

# **Report on CUPE Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee (OUWCC) Conference 2026**

**Submitted by: Shivam Gupta**

**Local: CUPE 3906**

**Conference Dates: February 26 – March 1, 2026**

## **1. Introduction**

I would like to sincerely thank CUPE 3906 for providing me with the opportunity to attend the CUPE Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee (OUWCC) Conference 2026. It was an enriching experience and my first time attending this conference. The event brought together CUPE members and leaders working in the university sector from across Ontario to discuss challenges facing university workers, share strategies, and build solidarity across campuses.

The conference included keynote presentations, panel discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities. These sessions addressed key issues affecting university workers, including university funding, governance, workplace safety, artificial intelligence, and broader social issues such as climate justice and equity in the workplace.

I attended the conference from February 26, 2026, to March 1, 2026.

## **2. Opening Session and Welcome**

The conference began on February 26 with registration followed by the official opening session. The event began with a Land Acknowledgement, recognizing the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples, followed by the UN Declaration on the International Decade for People of African Descent and the CUPE Equality Statement, emphasizing CUPE's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Opening remarks were delivered by union leaders including Yolanda McClean, CUPE Ontario Secretary-Treasurer, who welcomed participants and emphasized the importance of collective organizing among university workers across the province.

## **3. Panel Discussion: Trends and Sector Threats**

One of the early sessions included a panel discussion on Trends and Sector Threats in the University Sector, featuring presentations from sector researchers and OUWCC representatives.

The panel highlighted several challenges currently facing university workers in Ontario, including:

- Increasing reliance on precarious and contract-based employment
- Budget constraints and funding pressures on universities
- Privatization and outsourcing of campus services
- Administrative expansion and changing governance structures

The discussion emphasized the need for unions to remain proactive in addressing these issues through collective bargaining, organizing, and policy advocacy.

#### **4. Artificial Intelligence**

A session on Artificial Intelligence (AI) explored how emerging technologies are transforming workplaces in the university sector.

The presenters discussed the growing use of AI for administrative decision-making, data analysis, and monitoring workplace productivity. Concerns were raised regarding:

- Increased workplace surveillance
- Potential job displacement or restructuring
- Ethical concerns surrounding algorithmic decision-making

The session emphasized the importance of unions negotiating protections around the use of AI technologies to ensure that technological changes do not negatively impact workers' rights, job security, or working conditions.

#### **5. Group Workshops**

One of the workshops I attended focused on Reading and Understanding University Finances. This session aimed to help union members better understand how universities in Ontario receive funding and how financial resources are allocated.

CUPE researchers explained the different sources of university funding, including government funding, tuition revenue, and research grants. The workshop also discussed how universities develop their budgets and the accounting practices commonly used in the sector.

A key takeaway from the session was the importance of critically examining claims made by university administrations about financial crises. By understanding institutional finances more clearly, unions can challenge misleading narratives and advocate more effectively for fair wages, job security, and improved working conditions for members.

Another workshop focused on University Governance and Building Union Power on Campus. This session explored how universities in Ontario are governed and how decision-making structures influence policies that affect workers.

The workshop examined the legal framework that governs universities, including their legislative charters and their relationship with the provincial government. Participants learned about the roles played by Boards of Governors, senior administrators, and academic leadership in shaping institutional priorities.

A major component of the workshop involved power-mapping exercises, where participants identified key decision-makers within their own institutions and analyzed where influence and financial control are concentrated.

## **6. Workplace Violence Prevention Workshop**

On February 28, I attended a workshop on Preventing Workplace Violence, which focused on identifying risk factors that can lead to violence in the workplace and strategies for preventing such incidents.

The session examined the legal responsibilities of employers to protect workers from violence and harassment. Participants discussed common workplace risk factors, including:

- High-stress work environments
- Lack of proper reporting mechanisms
- Insufficient training and prevention policies

The workshop emphasized the importance of strong health and safety frameworks, proactive prevention strategies, and union involvement in advocating for safer workplaces. Participants also discussed practical steps that unions can take to support members who experience workplace violence and to ensure that employers fulfill their legal obligations to maintain safe working environments.

## **7. Additional Presentations and Discussions**

The conference also included several additional presentations on broader social and policy issues affecting workers.

A Retiree Presentation highlighted the continued role that retired union members play in supporting labor advocacy and mentoring new activists.

A panel discussion on Underfunding and Cutbacks in Universities examined how financial pressures affect workers on a day-to-day basis, including staff shortages, increased workloads, and reductions in services.

Another session focused on Climate Justice, discussing how environmental issues intersect with workers' rights and how unions can advocate for sustainable and equitable climate policies.

## **9. Networking and Collaboration**

Beyond the formal sessions, the conference provided valuable networking opportunities with CUPE members from universities across Ontario. These conversations allowed participants to share experiences, discuss challenges within their workplaces, and learn about strategies used by other locals.

Building these connections is important for strengthening collaboration and solidarity among university workers throughout the province.

## **10. Conclusion**

Attending the CUPE OUWCC Conference 2026 was an extremely valuable experience. The conference provided important insights into the challenges facing university workers, including funding pressures, governance structures, workplace safety, and technological changes.

The workshops and discussions offered practical tools for understanding university finances, navigating institutional governance, and advocating for safer workplaces. The event also reinforced the importance of solidarity among CUPE members working in the university sector.

I am grateful to CUPE 3906 for supporting my participation in this conference, and I look forward to applying the knowledge and connections gained to contribute to our local's work and to continue advocating for the rights and well-being of university workers.

In Solidarity,

Shivam