

## CUPE National Bargaining Conference Report – February 5-8, 2013

Linda Jones, Marlene Murphy and Karyn Noble attended the 1<sup>st</sup> National Bargaining Conference in Ottawa, Ontario. Below are their reports:

### President Linda Jones:

As I begin to write this report on the Free Collective Bargaining Conference it is just days after we have officially signed our new Agreement. I know some of you may ask why we felt the need to attend a conference on this subject if we were done bargaining. The answer to that is clear. We begin right away to see what we were not successful in gaining in the last round that our members truly will benefit from in the future. Although we only go every few years it is an ongoing process.

The conference was set up in such a way that we were able to connect with people who work in our sector from all across the country. It was eye opening to say the least. What we discovered was that PEI overall has been and continues to be the envy of many other provinces. That is as a result of the hard work and dedication put in by many people.

Those of us who attended the conference reported on what hit home for them and what they took from it. I will try not to repeat what others have reported on. I want to touch on 2 areas that registered for me. The first one was the comparison made by President Paul Moist on “Then and Now”. When he talked about CUPE National celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary he spoke how at that time many employers would have women sign a paper that said they would resign from that position if they got married. In other words you would not be allowed to keep that job if you were a married female. For all of us who are married and for all who have mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters, we would not be able to have our careers. Now because of the right to free collective bargaining, men and women have parental leave and family days and hopefully health and pension benefits. We want to keep moving forward and not lose or make concessions that 50 years from now people will look back and feel we did not keep the momentum going in the fight. We want to see more changes that improve the lives of the working people.

The other area that really helped to open my eyes was the discussion on “The Right to Work”. Hearing this term seems like it’s a good thing but wait, what does it mean to us as union members. If this is forced on us by any government, it means that anyone can be hired for our jobs and have all the rights and benefits we have. They can do this without paying union dues so in the future if most people decide to do this then we no longer have the ability to bargain. Locals would have no funds and no support to move ahead. And so the downward spiral would begin for all. The \$20 or \$25 that is deducted from our pay cheques is a small price to pay to maintain and improve things like our pensions and health benefits. We would stand to lose a lot more than \$20. If you do the Math on this, paying our dues to belong to a union is the smart choice for our future. We sometimes ask “What is the union doing for me?”. Talk to others out there who have no paid storm days or sick days, family days or no pension or health plan. These are only some

of the things our union has done for us. There is strength in numbers so the request we have for all of you is to show up when a meeting or a ratification vote or a rally is happening. The quote I remember is; "More Voice More Choice". Please add your voice to mine so we are heard. It starts with the grass roots and for us that means to begin showing up and continue showing up, so that we keep the right to Free Collective Bargaining as this is the best way to protect our future. This conference was one of the best I have been a part of. I thank you for the opportunity.

### **Sister Karyn Noble:**

"Over 1000 CUPE members and leaders attended this 1<sup>st</sup> National Bargaining Conference, the largest CUPE conference ever. It was an honor to be there! There was a jammed packed schedule of exciting and extremely knowledgeable speakers and meetings. We met each day as an Education Sector (it was really interesting to hear the challenges and successes from education workers across Canada) As well as the PEI group met to strategize provincially.

The goal of the conference was to move forward to build a better, stronger Canadian society. In these days of governmental austerity measures Canadians and unions are saying "enough is enough!" Governments are forcing unions to face concessions, stripping the rights to the free collective bargaining process. As CUPE's National President, Paul Moist stated "We cannot accept any form of Right to Work Legislation!"

The good news is CUPE is mobilizing members and fighting back smartly - successfully defending contract arbitration, refusing to sacrifice the benefits we have gained historically.

CUPE is proud of the achievements of our public sector employees and the services we provide. These services make **Canada FAIR** and we will fight to defend public services for every Canadian across the country. The link between unions and politics is important as unions continue to bargain for safe workplaces, benefits, pensions etc. – **these benefit ALL Canadians!**

CUPE with a membership of over 650,000 members is the largest union in Canada. 2013 is CUPE's 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary and the Year of the Young Worker. CUPE's power is in our members. As Paul Moist stated – "Growth, progress, struggle – these are the hallmarks of 50 years of CUPE."

There was a very interesting economic panel reframing the debate between private corporations and banks versus public services creating jobs, benefitting everyone by driving the economy. One especially interesting and passionate speaker was Anne Legare Dawson who stated "The cause of unions is the cause of the world."

I absolutely loved it when she addressed the issue of the attitudes of non- unionized workers who attack unionized workers saying – "You guys have it so good, paid sick days, benefits, good pensions etc., etc.:" She said that we shouldn't apologize for this – rather we should be saying

“Yeah you’re right – We’ve been successful - I’m proud that I have these things – they have been fought for long and hard! We *all* should be paid more; the Public Sector sets the standard. *You* should be asking - How come you’re not fighting for the same things? Why are we allowing the inequalities to exist? How come Canadians have allowed 1% of Canadians to control 99% of the wealth in Canada? The 1% needs the 99% and we all need each other. When she said this the light bulb in my brain went off! Something to think about....

Yes there are huge bargaining challenges out there. But CUPE members have power by mobilizing, standing in solidarity, fighting back strategically and smartly. Here on PEI we have been very fortunate – we are not experiencing wage freezes, concessions and the right to free collective bargaining has been maintained.

This was an amazing conference – one of the best I’ve ever attended!” Thank you to the Local for sending me.

**Sister Marlene Murphy:**

“Attending the First National Bargaining Conference held in Ottawa was such an honor. I was a little intimidated at first, but after receiving warm welcomes from all my "brothers and sisters", I soon felt right at home. Listening to the many powerful speakers such as National President Paul Moist, and former National Director of Equality for CUPE, Anne McGrath, was moving and emotional. They spoke with such enthusiasm and pride for the Union, I was awestruck. In my view the Conference was to get CUPE members from all locals across the country, “fired up”. Many questions and comments were put forth by the guest speakers as well as the union members. Many members who went to the microphones to voice their opinions and told their stories of what they had been through while bargaining was such an eye opener. We here on PEI for the most part are very fortunate with our collective bargaining. What I enjoyed the most about the Conference was the fact that anyone could say what they felt needed to be said and everyone in the room, which was around one thousand members, listened. What I will try to work on as a CUPE member is to get involved more, open the channels of communication, and stayed "fired up" about the union. My favorite moment at the Conference was at the end when many very young, new members spoke about how excited they were to be involved in such a powerful union. Overall the Conference was amazing.”