest is Charlotte Yates’ analysis of women’s value to union revitalisation.

Chapter 2 features case studies of creative renewal and adaptation strategies from major Canadian unions. CUPE National staff members Morna Ballantyne and Jane Stinson offer insight into the historical and

current situation in our own union. Other examples come from the British Columbia Government Employees’ Union, the Canadian Auto Workers and the Steelworkers.

The book’s two final chapters study campaigning in the community and educating and developing union leaders.

In their introduction, the editors admit that when it comes to determining direction for the labour movement, “there are necessarily more questions than definitive answers.” They do not presume to give people a roadmap, as suggested by the book’s title. More modestly, they hope to stimulate reflection, debate and further study.

■ Natasha Gauthier

Reviewing our national strike fund

Two years ago, I announced the end of the solidarity levy. Shortly thereafter, the strike fund had reached \$25 million and we were able to put an end to the constitutional levy as well. These two levies fulfilled their purpose: they demonstrated the commitment of CUPE members to one another and they built the strike fund.

Today, we continue to build. The strike fund, now collecting about \$8 million a year in revenue from CUPE chartered organizations, stands at over \$30 million. Over the last 10 years, our annual usage has ranged from a low of \$8 million to a high of more than \$20 million.

Our 43-year history demonstrates that there is always a need for a strong national strike fund. There have been times when we did not have the financial strength to support one another. That is why we took collective action to build the strength we have today.



Claude Généreux

As we enter a new phase of our history, one free of financial crisis, it is time to stop and reflect on what we need from our strike fund and how we should get there. Many questions have surfaced. Is the fund strong enough? What are the new and emerging pressures on other areas of our budget, such as our operations and campaigns?

To entertain these questions with thoughtful discussion and free from the pressures of budget decisions, your national president and I have set aside a one-day meeting in September for the national executive board to take a long, hard look at the strike fund. We will review its history, the patterns of its annual revenue and expenditures, the rules we use to govern it, and the anticipated pressures it will undergo.

The fund is our members’ protection. It is the source of our strength and a reflection of our solidarity. I invite your comments and questions on the fund as well. Please write to me at the national office or e-mail me at cgenereux@cupe.ca.

In solidarity,

Claude Généreux
National Secretary-Treasurer



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