

CUPE National Convention, November 1 to 5, 2015

It was very exciting to attend the National convention, and I'm thankful for the opportunity.

So many things happened this week!

It was fascinating to see all the province being represented, all sitting in the same room. It was a very powerful feeling to know that I'm only one person, but I'm a part of something so huge, all over Canada

Some of the things that stand out for me are the new, young voices – so full of passion, insight and energy. I was very impressed with the ideas they expressed and I'm looking forward to hearing more from them.

There were opportunities to meet and greet with CUPE members from all over Canada as well with some social events planned.

During the week, one of the highlights for me was the National CUPE president! Fred Hahn from Ontario and Mark Hancock from BC were the only 2 running, and as flamboyant, energized and motivated as Fred was to take the position, Mark won the election.

One event that happened during the week that was very negative, was the racial remarks made to a woman of colour in regards to an event that happened. Apparently someone felt threatened by a certain group of people, and made some comments which were offensive, and it came out on the floor of the convention when this woman spoke out against the comments and the feelings they evoked. It was mentioned a few times that in our Code of Conduct that harassment of any kind will not be tolerated. It was shameful to hear that this still takes place in this day and age, but hopefully for all those involved it was a learning experience.

There was also a devastating blow to our members who don't have a strike fund like we do. Some Locals have to wait the 2 weeks with no pay until National kicks in with strike pay. There was some talk about how this happened, as the vote was lost by only 34 votes, but many people had left the hall toward the end of the day. Everyone I spoke with seemed to agree, the thought was that this resolution wouldn't be brought up so close to the end of the day considering it was so important and would affect so many locals. The overall consensus was that with so many leaving it would be put over to the following morning.

We also had speakers and videos each day. Mandi Gray, a York University grad student, Local 3903, was shown by video speaking out against sexual and relationship violence on campus.

Lee Saunders came to speak about the union he is affiliated with, AFSCMA, in the US. That union consists of approx. 1.5 million workers.

Tom Mulcair was present to speak with the convention, and to encourage CUPE to continue the fight against austerity and for workers across Canada.

I was very interested in what Murray Sinclair had to speak about. His topic was on the residential schools and the treatment of aboriginal children. Many children suffered horribly at the hands of educators, and even our government, in the quest to save the savages.

Direct quote: "When the child is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages: he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write"

Sir John A. Macdonald (1883)

On a more personal note, I was able to see some sights of Vancouver and take pictures of the amazing harbours and mountains. It's truly a breathtakingly beautiful place to visit, and I hope to get back one day on my own.

Thank you again for the opportunity to represent the members of Local 973 at the National Convention, 2015.

LISA WETTLAUFER, COUNTY OF WELLINGTON