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## CUPE National Convention Highlights

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Sisters and Brothers:

It is with great pride that we write to you just days after the conclusion of our 23<sup>rd</sup> constitutional convention held in the beautiful city of Toronto.

We are proud of the vigorous debate and progressive agenda that delegates forged and while it is fresh in our minds, we offer the following very brief and memorable moments from convention:

1. This was one of the largest conventions in our union's history with 2,031 delegates and 40% of those were first-time delegates. Our union is undergoing a renewal with a new group of members ready to join an already strong group of leaders and activists. CUPE's future will be in good hands. In terms of gender breakdown, 52% of the delegates were sisters.
2. The centerpiece of our Strategic Directions 2007 – 2009 policy paper is a multi-million dollar commitment to fight privatization in all of its forms, wherever it arises across the country. Privatization is our biggest threat and we must always fight to protect public sector jobs and services. This was the message of our first national president, Brother Stan Little as he closed our first convention in 1963, and it is the message from this, our 23<sup>rd</sup> convention. We are incredibly proud that delegates have collectively embraced our renewed commitment to not only protect jobs, but to enhance public services in our communities.

The adoption of the Strategic Directions 2007 – 2009 policy paper commits CUPE to develop plans to increase the wages and pension coverage of all low-paid members of our union.

The paper also puts environmental issues and the threats posed by global warming on the front burner for our union.

3. Saskatchewan-born recording star and activist, Buffy Saint-Marie was our keynote speaker, and was one of the most inspirational speakers we have ever had at a national convention.

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Her thought provoking words, "When one has a billion, and a billion have none.... something is wrong", connected deeply with each and every delegate in our convention hall. We will seek her permission to produce a video of her address to share widely within our union.

4. Recommendations of the National Women's Task Force involving a Code of Conduct for all CUPE events, a mentoring program, a National Women's Bargaining Conference and increased resources for equality work were all overwhelmingly approved by delegates.

National Executive Board (NEB) elections resulted in doubling the number of sisters elected from three to six (out of 23) NEB seats. While there remains much to do, the National Women's Task Force work has laid a solid framework for bringing down barriers to women's full participation within our union.

We are deeply indebted to all members of the National Women's Task Force for their hard work and leadership over the past two years. Thank you sisters, from the bottom of our hearts.

5. Debate on international issues saw delegates overwhelmingly approve resolutions denouncing the crackdown in Burma, (also known as the Union of Myanmar), on basic human rights and the Burmese people's pursuit of free elections and democracy.

The convention also adopted a resolution in opposition to Canada's current military role in Afghanistan.

6. In an outpouring of solidarity and support, delegates donated and pledged over \$163,000 in support for locked out and striking members on the line immediately prior to and during convention:

<b>Local 15</b>	City of Vancouver (81 days)
<b>Local 1004</b>	City of Vancouver (88 days)
<b>Local 391</b>	Vancouver Public Library (88 days)
<b>Local 1450</b>	Quebecor Media (6 months ongoing)
<b>Local 1872</b>	Quebecor Media (6 months ongoing)
<b>Local 2808</b>	Quebecor Media (6 months ongoing)

(Note: All donations must be received by Friday, November 30, 2007. Cheques should be made payable to CUPE National, we will then match the total amount raised and distribute the money to the Locals. Every dollar will go to the striking / locked out members).

7. CUPE delegates observed the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty with a spirited rally throughout the streets of Toronto. Our convention stood with 38 million people in 110 countries in a silent dedication "Stand Up Against Poverty," sponsored by Oxfam and Make Poverty History, towards the eradication of poverty. This action broke a Guinness World Record.

Delegates marched to the Holiday Inn on King Street to support locked out members of UNITE-HERE Local 75. On the eve of convention we pulled our business from this hotel, affirming our longstanding policy of not patronizing anti-union businesses.

We also joined the "Pensions Picnic" held on October 18<sup>th</sup> by Local 1750 (employees of Ontario's Workers Safety and Insurance Board) to press for their longstanding pursuit of a jointly trusteed pension plan.

8. Delegates amended CUPE's National Constitution, Article 14.1 (v) to expand the use of the Convention Assistance Fund to provide assistance to small locals for national conferences, in addition to national conventions. Now our national union can help smaller locals attend a greater number of CUPE National events.

Delegates also approved the framework for a national energy policy for CUPE, and endorsed a resolution opposing media convergence in Canada.

9. Ten sector forums were very well attended on the day prior to convention opening where delegates discussed many resolutions and the priorities for sector activism over the next two years.

10. At a number of points during convention, delegates denounced the Harper government over a range of issues, including cancellation of Canada's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol, the Kelowna Accord and funding agreements for a Pan-Canadian universal not-for-profit child care system. Delegates also spoke of the devastating impact of cuts to literacy and women's groups, unnecessary cuts in light of the \$14 Billion federal surplus realized in each of the past two years.

On both foreign and domestic policy fronts the Harper Conservatives stand apart from the values of average Canadians. When we next go to the polls federally, CUPE will be front and centre promoting public services and working to defeat Harper.

## **National Strike Fund**

Delegates affirmed the 2001 convention decision to create a separate strike fund, to be used only for strike pay, strike averting campaigns and interest arbitration costs, by defeating a resolution seeking to expand the use of the fund for political campaigns against regressive government attacks.

This decision, while approved by a majority of delegates, caused concern among some Ontario delegates who left the convention floor twice, during the last two days of convention.

As National Officers we fully embrace all decisions made by our parliament, our national convention. Having said this, we acknowledge this issue needs both our attention and our leadership. The truth is, we resource all strikes and we fight back against all regressive government attacks on members. This is the history of our union, a history of which we are all proud.

Central to understanding our experience are the following two points:

CUPE's strike fund does not distinguish between legal and illegal strikes (as defined by governments and labour boards). For example, in 2005 we spent about \$4 million on strike pay for BC school board workers who respected the teacher's picket lines in that group's province-wide illegal strike action.

In Ontario, health care workers are denied the right to strike by legislation. This includes the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU), which has a proud history of militant job action and campaigning to defend public Medicare and our members' jobs. Since the inception of the Strike Fund in 2001, OCHU members have received \$1.68 million from all three national funds to enable them to respond to regressive government attacks. We were proud to support such campaigns, and will continue to do so.

## **Final Words**

In closing, it was an exciting week in Toronto, one that we will never forget. We thank each and every local who sent delegates. We thank the delegates themselves for their passionate debate and solidarity.

While there are too many highlights to list in this brief report, we thank all activists and staff responsible for the evening forums held during convention, they were both informative and fun. And a special thank you to the members and staff who came together to form the CUPE Choir and Drum groups, who performed at convention Friday morning...their performances were incredible!

We thank the hundreds of members of our staff whose hard work contributed greatly to making our convention run smoothly and effectively. And we pledge CUPE's full support for the staff members (and their families) who fell ill or lost loved ones during convention.

On a personal note, we are both honoured and humbled by the confidence shown in us, through our re-election as National Officers. We do indeed work for the best union in Canada, and we pledge to do our utmost to live up to your expectations and to pursue unity and solidarity within our ranks in order that we may continue to effectively represent the 560,000 members we are privileged to represent.

Thank you all for making this past week a memorable one.

In solidarity,



PAUL MOIST  
National President



CLAUDE GÉNÉREUX  
National Secretary-Treasurer