

CUPE National Convention 2023 Delegates report



We would like to thank the local for sending us, Kirk, Page, Amy, Nykita, and Heidi, to the CUPE National Convention, held in Quebec City the week of October 21-28, 2023. Over 2200 delegates representing 740,000 CUPE members from across Canada attended. The schedule was a full one, beginning with sectoral caucuses and a welcome reception on Sunday and running through to the end of convention business on Friday.

Some of the issues to be raised in the Post Secondary caucus included follow up on the Laurentian University debacle, which has increased calls for financial transparency at the University of Regina and other institutions; the commodification of housing as well as post-secondary institutions becoming landlords; executive bloat; living wage fights; the tuition hike at Quebec Universities; and intellectual property. We also heard the outcome of some strikes and campaigns, and some wins in bargaining and organizing.

Page attended the 2SLGBTQIA+ Workers' caucus bright and early Monday morning where talk focused on some of the fights around the ongoing Anti-trans and Anti-SOGI protests; the pushback against Scott Moe using the notwithstanding clause in Saskatchewan; plus, the campaign for the Constitutional Amendment, C9 that would add diversity representation to the National Board. One of the wins that was highlighted was the Gay Men's Rugby team in Vancouver who are hoping to travel to an international competition in Italy next year; the member who spoke said the team was thriving as it was also breaking some stereotypes and boundaries in men's sports.

Monday also saw the official open of Convention, and after a welcome from CUPE Quebec, we heard and debated the President's Report. Midday there were two more caucuses: first the CUPE BC caucus in which we discussed several important resolutions that we hoped would reach the floor for debate. Then an equity caucus (for all equity groups) encouraged members to bring up some of the resolutions from across the equity groups to better coordinate an understanding of each other's issues. After lunch, we heard and debated the Secretary-Treasurer's report before getting into election forums.

Monday evening, Kirk attended the District Council caucus while Page attended the Human Rights Forum. At the District Council caucus, important discussion surrounded the situation in Ontario where there has been a steep decline in District Council activity, leading to a reduction in the number of Councils. In the Human Rights forum, the focus was on immigration and the fact that Canada has a robust system to welcome those refugees who come through official channels but continues to turn a blind eye to those seeking asylum outside official channels.

The business of convention continued Tuesday with committee presentations and reports, plus debate of emergency resolutions, constitutional amendments, and other resolutions. We also got our first look at the Strategic Directions document. Over the lunch hour the Women's Caucus met and after convention closed, Kirk and Page attended the Persons with Disability caucus which included a lot of discussion about the lack of accessibility for many in the room.



Wednesday opened with Gurdeep Pandher and a Bhangra lesson before we got into the business of elections. Mark Hancock was reelected as President and Candace Rennick was reelected as Secretary-Treasurer. Regional caucuses then broke out to select their caucus choices for representation on the board and most were uncontested; Karen Ranellata was endorsed as General Vice President for the West, with Trevor Davies and Barb Nederpel both endorsed as Regional Vice Presidents.



Over the lunch hour there was a rally to support cannabis dispensers looking to get wage parity with liquor store workers, and the Common Front for all public workers in seeking a fair wage increase to match inflation. Most of our delegates were able to take part.



The afternoon session included more debate on Strategic Directions; Kirk and Page spoke to issues around apprenticeships (under Protecting work), and accessibility accommodations (under Human Rights), respectively. No one from our delegates was able to attend the Global Justice Forum.



Thursday was heavily focused on getting through debate on amendments and resolutions. While some important changes were made to the Constitution to reduce duplication of work, the proposed amendment to add Diversity Seats was defeated, following emotional debate and a call for electronic balloting that involved a challenge to the chair and essentially the floor deciding to go against the constitution (as convention business goes, this was “new territory” and quite exciting for the nerds among us). We also heard more committee reports and completed the elections for General and Regional Vice Presidents, Trustees, and the two Diversity Vice Presidents (Indigenous: Debra Merrier was reelected with John Kubrakovich as alternate; Racialized workers: Aubrey Gonsalves was reelected with J.R. Simpson alternate). We also adopted the final report of the Safe Union Spaces Working Group.



Friday included the presentation of the revised Strategic Directions document which incorporated Kirk’s and Page’s requested additions, and a visit from Jagmeet Singh before getting back into the last block for resolutions. We debated just a couple more before quorum was lost and Convention was officially closed. Locals, Divisions, and District Councils submitted 39 Constitutional Amendments and 221 Resolutions for consideration; 9 Constitutional Amendments and 18 Resolutions made it to the floor for debate. Four Emergency Resolutions were also submitted during the Convention, three of which were debated and adopted. The remaining resolutions and amendments were referred to the Executive Board for consideration prior to the close of convention.