

2025 Canadian Association of Labour Media Conference: *Report back!*

Earlier this month, Mackenzie (Communications Officer) and Maija (Staff Representative / Mobilization Coordinator) attended the Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM) Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland!

The conference included lots of discussion, networking, and workshops intended to strengthen our skills as communicators for CUPE 3903. Here's a recap of some of the workshops we attended, followed by some general notes about the conference itself!

Photography Workflow and Digital Asset Management (DAM) with Chris Noto

- This was Mackenzie's first workshop!
- As communications people within unions often become unexpectedly drafted into photography, it's good to have a system to prioritize and manage the photos you take.
- This workshop was delivered by Chris Noto, who has worked in graphic design, commercial art, and other communications jobs since the mid-nineties, having been a photographer for unions and the NDP.
- Make sure to think about the technical aspects: Bring an extra battery pack or power bank for events. Consider the formats you're shooting in (ex: RAW takes up a lot of extra memory and storage).
- At the same time, make sure to be aware of the human element—the subjects of your photos: Is their shirt wrinkled? Are their eyes closed? Can you see everyone in the group photo, or is someone obscured?
- Logistics are important to capturing good union photography as well: Did you get an agenda of what's happening? Did you scout the location beforehand? Did you figure out where you can stand?
- One of Chris' key tips was simply, as he put it on his slides, "GET @\$&ING CLOSER". As much as it might feel a bit awkward or cringe to get really close to a stage at an event, approach a speaker at the mics at Convention, or corral a bunch of people into a group photo, you want to get up close and personal to get the shots you want, otherwise you'll regret it later.
- Using digital asset management (DAM) programs to help manage the metadata of your photos can make it easier to stay organized. While Chris prefers Adobe Bridge, there are comparable features in Adobe Lightroom, Media Valet, and even Apple Photos or Windows Media Viewer.

- Newer photographers often take a *lot* of photos, so keeping these organized is important! Chris suggested a folder system by year, then by event.
- Renaming your photo files into something easy to find will help you out in the long run, for example “Event-Date-001.jpg” or “WinnipegPride-2025-007.jpg” (noting the hyphens rather than spaces for web-friendliness).
- Rating your photos can also help you pare down and decide what you want to post on behalf of your union. Going in and assigning your best photos three stars, then two stars for “good” photos, and one stars for photos that are “just okay” will help you decide which ones are worth making it to your union’s Instagram or Facebook accounts vs which ones you can just keep in your back pocket if needed (or upload to Flickr, even, for storage).
- Think about the size of your photos as well: if it’s only ever going to be displayed in a small scale on your website, reducing the size will help with website load times.
- We also talked a little bit about editing tips: whitening teeth if needed using hue/saturation, close-cropping skills for various situations and hair-related considerations, and more.

Clinic with Chelsea Connor – Media Relations

- For Maija’s first session, she had a 15 minute one-on-one talk with Chelsea Connor about media relations to get some personalized advice!
- Maija chose to frame her questions around media relations to ask specifically what Chelsea would recommend to get media attention on the refusal of extension for members with human rights grounds.
- The advice was: forget press releases, they take time and don’t get picked up. Best to plan an activity (or stunt) and issue a short media advisory instead.
 - Chelsea gave the example of an event where supportive elected officials were asked to come participate in a public car wash. This made for an effective and memorable visual, with men in suits washing cars.
- Another option is something that shows escalating pressure, e.g. delivering a petition
- You want the event to be amped up and memorable, but not “too circussy”.
- The workers who are interviewed should be present for everything they speak to. The union can speak in generalities (e.g. “we’ve seen [x] number of these grievances last year, which is an increase...”), but it’s much much better if we can get specific members to speak.
 - Never give the journalist member information – make the connection yourself, and never leave them alone (not for surveillance, but for support; you also don’t want the journalist to follow up with the member without you knowing about it)
 - Most journalists will agree to anonymity if negotiated.
 - Tell the journalist if the member is nervous, and they’ll usually be kinder and less potentially aggressive than they might be with official union spokespeople.

Introduction to Interviewing Techniques with Rhea Rollmann

- Mackenzie went to this workshop to learn more skills about how interviewing could help tell our members' and our union's story better.
- The presenter was Rhea Rollmann, who has three decades of journalism experience and is also a former CUPE 3903 member (who still reads the newsletter each week)!
- Rhea asked us why we interview in the first place. Some key reasons to be guided by in the interview process are:
 - To bring a story to life
 - To gather first hand information, experiences, insights
 - To add to the public record
 - To tell the story from a new angle that hasn't been explored before!
 - To have a conversation in a new way
 - Using your own identity to strengthen the conversation
 - To generate empathy and understanding
- Some quotes from journalist Lewis Raven Wallace's *The View From Somewhere* were featured to frame the workshop, including "Stories shape reality and suggest possibility. They can spark curiosity or foreclose it, drowning us in facts and figures. It is possible to create a world we don't want."
 - This is good to remember, when we're thinking about the ways the narratives we create can shape our material conditions!
- When interviewing on behalf of your union, consider where and when you'll do the interview, and pick an appropriate location.
 - A crowded space might make someone less likely to divulge sensitive info.
 - Is it windy? Is the interviewee comfortable?
 - Use multiple recording devices when you do an interview, even if your secondary device is just your cellphone! Don't lose your interviews.
 - Make sure your devices are charged and working, with enough memory.
 - Keep charged power banks on hand.
- Think also about how you'll transcribe the interview to capture your interviewee's voice and thoughts authentically! AI transcriptions often take shortcuts.
- Things to consider before doing an interview:
 - Research your interviewee/subject.
 - Familiarize yourself with other interviews that have been done with your interviewee or on this subject.
 - Reflect on your intended audience:
 - Who are you writing for?
 - What would they want to know?
 - What knowledge, gaps, stereotypes, misunderstandings are prevalent in public discourse?
 - Clearing up misperceptions can be very valuable!
 - Reflect on your interviewee/subject: where are **you** located in relation to them?
 - Are they in a position of relative power? Hold them to account!

- Are they a random picketer, a marginalized person? Consider your positionality and what you bring into the space.
 - Have flexibility and sensitivity for subjects that involve trauma.
 - Reflect on the story you're working on: What intersecting webs of relationships are involved? To whom are you accountable as a journalist?
- Research topic area coverage guides (especially those created by marginalized communities themselves):
 - [The Trans Journalists Association: Stylebook and Coverage Guide](#)
 - [Safe Harbour Outreach Project](#)
 - And more!
 - There are often debates within communities about media representation, but getting more educated is always good.
- Interview prep tips!
 - Prepare for things to go wrong.
 - What if your interviewee isn't talkative?
 - Try to start off with a conversational, casual topic to get them to feel comfortable with conversing with you.
 - What if they refuse to answer questions?
 - Keep trying to re-orient them back to the questions, and don't be afraid to tell them that if they don't answer the question, you'll have to write that they refused to comment (which usually puts a scare in them).
 - What if they refuse to address specifics?
 - Similar to above, don't be afraid to tell them you'll have to say they refused to comment on the specifics if they're refusing to comment on the specifics. Be pointed to get the info you need
 - Sometimes union executives get told only to use a certain "message box" template: how do you express when that's frustrating and then work around it?
 - Let them know that you can tell they have a certain message they want to communicate, but that you still want to find out [xyz].
 - What if your interviewee becomes hostile or upset?
 - Be ready to end the interview if needed.
 - If you're broaching a really sensitive topic, treat it with the sensitivity it deserves. Think beforehand about where you will draw the line if needed.
 - At the same time, be prepared and feel empowered to hold your ground if your question makes someone in power upset. Capture their reaction in your writing; this can be very effective.
 - What if you trigger a trauma reaction? How will you accommodate the person, and will you end the interview?
 - Give people a heads up when you're venturing into a line of questioning that might be triggering for them.
 - Let them know they can answer if they feel comfortable, but don't make them feel pressured.

- Give space for complex reactions, including welcoming silences. Feel confident and comfortable to end the interview if needed, especially being mindful of power differentials.
 - Think also about how to keep yourself safe in the interviewing space and avoid zoning out if you're thrown off!
- What makes for boring interviews?
 - Asking questions for which the answers are already widely known.
 - Asking vague questions is begging for vague answers.
 - Simple yes/no questions.
 - Interviews without a purpose.
- There is a complex network of relationships to consider when doing an interview:
 - Your editor/publisher
 - Your readership
 - Your interviewee(s)
 - Your desired readership
 - Secondary agents/parties
 - (employers, police, regulatory agencies)
 - Tertiary agents
 - (government/legislators/donors/researchers)
 - Marginalized and equity seeking communities
 - (What will be the effect of your story for those communities?)
- Think about practices around letting interviewees read their interviews prior to publication. There are often established internal policies associated with this!
- What is really important is building rapport in the interview.
 - Be honest and open about who you are, why you're doing the story, and what you know about it.
 - Be transparent if you're not an expert or not that knowledgeable!
 - Let the other person speak with minimal interruptions. Be an active listener; they might be telling you about an even more important story than you didn't even know about.
 - If you don't understand something, *ask*! Don't be afraid to confess if you're confused or have a lack of understanding/familiarity with something.
 - Keep track of your potential questions and requests for clarification while the person is speaking.
 - Be okay with silence! Don't feel compelled to always fill the silence.
 - Show empathy where appropriate. Maintain eye contact if you can.
- Tips for accountability in interviews:
 - Should you let an interviewee wander off topic and take control of an interview? This varies depending on many factors!
 - Practice informed consent. It is *your* responsibility to ensure a vulnerable interviewee is aware of the impact of what they might say and the impact it could have on other community members.
 - Don't be afraid to address stereotypes in a respectful way, such as "there's people who say [x]. How do you respond to that?"

- Be honest with your interviewee about what you can and can't do as an interviewer.
- Be transparent about the interview, story writing, publication process (including timelines). This includes: Are other people involved, editing, cutting, etc.? How will the words be used, in what context, and when/where?
- Some parting points:
 - Consider an interview a conversation, often an ongoing one.
 - Often an interview is the first step in building a meaningful relationship. Cultivate it when possible; remain cognizant of your responsibility to the person and groups that you represent in your work.
 - At the same time, protect your own boundaries where appropriate!
 - Don't be afraid to reach out with follow up questions; keep the dialogue open.
- Special interviewing tips for labour organizers:
 - First, talk to the individual. Listen to their concern or experience. Hear them. Try to understand the situation.
 - Take detailed notes, collect and document all the factual info (names, dates of people involved, times, full step by step context of what happened).
 - If the interviewee omits info, ask them! Go at your own pace, double check your notes and summaries with the interviewee.
 - Be honest about what you can or can't do. Interviews are for information gathering, not a guarantee of action
 - Keep in mind two frames of reference: the technicalities of the collective agreement/workplace policy, but also the feelings and emotions you're encountering, which could provide a hint to the true problem at play.

Talk the Talk: My Go-To Keys for Structured Organizing Conversations and Communications with Angela Drew Kimelman

- Maija attended this workshop, which focused on the ways communications tools can work in tandem with structured organizing conversations to supplement each other.
- The presenter of this workshop was lead organizer on a successful campaign to unionize a Walmart in Mississauga!
- According to the presenter, it took them 10 months to get the cards signed, and they went into the vote with a very risky 40%, but got certified.
- With a standard campaign of flyers etc., cards were coming in, but it wasn't enough, so they instituted "Team Red": an inside team that wore union hats and swag to work and engaged in one-on-one conversations, which led to a big increase in cards signed.
- They asked the team to pick two people they wouldn't usually speak to every day and ask them about the drive.
- **4 step approach to the SOC:**

- **1. Introduce:** If doing so from an outside perspective, make it clear that you're there because their coworkers asked you to be.
- **2. Issues & agitation:** Don't assume you know the issues. You might have thought wages would be the main issue at Wal-Mart, but it was health and safety. Allow workers to recognize their own reality. Don't engage with people who are angry. 30/70 talking/listening.
- **3. Vision & education:** Provide a vision of what things can look like, but no promises beyond the fact that we'll be at the bargaining table together. Education is to provide info. Some common topics include: dues rates, freeze provision, the right to talk about the union, Employer tricks, how to sign a union card, voting process, etc.
- **4. Next steps:** Asking members to do something manageable. Possibly mapping. Make a specific plan to follow-up.
- Communication tools to support organizing:
 - Nation Builder
 - Can create a mini website with all the union info (called a "join page").
 - Include a sign-up sheet to stay up to date.
 - Customized e-blasts are an option, but they're often unopened.
 - Can put all the info that would have been in the email on a website and text that link in a text blast.
 - Adobe Creative Suite
 - Canva
 - Callhub
 - MS Office Suite
- Maija's perspective was that it was interesting to hear about the nuts and bolts of a successful campaign, especially against such a notorious employer.
- While Maija doesn't imagine we'll invest in Nation Builder any time soon, it is interesting to think of what we can adapt from that, e.g. creating join pages, creating structures to follow-up with inside committees. It was interesting to hear that text blasts get better reach than email blasts, which might depend on the demographics of the workplace.

Plenary Discussion: Urgent Strategy to Counter Disinformation, Apathy & Fascism in Canada with Sam Krisnapillai

- The plenary discussion asked what platforms we are using, despite the increasing "enshittification" of our digital spaces?
- There are moderation tools to support better online spaces, like [Common Sense Empathy](#), which can assess negativity in comments and provide filtering services.
- There is growing interest in Canadian-owned alternative social media platforms.
- In today's digital media landscape, there is increased importance for vertical videos (reels, TikToks) both algorithmically and culturally.

- Even when there's barriers, digital communities can still thrive. A recent example is [FWAD \(Federal Workers Against DOGE\)](#). These workers have been afraid of being targeted/identified, which led to an active anonymous/pseudonym based online community that was a vetted space for government employees only, predominantly using Jitsi, Matrix, and other newer platforms.
- Social media is not there to replace in-person communication!
- Today, organizations have less algorithmic clout, which means that individuals need media training to create authentic, meaningful engagement.
- It can be useful to consider geo-targeting ads and promoting posts to get your message where your workplace is.
- There was a pitch as well for a progressive creators' network, which had some evident useful possibilities as well as potential drawbacks.

Memes of Production with Alexander Delorme

- While this workshop covered a bit more of a Memes 101 type approach, Mackenzie still found its advice on tailoring meme content to your union's audience very useful!
- This workshop guided participants in making memes (using imgflip) to call attention to issues in their workplaces and foster community in their unions.
- There was discussion of how the term "meme" originated (coined by Richard Dawkins) and the ways that memes can be biological-like actors in our labour media ecosystems:
 - Genes: memes carry information forward through successive "generations".
 - Natural selection: just as with evolution, natural selection decides which memes move forward and replicate.
 - Random mutation: new iterations and subversions allow unique ideas to feast/famish via natural selection.
- A meme is generally funny, relatable, and often ironic. Memes tend to exemplify the Hegelian notion of being pregnant with its opposite, deriving shareability and humour from contrast and contradiction.
 - Remember not to become too irony-poisoned though. Overly "brainrotted" memes will struggle to appeal to less chronically online audiences, so think about who you are targeting and who your union's membership is, plus on what platforms to reach them.
- There was also discussion of combatting the rising right wing meme culture and resisting fascist co-optation of meme formats, including info about the [Canadian Anti-Hate Network](#) and [their anti-hate strategies for workers and labour](#).
- An attendee's story about having meme-making as an official picket duty in their union's strike also garnered a lot of excitement about potential directions for future organizing!

Workflow Management: Get Organized to Organize with Elizabeth Berman

- Maija's next workshop was about how to keep our organizing organized!
- The group of attendees identified challenges in getting our work done:
 - Leadership issues
 - Overwork, unreasonable expectations
 - Buy-in from the others on the team
 - Reactivity (assuming communications is always go-go-go to react to things rather than planning ahead)
- Things people have tried to get around these:
 - Shared calendars
 - Setting deadlines
 - Lots of meetings
 - Project management tools
- There was also discussion of what project management is and its philosophy.
 - "Waterfall" (one thing at a time) vs "agile" (try something, come back, try something different) project management.
 - The philosophy of project management (i.e. what we're trying to achieve by using it) is:
 - Openness and transparency
 - Clarity and accountability
 - Structure and process (i.e. having one)
 - Flexibility and adaptability
- There was also an overview of project management tools: Asana, Planner, Monday, etc.
 - While the presenter mostly uses Asana and gave a demonstration of what can be done with it, Maija noted that it might be worth looking into Planner, as CUPE 3903 increasingly internally moves toward Microsoft services.
- Some Asana notes:
 - In Asana, the main unit is the "task"; each task should be a comms output (e.g. newsletter) to which you can assign sub-tasks (e.g. editing).
 - You can use "projects" to group tasks together.
 - Always assign a person to the task and a deadline.
- The discussion was a bit critical, the main issue being: how on earth can we get our teams to agree to use something like this? The simple fact is that project management tools don't work when some team members refuse to use them. "Need to talk tactics, not tools" said one person whose colleagues are particularly uncomfortable with tech.
- The discussion turned to what people had done to get buy-in from their teams, which mostly boiled down to "make it easier for them than sending an email".
- It can be worth it to put in the front end work to create a form that's easy to use, for example. Slowing down can speed things up long-term.

Microsites, Major Impact: Thinking Beyond Your Main Website with Teuila Mau

- Mackenzie went to this workshop to start off her second day at the conference, which was less hands-on: not building something, but gathering ideas and inspiration.
- It discussed microsites, which are a standalone website or small cluster of webpages, designed for a specific purpose.
- Microsites will typically have a different domain than the union's (or main org's) website, focused on promoting something particular.
- The presenter, Teuila used to work for Corel on microsites and now works for CALM.
- In a microsite, you can have tailored messaging, clearer navigation, and stronger visual identity for a campaign.
- It avoids people having to go through all of your union website's dropdown menus to get to your campaign.
- Microsites can be tailored in messaging and design to reflect the specific issue and tone needed. They also give a dedicated space for action, putting the call to action front and center
- Microsites also allow for organizational clarity, organizing things into little "departments".
- General tips for microsites:
 - Maintain the union's branding (logo, colours) for recognizability and natural flow so visitors to the site aren't confused.
 - Keep it simple and accessible (clean layout, intuitive navigation).
 - Wordpress is good and powerful, but also Canva websites are easy to use and create, with a similar interface to their design features.
- Here are some reasons we might want to use microsites for our union:
 - Campaigns!
 - Example: foryoucanada.ca - PSAC
 - education2025.ca - CAUT
 - Case studies
 - Creating a case study microsite can help showcase inspiring wins to shape future efforts.
 - Online stores.
 - Often through Shopify, which is easy to use.
 - Digital downloads
 - A place where people can go and search through your database of documents and resources.
 - Keeps the info all in one organized, centralized place.
 - Reduced staff workload and boosts member engagement.
 - You can track how many of something has been downloaded, which helps you gauge what people want the most.
 - Update friendly.
 - Event sites
 - Very popular!

- Strike microsites!
 - Picket line finders, ex: workerscantwait.ca - PSAC
 - These are best when they have more resources than just finding your line: letter from leadership, FAQs, press release, solidarity toolkit, strike preparation course.
- Directories
 - Member directory
 - lets members find each other! search by name or keywords, filter by city, state, and more
 - can include social aspects to build community! but this is a lot of maintenance to monitor
 - Locals lookup
 - pull from a database of locals to view local information and contact details
 - search using keywords
 - filter by region, province, city, etc
 - basic info: employer, area, some of the execs
- Learning and resource websites
 - This could be a Udemy style online course website.
 - eLearning - to deliver structured online courses
 - Example: education.psac-afpc.com
 - For learning, have a visual and written option for different learning styles.

Reel Change: Mobilizing the Labour Movement with Smartphone Videography with Anna Jover

- Maija started off her second day at the conference by learning about smartphone videography!
- Smartphone videography is useful because it's easier to use than a camera and easier to bring into places where you might be stopped carrying a big obvious camera.
- Think about the purpose of videos:
 - Humanizing stories
 - Amplifying worker voices
 - Building solidarity
 - Mobilizing support
 - Engaging younger workers through video
 - Creating long-lasting content
- Storytelling with images needs to answer: who, what, where, why
 - These answers are typically all in the visuals, except for why, which can be through interviews etc. Picket signs are a great visual resource!
- **3 main types of frame:**

- 1. Wide: shows more context
- 2. Close up: more emotional connection
- 3. Medium: more detail than wide, but not as emotionally engaging as close-up.
- Consider how to place yourself when you're filming: move around!
 - The front of the rally will show you the leaders etc., but the back and sides is where you may find engaging stories of regular people.
 - Lateral shots can give you depth (e.g. to show how big a rally is).
 - Find weird spots, try different things.
 - Scope out the location ahead of time to find the best spots.
 - Get a lot of group shots.
 - If filming someone talking, make sure their background is compelling: ask them to move or change your angle so you don't just get an empty parking lot.
- The presenter, Anna, always makes a list of the shots she wants before filming an event:
 - Establishing shots (shows where you are)
 - Face shots
 - Close ups
 - Over-the-shoulder shots
 - Neutral shots (whatever you need)
 - Creative/artistic shots (e.g. from the ground, from unusual places)
- She also gave some tips about helpful features on iPhones, such as focus lock, adjusting lighting, slo-mo, cinematic, and portrait mode.
- Smartphone Videography Tips:
 - Try to avoid zooming in with the camera and avoid night shots.
 - Go airplane mode when you're recording so there's no chance a call interrupts your recording.
 - Check settings and pick high quality.
 - Change 30 fps to 24 fps.
 - Capture both horizontal and vertical footage for use on different platforms
 - If you can only do one, do horizontal, which is easier to cut down for vertical than the reverse.
 - Clean your lenses!

Member-to-Member Conversations are the Solution to Enshittification

with Ethan Clarke

- Mackenzie and Maija both attended this workshop!
- Ethan Clarke runs Campaign Gears and has had a long history in labour movement communications and organized.
- He recommends that you ABC: always be campaigning!
- What is the enshittification cycle?
 - Enshittification of tech platforms is a widespread, widely-noted issue, and it happens on purpose.

- First, social media platforms are good to their users, often showcasing a new feature or concept.
- Then, they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers.
- Finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the values for shareholders
- Then, they die (or at least their original virtual culture does).
- Think about developments in union-to-member communications over the past decade:
 - Campaigns are now often associated with emailers, social media, microsites, etc.
 - Is that really working though?
 - A lot of attendees reported seeing low turnout for major votes, and this is common across the labour movement.
- Consider a broadcast model vs network model:
 - People increasingly trust central authorities less, and people are often looking for a relationship with the organizations they're a part of.
 - People don't want to feel like their unions are taking "at" them.
- Guide your outreach through the principles of the McAlevey method:
 - High participation is a prerequisite to power.
 - Tight structure + unity are required.
 - Build power through demonstrable and sustainable majorities.
 - Identify leaders vs activists (capacity vs commitment).
 - Distinguish organizing vs mobilizing / activism.
 - Focus on people who *aren't* talking with us
 - Be credible!
 - Think about whole worker vs community-labour alliances, structure vs self-selecting.
- A complementary text to consider: *We Are The Union* by Eric Blanc
 - McAlevey covers a way of doing things (techniques) but *We Are The Union* argues that we need to change not only the way we do things but how we lead them.
 - Building unions should be member-to-member, not top-down.
 - Therefore, unions should prioritize building digital tools to communicate with each other directly.
 - This can give "generation union" (as it's sometimes called) the freedom and resources to make change.
 - This generation has more people calling themselves socialists and more people willing to join unions.
 - People crave connection, so include social activities in your organizing and communications.
- Ethan discussed the strengths and weaknesses of multiple case studies in relation to these principles, including Starbucks Untied, OSBCU, and CUPW.
- Some practical advice:
 - Invest in upfront on training for anyone interested.
 - Don't gate-keep resources; post them publicly.
 - Have a means to conduct coaching for organizers as you go.

- Build infrastructure for workers to communicate directly without any intermediaries across distances
- Make a long term commitment to change culture, not just a single campaign.
- Key platforms for organizing: Discord, Slack, Matrix.
- While some advice (like about book-offs for organizers) isn't necessarily transferable to our context, there were still aspects that could be translated to CUPE 3903!

Clinic with Mackenzie Edwards – Instagram for Unions & Organizing

- Mackenzie got to act as an “expert” and help lead a “clinic” (15 minute one-on-one help/advice/troubleshooting session) about how to use Instagram for unions and organizing purposes.
- Some of the info I shared that seemed helpful was about creating coordinated highlights for easy access to info, crafting a distinct visual identity, changing Instagram post size ratios, tactics to get members involved in social media content, ways to encourage members to DM you, and how to make your union's Instagram feel more personal.

Digitally Different: Using Alternative Communication Tools in a Toxic Digital World with Jason Alward

- Maija went to this workshop!
- While the underlying problems of digital technology cannot be solved in one workshop, there are some tools we can use to mitigate the problems.
- The presenter provided a history of the internet from 1944 to the present.
 - The main takeaway from this was the increasing speed at which these changes are happening and that the introduction of venture capital in tech has in a lot of ways caused this acceleration and given us algorithms and intentionally addictive tech, in order to generate more and more money for investors above all else.
 - The results are: shrinking attention spans, screen addiction, echo chambers, surveillance capitalism, the rise of the far right, the attack on democracy, and the rise of AI.
- The solutions presented are to detach yourself from algorithms and AI.
- Different options with varying levels of difficulty:
 - Easy alternatives: relatively easy to use, mostly free, mostly algorithm-free
 - Linux: safest OS, easier to use than in the past
 - Bluesky: does have some AI, will have to see how that develops
 - Signal
 - Pixelafed: Instagram alternative
 - Jitsi: Zoom alternative, it does have some AI
 - Firefox
 - Thunderbird: email client, kinda old school

- RSS reader: for news
- Libre Office: MS Office alternative
- Affinity: Adobe Suite alternative, not free but one-time purchase
- GIMP: Photoshop alternative
- Canva is specifically **not** on the list because it's so AI-heavy
- Advanced alternatives: can include server costs and moderation considerations
 - Self-hosting: with own servers, NAS
 - Next Cloud: google workspace alternative
 - Friendica: FB alternative, could maybe be used as a secure discussion space
 - Wordpress
 - Discourse: forum group chat type thing
 - Immich: like Flickr
- The really tough one: disconnect.
 - Delete social media accounts
 - Delete the apps from phones and check those accounts intentionally
 - Keep debates offline: "you're arguing with robots!"
 - Printed media
 - Get together in-person
- Despite the doom and gloom, there are some good signs: pushback against AI, some regulations of social media coming from the EU, increased acknowledgment of what social media does to people's mental health, etc.
- The discussion was a bit gloomy and quite divided! Most attendees are all for this, but they don't think they can convince their workplaces to change tech. There was some AI apologism and some "abolish capitalism" as the solution.
- Maija didn't find herself falling wholly into the "robots are coming for us" school of thought, but as someone who does have some alarm around how much we are allowing corporations to monetize our lives and data, she noted that it was nice to see someone talking about this.
- While CUPE 3903 might not use any of these alternatives any time soon, it's interesting to have a fulsome list that we can return to as things evolve.
- This workshop, more than any other, really highlighted the schism within CALM between those who want to boldly go forward by somehow taming the tools of our oppressors and those who simply want out. It's a tension that, in retrospect, hung over the entire conference to some extent.

Media Relations: Take Control of the Narrative with Chelsea Connor

- Mackenzie went to this workshop, which was one of her main draws for coming to the CALM 2025 Conference! Improving her skills with media outreach is a big priority for her this year so that we can get more visibility for our union's issues.
- Why do media relations matter?

- The media shapes our perceptions: of unions, of workers, of justice.
- Our voices are often drowned out by corporate spin.
- Building trust with reporters = more worker stories in the spotlight.
- Understanding the media landscape and media ecosystem
 - Who's covering labour?
 - People who are covering labour come from all different media specialties. Even though someone might not be a labour-focused reporter, there's usually a way that their media work can connect to labour issues.
 - Consider: approaching fashion reporters about garment workers' issues, engaging education reporters about TA and contract faculty struggles, getting food reporters to cover migrant farm workers' plights, etc.
 - Know your audience: mainstream, alternative, and local media.
 - What's going to bother the Employer?
 - What publications are the workers reading?
 - Despite the death of formal labour reporters, any reporter can be a labour reporter, you just need to educate them and find the connections.
 - What's newsworthy?
 - Conflict, human interest, timeliness, local angle.
- Terms to know
 - On the record: all fair game, attributable by name and title.
 - Off the record: nothing usable or attributable, differs from anonymous
 - On background: a defined attributable. "a source close to [x]... / with knowledge of" or "a union representative (no name)".
 - On deep background: not attributable but usable "it has been learned..."
- Feel comfortable starting a relationship with a reporter where you set boundaries (like for example that all text messages are off the record).
- Remember when interacting with reporters that these are relationships. Think for example about how ignoring someone over email looks in the workplace.
- Record everything you can, so that you have your own version to refer back to!
- What are reporters looking for?
 - Data or visuals that support a narrative
 - On-time responses and reliable quotes
 - Real people, real stories
 - Access to events and spokespeople
- Building relationships with reporters: How to!
 - Introduce yourself *before* the crisis
 - Cold email reporters to see if they have time for a chat, introduce your union, keep it quick and don't waste their time.
 - When Chelsea, the presenter, was organizing stores in Chicago, she sent cold emails to Chicago newspapers' business and labour sections, introducing herself before organizing there.
 - Invite them to union events or one-on-ones with workers
 - They can have quotidian conversations that matter with workers. (ex: getting a perspective from retail workers at the busy holiday season)

- Follow and engage with them on social media
 - Be responsive and accurate when called on
- We did some roleplay and creative exercises to come up with a worker-centered media pitch, learn how to best support members who are being interviewed, and more!
- Speaking with reporters: Dos and Don'ts, whether it's an interview or not!
 - Do prepare 2-3 key points
 - Do speak in soundbites
 - Do bridge back to your message
 - Do answer the question you wish you were asked
 - Do correct misinformation
 - Do feel empowered to end when you're done
 - Don't go off the record unless you really know what it means
 - Don't speculate or overshare
 - Don't let reporters define your story
 - Don't commit hearsay or libel
 - Don't give out worker contact info
- When you're being interviewed, make sure to remain calm!
- When being interviewed, encourage workers to wear their work clothes (identifiable) or union t-shirt (for branding and recognizability).
- You can ask reporters just to use the interviewee's first name.
- As the communicator, prep reporters with the context for why the issue matters, and tell them if the member is a little nervous.
- Make sure to set a collaborative tone! Don't take over an interview with a member, but do correct when things are not accurate. Also, don't be afraid to jump in if you see the worker getting blatantly interrupted.
- If an interview is going badly, use your role as a communicator to encourage the reporter to talk to others (like the union president or someone well trained for the media) to change the narrative with more content and perspectives.
 - This also shows the member that the story doesn't end here, if they don't feel confident about how it went.
- Make sure you're always there to make the introductions between a worker and someone from the media, to make it a formal space and ensure that members never feel alone in the process.
- Call out false neutrality or bias that assumes the Employer's point of view is neutral or more reasonable than the union's.
- Remember that journalists don't have the time and resources to understand every topic. They often appreciate the time to explain what happens.
- Don't be shy to ask for factual corrections to a story if needed.

Some overall thoughts!

Overall, going to the 2025 CALM Conference felt like a worthwhile experience. The conference was significantly more focused on skills-building than political work. Fittingly then, many of the workshops had practical, useful advice that could be helpful in our day-to-day labour communications efforts. The workshop presentations are available to review after the conference, which is a useful resource to refer to.

In terms of attendees, the conference tended to have mostly paid staff of unions rather than elected executives from the membership, with a disproportionate amount of attendees from Ontario. OPSEU and UNIFOR were well represented among the attendees, with CUPE being fairly scarce, so it was interesting making connections with many other unions beyond CUPE, since that opportunity can be rare.

Many of these encounters with attendees from very different union contexts were highlights for Mackenzie! It was enlightening to hear about the struggles of combatting homophobia through communications in a conservative context from a trades union comrade from Saskatchewan, learning about internationally fraught ostrich drama from an Agriculture Union comrade, and lots more diverse stories from across the country. Overall, the networking felt really important when it comes to building solidarity, sharing resources, and fostering broader ties to other parts of Canada's labour movement.

There were some notable takeaways for future iterations of the conference as well. Accessibility-wise, we had some concerns with some of the more alcohol-centric portions of the conference, as well as its timing being during Eid Al-Adha, both of which could hopefully be ameliorated in the future. We hadn't submitted to the 2025 CALM Awards, but next year, it would definitely be great to submit something on behalf of our union! It's also worth considering attending the Advanced Communicators Day. While this year's topic for that day wasn't particularly practically relevant for us, it changes each year, and it can be a good way to forge deeper relationships with other attendees as well.

That's everything there is to say about the 2025 CALM conference for now! If you want to know more, please feel free to email Mackenzie Edwards, Communications Officer, at communications@cupe3903.org