

## Political strength leads to historic school board agreement

Following the tentative settlement that was reached two weeks ago between the CUPE PDT Bargaining Team and the School Boards of Ontario, with the assistance of representatives of the Ministry of Education, a leadership meeting was held in Toronto on Monday June 9<sup>th</sup>. More than 300 CUPE Ontario school board workers attended the special meeting, which was a decisive phase of the Provincial Discussion Table (PDT) process for CUPE.

After a full day analyzing the document and debating the issues involved in the central bargaining process, members came to a final vote. Without any exception, every local fully endorsed the tentative settlement, committing to bring back the document to their own members in order to get it ratified at the local level along with the results of local bargaining.

### History in the Making

"This process is clearly history in the making for the school board sector," CUPE Ontario President Sid Ryan told meeting participants. "This PDT represents some very significant gains under very difficult economic conditions, particularly compared to other unions in the sector. For that we need to thank the reference group, the bargaining committee and locals for putting their trust in CUPE and in this process."

The agreement is the culmination of years of political bargaining by CUPE Ontario, locals and their members to address key issues affecting school support workers arising from the faulty funding formula introduced in the 1990s.

Ryan and Terri Preston, OSBCC chair, opened the meeting by reviewing the whole central bargaining process: "A lot has been done by your bargaining committee since the first leadership meeting in January", said Preston. "Your concerns and the eight priorities you had identified were taken in consideration since the beginning and during every PDT meeting. We are confident that we've achieved the best results we possibly could given the financial reality that we had to deal with."

After the positive vote, Preston was overwhelmed by the resounding support for the work of the bargaining committee, but also realistic looking ahead: "Congratulations to all of you. We were able to rally every local around common issues and then address these questions at the PDT. However, we also need to remind ourselves that lot of work remains to be done before we can really celebrate."

The last major step before a real central agreement is now local bargaining. Before the PDT package becomes fully part of every collective agreement, local leadership will have to make sure that their own issues are settled at their table in a timely manner.

In order to achieve this coordinated bargaining, communication will remain a priority. It will be each local's mandate to keep in constant contact with CUPE staff and make sure they are on pace with the rest of the executives regarding bargaining and local issues. As usual, support will be available from the OSBCC representatives and CUPE personnel.

To assure follow-up, a special bargaining conference is scheduled for mid-September, mid way through local bargaining and a couple of months before the final deadline. Details of this meeting will be sent to participating locals in a few weeks.

### **Impressive results**

Answering questions on the proposed settlement, the OSBCC committee was proud to say that all eight issues identified in January by the members were clearly answered: violence in the workplace, professional development, 7 hours work day for EA's, adequate staffing level, supervision of students, instructors issues, roles and responsibilities of EA's, wages and benefits for all classifications.

To these eight items, a ninth was added by the CUPE bargaining team, regarding green schools and the use of toxic products. We have to keep in mind that all gains were achieved in spite of a difficult economical forecast and declining enrolment in schools throughout Ontario.

With the PDT tentative agreement in place the focus now will be shifting to winning local settlements on the key issues adopted at the leadership meeting and on the local bargaining initiatives of the CUPE School Board Locals in Ontario.

Information: Contact your local CUPE executive, check out the CUPE Ontario website <http://www.cupe.on.ca/>, or join the CUPE school boards Listserv. If you wish to receive this newsletter by fax please send your fax number.

In solidarity,

Your bargaining committee:

Terri Preston	OSBCC Chair
Susan Hanson	OSBCC
Marc Boisvert	OSBCC
Frank Ventresca	OSBCC
John Weatherup	Local 4400
Sid Ryan	CUPE Ontario president
Antoni Shelton	CUPE Ontario Division
Linda Thurston-Neeley	CUPE Assistant Director
Brian Atkinson	CUPE Assistant Director
André Lamoureux	CUPE Assistant Director
Brian Blakeley	CUPE School Boards Coordinator
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