

**Report Back from the CUPE 3903 Student Power Working Group
at the “Student Activist Assembly”**

October 12 & 13, 2012

Hosted by the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario

The Student Activist Assembly was attended by roughly 300 delegates from throughout Ontario. The event was held over two days of 32 workshops during four sessions (eight concurrent workshops per session). The workshops were classified as either “Issues Workshops” or “Skills Workshops”. There were 16 workshops in either grouping.

Issues Workshops were designed to educate participants about specific topics; whereas Skills Workshops focused on strategies and tactics participants could use to implement campaigns on their respective departments and campuses.

Issues Workshops included the following (the Student Power delegate attended the highlighted sessions): Understanding Who's Who in Post-Secondary Education; Actively Fighting Poverty; What the F Is Up With Feminism?; **The Economics of Free Education**; **International Student Struggles**; Food (In)Security on Campuses; How the Tar Sands Affect Us All; Building a Radical Disability Movement; **Ontario's Education Crisis**; Troops Out Now!; The Politics of Queer Organizing; **The Rise of Corporate Interest on Campus**; From Student Codes of Conduct to the G20; The Austerity Agenda; Support For Our Aboriginal Communities; Trans Rights Left Behind.

Skills Workshops included: **Educate, Agitate, Organize!**; Facilitating Effective Meetings; Social Media as a Campaign Tool; **Building Your Volunteer Base**; **Grad Students United!**; Building an Inclusive Movement; High School Students Push Back; Creative Outreach and Engagement; **Why Departmental Organizing Works**; Building a Message Box; Effective Public Speaking; Corporate Language to Push Back on the Corporate Agenda; Direct Action;

Facilitators of the workshops spoke to the importance of identifying and mobilizing with a focus on local issues, maintaining a momentum on campus by way of having short (voluntary) task oriented meetings and plugging into other like-minded activities and groups on campus. Further, many of the Skills Workshops stressed the importance of generating campaigns on a departmental and campus-wide basis. Specific attention was given to identifying “goals, strategies, and tactics” for both “reactive” and “proactive” type campaigns. A main theme throughout the sessions was the importance of door-to-door outreach and mobilizing, and working with undergraduate students.

The session Grad Students United! was co-facilitated by York University Graduate Student Association President, Carolyn Hibbs & Laurentian Graduate Student Association President, Brendan Lehman. The session focused on graduate student organizing, communication methods, and mutual support between graduate and undergraduate students. About 20 participants from Windsor, Queens, Laurentian, York, UofT, Carleton, the University of Ottawa, Guelph, Western and McMaster were present. Group discussion focused on shared issues affecting all Grads.

The issues highlighted were:

- 1) The reconfiguration of degree requirements
- 2) Lack of accountability around funding
- 3) Changes to work-study policies
- 4) Fees to take courses for language requirement component of degree

- 5) Tuition hikes not pegged to t.a. wages
- 6) Workload not distributed evenly over ta'ships
- 7) Expansion of unfunded grad programs
- 8) Joblessness after completing graduate school
- 9) Privatization of funding and research

The Student Power delegate also had an opportunity to attend the “York University breakout session,” an informal gathering of delegates from the York Federation of Students and Osgoode Hall Law School. This session proved to be quite stimulating as the 25 delegates spoke about the importance of resurrecting a campus-wide coalition of activist groups and the importance of teacher-student alliances. It was decided that in the coming weeks, the YFS, Osgoode Hall Law School students and Student Power will organize a joint Graduate, Professional, and Undergraduate student panel discussion on trends in employment for newly graduated students.

The closing plenary was quite inspiring, with presentations from four heavy-weights in the global student movement. Delegates heard from Ana Garcia Rubio of El Sindicato De Estudiantes (Federation of Students), the largest representative student organization in Spain; Panagiotis Louvros of the Panhellenic Coordination of Student General Assemblies and Occupation; Rodrigo Echeopar of the Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Católica de Chile in Santiago (Catholic University of Chile Federation of Students); and Marianne Breton Fontaine, former executive member of the students' union at Cégep du Vieux Montréal, and Editor of Jeunesse Militante.

The two and a half hour closing plenary was simultaneously-translated in English, Spanish, and Sign. Each presenter stressed the importance of door-to-door and departmental organizing. They continuously reminded the plenary that building a momentum to organizing a movement takes years, but that it is a goal worthy of the time and discipline needed. They shared their victories and defeats, hopes and fears, but more importantly, they displayed a deeply humane commitment to organizing. Ultimately, the Student Activist Assembly showed the importance of skills training for organizers, and the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario is one network that students must utilize to mobilize successfully.