



NUPGE Environment Conference

Climate Justice: Workers Taking Action

October 19–21, 2022

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 12 Components and 2 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 425,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is situated on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We recognize and acknowledge the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done.

And, we dedicate ourselves, as a union, to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Bert Blundon, President

Jason MacLean, Secretary-Treasurer

NUPGE Environment Conference
Ottawa Marriott Hotel
100 Kent St., Ottawa, ON
October 19–21, 2022

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU/NUPGE	Masoud Aminzavvar Chris Walker John Manthorpe Joel Blanco James Coccola	DJ Pohl Edmund Quan Celeste Dunstan Tanya Boyd Mona Dykes
MGEU/NUPGE	Shelley Wiggins Annette Lyss Blaine Duncan	
OPSEU/SEFPO/NUPGE	Shawn Burr Myles Magner	
NBU/NUPGE	Terry Richard	
NSGEU/NUPGE	Peter Perry	
PEI UPSE/NUPGE	Karen Jackson	
NAPE/NUPGE	Tony Kelly Cynthia Thorne	
NUPGE	Bert Blundon, President Jason MacLean, Secretary-Treasurer Len Bush, Managing Director (Office of the President) Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative Laura Rashotte, Administrative Representative	
Speakers/Facilitators	Sheldon McGregor, Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Steve Shallhorn, Labour Education Centre Karen Charnow Lior, Labour Education Centre Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, Indigenous Climate Action Christopher Wilson, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists Denise Hampden, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists Lauren Latour, Climate Action Network Canada	

Opening

Sheldon McGregor, Anishinaabe knowledge keeper from Kitigan Zibi, opened the conference. He provided a traditional territories acknowledgment, a teaching on the impact of climate change on Indigenous peoples, and an opening prayer.



Above, Sheldon McGregor provides the opening blessing

President Blundon welcomed participants and thanked them for attending. He described climate change as the crisis of our time. He pointed to the role of unions in contributing to greater awareness and a sense of urgency amongst the public and governments, and the importance of building activist capacity. Blundon highlighted the impacts of climate change on public services and workers who deliver them. The public sector—indeed, all sectors—need to be part of a Just Transition to a sustainable economy.



Above, President Blundon welcomes attendees.

Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative, gave an overview of the conference agenda. She also introduced members of the National Executive Board, the Advisory Committee on the Environment (ACE), and NUPGE staff that were in attendance.



Above, some ACE members attended the conference.

Climate Justice is Union Business

Steve Shallhorn and Karen Charnow Lior of the Labour Education Centre led a workshop called Climate Justice Is Union Business. They began by asking participants to identify the main challenge for their union related to climate change, or what they see as future challenges.



As part of the workshop, conference attendees share current and future challenges for their unions.

Participants identified ways that climate change is impacting their workplaces and members. The list included waste, occupational health and safety, collective agreements, and rural-specific challenges. A common issue was engaging members.



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The workshop proceeded through 4 modules:

1. the science of climate change,
2. mitigation versus adaptation,
3. Just Transition, and
4. what unions can do.

Participants had opportunities to ask questions and share thoughts throughout. In the final segment, in small groups, they discussed identifying and implementing an action.

Supporting Impacted Communities

A representative from the Canadian Red Cross attended during the lunch break. Joined by conference participants, the NUPGE officers presented a cheque to support the Red Cross’s Hurricane Fiona relief efforts.



Above, the cheque is presented to the Canadian Red Cross. Above, MacLean speaks to conference participants.

Secretary-Treasurer MacLean provided remarks to close the morning.

He noted the importance of responding to climate disasters and supporting workers and communities who are being affected by climate change now. But, he said, it is also crucial that we, collectively, be proactive to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects.

Indigenous Leadership in Climate Action

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger of Indigenous Climate Action (ICA) spoke about the role of Indigenous leadership and knowledge in climate action. She began by discussing Canada's colonial history and the links between colonialism and climate change. In turn,



Above, Deranger joins the conference as a guest speaker.

she argued that Indigenous rights are part of the solution to the climate crisis. She described how Indigenous knowledge, based on observation, experimentation, and stewardship is crucial to climate action because it is some of the best science.

Deranger highlighted work being done by Indigenous peoples internationally and across Canada. Cultural revitalization, energy sovereignty, food sovereignty, and land defence are all examples of advancing Indigenous rights that have positive impacts on addressing the climate crisis. She

underscored the importance of working across movements. She also spoke about ICA's work, including their project on decolonizing climate policy, its climate leadership program, and climate action toolkit. Participants were very engaged in asking questions and learning together.

Green Is Not White: Confronting Environmental Racism

Christopher Wilson and Denise Hampden of the Coalition for Black Trade Unionists facilitated this workshop. It began with a gallery walk, where participants viewed images around the room and then shared what spoke to them about environmental racism.



Above, attendees participate in a Gallery Walk as part of the workshop.

The facilitators defined environmental racism and its types. They gave examples from the Canadian context, such as the lack of clean drinking water in Indigenous communities and the case of Africville.

They discussed the role of unions in reconciliation and the need to ask hard questions, as outlined in Hampden's recent article in [Our Times](#). They opened conversation on what workers can do to tackle systems of oppression and invited participants to share thoughts on taking action through labour education, collective agreements, political action, and greening workplaces and/or the union.



Above, Wilson and Hampden lead the workshop.

Coalition Building

Lauren Latour of Climate Action Network Canada shared lessons in coalition building. She underscored the value of working in coalition, as well as its challenges and obstacles.

She shared lessons from 3 coalition efforts: the Pact for a Green New Deal, the Just Recovery Principles, and the Just Transition dialogues. During the Q&A, there were discussions about recognizing power dynamics in coalitions, including the relative power of labour in some instances, and the importance of building relationships.

Breakout Discussion—NUPGE and Components Taking Action



Participants had multiple opportunities to engage in small-group discussions throughout the conference.

Participants began by highlighting the work Components are engaged in and shared their experiences. Components are doing a variety of activities, from environment committees and courses, to negotiating collective agreement provisions, to working with allies.

Participants discussed barriers to this work. Common barriers were time and capacity in their unions, member education, and competing priorities. Finally, they identified opportunities to build on existing work within Components and nationally, including continuing to share information across provinces. Other opportunities include collective agreement language, member education and training on the environment, and campaigns.

Wrap-Up and Next Steps



Above, participants listen during one of the sessions.

Ibrahim thanked everyone for their engaged and thoughtful participation. Participants were invited to share their feedback on the conference.

NUPGE will prepare a summary of the conference and circulate it. NUPGE will also compile a Resources List for participants' use and reference. They were invited to send in any Component materials or resources they wish to profile.



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. General Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals (MAHCP)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union/Syndicat des employés de la fonction publique de l'Ontario (OPSEU/SEFPO)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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