

ORGANIZE



You care, we care:
child care



We embrace *diversity*
as part of our way
of ensuring *harmony*
with each other
and with
Mother Earth.



*In solidarity with
Aboriginal Peoples*

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Canadian Union of Public Employees

CUPE
On the front line

Make child care and health care your priorities, Mr. Harper



Paul Moist at the Saskatchewan division convention

In this issue of Organize we pay tribute to Ed Broadbent. Through his years of service as a member of Parliament and as leader of the federal New Democratic Party, he provided caring and effective representation for working people and all Canadians. We will miss his voice in Parliament.

The election of Stephen Harper's Conservatives set the stage for some critical debates regarding public services. While far from perfect, the former Liberal government's child care program would have laid the foundation for Canada's first new social program in a generation. Harper's cancelling of signed child care deals with the provinces is a clear indication of his priorities. Building a truly universal, not-for-profit child care system has to be one of ours.

Recent announcements from the Quebec and Alberta governments have placed public medicare on the front burner as a key national debate. Again, Stephen Harper's view is that the Canada Health Act is an intrusion into provincial spheres of responsibility and it's clear he won't defend public medicare.

Beyond these national issues, we have also launched an important internal initiative as set at our national convention. Our national women's task force has begun consultations on the barriers sisters face that prevent their full participation in CUPE. I urge each of you to meet with task force members and become involved in this critical discussion.

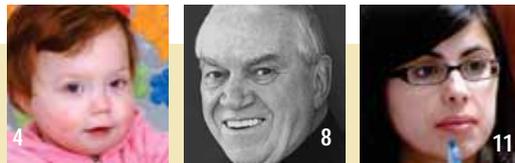
Finally, this issue highlights a number of CUPE pioneers who have passed away in recent months. The women and men who built our union deserve both our remembrance and our heartfelt thanks.

In solidarity,

Paul Moist
National President

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CUPE family suffers losses

In a three-week period this past winter, CUPE pioneers John Francis “Lofty” MacMillan, Tex Hughes and Ed McAllister all passed away, leaving behind legacies brimming with commitment and service to the ideals and values of Canada's largest union.



Lofty MacMillan

CUPE giant Lofty MacMillan passed away on Jan. 15, 2006. A life-long trade unionist and tenacious activist, MacMillan's colourful character, commitment to justice and skills as an orator will be sorely missed and fondly remembered. MacMillan's long history with CUPE began in 1963 when he became the first regional director for the Atlantic provinces. From 1967 to 1982, he was national director of organizing and oversaw CUPE's period of greatest growth. Today, the Maritimes regional office bears his name.

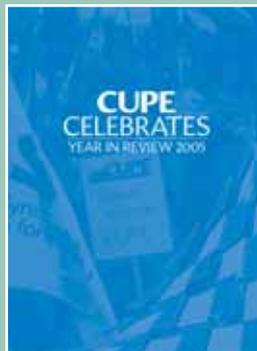
“Lofty was the most dedicated trade unionist I ever met,” said Gil Levine, former CUPE national research director, who first met Lofty at a 1957 convention. “The union was in his blood. He lived it and breathed it.”

Tex Hughes, a former Maritimes regional director, passed away Jan. 31, 2006. Hughes will be remembered for seeing CUPE through some of its most difficult moments, and for his habit of taking copious notes and answering questions in meticulous detail.

Ed McAllister rose through the ranks to become executive assistant to Grace Hartman, CUPE's first woman national president. He passed away Feb. 4, 2006. Al Cunningham, a CUPE employee for 24 years and a former Atlantic regional director, passed away March 29, 2006.

Gloria Deobald passed away Jan. 25, 2006. She was the longest-serving staff person in CUPE Saskatchewan, working as an administrative assistant for 26 years before retiring in 2002. Harrison Harvey,

CUPE Celebrates 2005



Ever wondered how the folks at CUPE National spend their time and members' dues? The 2005 edition of *CUPE Celebrates* shows you where the money goes and provides examples of how the various CUPE departments and branches work to serve members.

First published in 2004, *CUPE Celebrates* is our official year-in-review document. It lists our strategic directions as well as concrete achievements and new initiatives of each CUPE National branch or department. It also contains essential information on strikes, membership and finances for the year.

You can read the entire document online at cupe.ca, or contact ccarre@cupe.ca to request hard copies in either official language.

CLC celebrates 50 years of commitment to workers



The Canadian Labour Congress celebrated its 50th anniversary in April. Canada's house of labour was born on April 23, 1956, out of a merger of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada and the Canadian Congress of Labour.

"CUPE is proud to be the CLC's largest affiliate," said CUPE National President Paul Moist. "The work we accomplish together on issues of national concern advances not just the labour movement but all Canadian

communities. We look forward to another 50 years of collaboration and solidarity."

Over the years, the CLC has helped Canadians enjoy benefits that were first bargained in collective agreements one workplace at a time. These include the Canada Pension Plan, overtime and holiday pay, student loans, universal public medicare, health and safety legislation, protection against harassment and maternity and parental leave.

"Everyone who works for wages, one day or another, comes to realize that a union means better pay, benefits and pensions," said CLC president Ken Georgetti. "Over the last 50 years, in their daily struggle for fairness, equality, and opportunity, the unions of the CLC have improved the quality of life of all Canadian families."

To honour the CLC and its achievements, Canada Post has issued a commemorative stamp. The postage stamp image, a twist on the CLC's logo, shows two hands holding a crystal ball with the outline of North America. One hand is black and masculine, the other white and feminine. The background contains words, in English and French, highlighting some of the benefits unionized and non-unionized workers in Canada have received over the past 50 years.

The CLC is the national voice of the labour movement, representing some three million Canadian workers. It brings together Canada's national and international unions along with the provincial and territorial federations of labour and 135 district labour councils. Visit the CLC website at www.canadian-labour.ca. ■ **Natasha Gauthier**

a former staff representative in Saint John, N.B., passed away Oct. 1, 2005, just a few months after retiring. Catherine Golar, who spent almost 20 years at the Alberta regional office as a stenographer, passed away March 31, 2005, after retiring in 1983. Barb Kowalski, a much-loved staff representative in the Atlantic regional office, passed away Feb. 1, 2005.

"We need to remember, honour and recognize the many CUPE retirees, both members and staff, who have forged this organization and have made it the great union it is today," National President Paul Moist said.

■ **David Robbins**

N.B. women have the wind in their sails

For the last few years, union women in New Brunswick have been trying to organize a New Brunswick Federation of Labour women's conference. Despite their best efforts, low registration forced the NBFL to cancel the event. But this year was different.

In November 2005, a group of women from the Atlantic provinces gathered in Nova Scotia for the first *Women Breaking Barriers* course offered in that region by CUPE.

"The course sparked some interest amongst the participants about the role of women in the union movement. After the course, they wanted to be more involved," said Marilyn MacCormack, a member of CUPE 2745 (provincial school district workers) who attended the training.

The week-long course was just the boost N.B. sisters needed. Freshly inspired, they moved forward with the planning of the women's conference

and whipped up enough interest to hold a successful and well-attended meeting March 17-19.

The conference gave the women the chance to further discuss many of the topics touched in the *Women Breaking Barriers* course, including pay equity, harassment and discrimination.

"I have always been involved in my local," MacCormack said. "But at the workshop, I realized that women in the labour movement have a lot in common. Most of all, we realized that we play a key role in our union."

"The CUPE workshop was a wake-up call," she added. "We are now more aware that we need to bring forward the issues that affect us in our workplace, but also to look out for each other, to speak up when we see one of our sisters being treated unfairly at work."

■ **Danielle Savoie**

BUILDING A BETTER CHILD CARE PROMISE

More than 30,000 Canadians have signed an open letter urging Prime Minister Stephen Harper to rethink his child care funding plan.

Debra Huron summarizes.



Jan. 23, 2006, was a dark day for child care workers and activists across Canada. The election of a Conservative minority government spelled the end, it seemed, to the hard-won child care agreements the outgoing Liberals had signed just months before with the provinces.

On Feb. 3, the day Prime Minister Stephen Harper took office, one of his government's first acts was to announce that Ottawa would give each province one year of funding, then axe the Liberals' five-year child care agreements. Harper also made good on a controversial election promise to provide Canadian parents with a \$1,200 tax credit per year per child aged six and under.

That same evening, CUPE child care workers, parents, and activists braved frigid temperatures to gather at the gates of the prime minister's residence in Ottawa for a vigil to mourn the shattering of stable funding for child care programs in Canada.

From the depths of this wintry discontent, a coalition calling itself CODE BLUE for Child Care emerged. In hospitals, CODE BLUE means "medical emergency." Led by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC), and supported by CUPE and other labour groups, the coalition launched an online open letter addressed to Stephen Harper, the federal opposition and provincial premiers.



Supporters rally for child care in Winnipeg, right, and Saskatoon, below. Opposite page: Even the kids get in on the action at a Parliament Hill rally.



The open letter stated:

"We are calling on you to work together to honour the promise of a national child care program. The place to start is by protecting the early learning and child care agreements between the Government of Canada and the provinces.

"The federal-provincial agreements on child care were negotiated in good faith. They lay a foundation for a full system of early learning and child care that can meet the needs of all Canadian families. Cancelling them sets back the development of a national child care program for years to come, leaving families with young children to fend for themselves.

"Breaking federal-provincial child care agreements would be a breach of public trust and would lead to a cut of almost \$4 billion from child care funding. The federal election results were not a mandate to turn back the clock on child care. While income support for families is a valid policy goal, a taxable family allowance and a tax credit for employers will not create early learning and child care services that are high quality, available and affordable. Families need income supports and publicly funded child care services. We call on all governments to protect and enhance progress on child care."

CODE BLUE apparently hit a raw nerve: within the first week, 9,000 Canadians had signed the letter. By late April, that number had swelled to more than 30,000. Many people shared their comments and stories. The cross section represented was remarkable: parents, grandparents and child care workers, but also academics and business people, rural and urban, Aboriginals and new Canadians. What they have in common is the passionate belief in universal, accessible, quality, publicly funded child care.



Here's a sampling of what the letter signers had to say:



"The health care act is one of the great things that make Canada what it is. Just think of the legacy left if we instead had given every Canadian a small amount of money to subsidize their health care costs."

Ray Brinkman, Coquitlam, B.C.

"Canada should take a lead in providing quality child care to families and invest this money in training the staff and in paying good wages to early childhood educators... Who suffers? Parents and children. Mostly children, since they are going to end up in the basements of privately owned daycares. Most likely non-licensed. Do we need to do that to our children?"

Sharoj Sharma, Terrace, B.C.

"As a working parent, I understand totally the need for a national plan ensuring accessible, affordable, quality child care, provided by qualified professionals."

Janet Blaxall, London, Ont.



"No childcare means parents can't work, welfare and unemployment rates go up. Some solution, Mr. Harper!"

Jeannie Lanzaderas, Brampton, Ont.

"It is remarkably stupid to give parents a few hundred dollars to buy child care that IS NOT THERE! It's as useful as money to buy school supplies when there are no schools or teachers, or money for health care when there are no hospitals or doctors."

Joyce Wells, Regina, Sask.



"After more than 20 years in the child care field, I was excited to see the government finally realize that by putting much-needed money into quality programming, it would benefit everyone. It was a win-win situation and I thought there was finally a light at the end of the tunnel! Now our hopes are once again dashed. If there isn't consistent funding given to daycare, we won't need to worry about quality care as there won't be any programs left in operation"

Ardith Leggat, Patterson Children's Centre, Grande Prairie, Alta.

"Working families and children in this country need a child care plan and not a cash hand-out... All our children matter and they deserve quality care."

Janell Hubbard, CUPE 3967, Regina, Sask.

"Please consider the wealth of knowledge and experience of those directly involved with the delivery of quality child care programs. Money to parents does not guarantee quality child care."

Trina Isakson, YWCA of Vancouver, B.C.

"The research is absolutely clear on the fundamental importance of the early years of child development. Every dollar denied at this stage will cost many more dollars in the long run. Cutting this funding is economically irresponsible. Publicly funded child care spaces are the only reasonable way to provide this vital service."

Rod Dolmage, University of Regina, Sask.

"The Liberal government under Lester Pearson announced a national child care policy when I was still in high school. We have skipped a generation and now I have grandchildren still waiting for quality, affordable publicly funded child care services. Shame on both provincial and federal governments."

James McNinch, University of Regina, Sask.

"We should be learning from the experience in Quebec that has been an enormous success by permitting both children and parents to fulfill their needs and develop happily."

Katherine Frohlich, Montreal, Que.

"Please honour the agreement and make safe, regulated, and stimulating child care available to all Canadian parents who need such a service. The future benefits will be well worth the immediate costs."

Jennifer Rattray, Winnipeg, Man.

"Affordable, quality childcare allows working Canadians to improve their lives and the communities they live in. The federal government has a duty to finally come through with a real national program."

David Frevola, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Halifax, N.S.

"Waiting lists for daycare are atrocious. Help working parents provide good and safe environments for their children."

Annie Ho, Toronto, Ont.

"Surely, with the collective wealth of this country, we can combine a small direct payment to parents as proposed by Harper with funding a comprehensive daycare program for the country."

Thomas O'Shea, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.

"We must begin to progress rather than regress. This cancellation of funding will not help or protect our most important assets, our children, our future."

Evelyn Stefanovic, Agassiz, B.C.



ED *A true statesman and workers' friend* BROADBENT



In January, shortly before the federal election, Organize editor Natasha Gauthier spoke with retiring New Democrat MP and former NDP Leader Ed Broadbent.

One of Canada's most respected political figures and a true statesman, Ed Broadbent was a member of Parliament for over 20 years. He served as leader of the NDP from 1975 to 1989, when he first retired from politics.

Under his leadership, the NDP had its strongest showing, winning 43 seats in the 1988 election. Some of the issues Broadbent fought for were an equitable tax system, equality for women and the constitutional entrenchment of aboriginal and economic rights.

In 2004, citing "the deepening of inequality in Canada," he returned to politics, winning the riding of Ottawa Centre for the NDP. In May 2005, he announced he would not run again in order to spend more time with his ailing wife, Lucille.

He was born March 21, 1936, in Oshawa, Ont., a riding he later represented for many years. He studied philosophy at the University of Toronto, pursued graduate studies at the London School of Economics and received a PhD in political science from the U. of T. Prior to joining politics, he taught at York University in Toronto.

During his first retirement, from 1989 to 2004, Broadbent was active on



Broadbent, then NDP leader,
with former CUPE president Grace Hartman

the Canadian and international academic and social justice scenes. From 1990 to 1996, he was the first president of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Montreal. Broadbent was also a vice-president of Socialist International.

While at the centre, he worked with those involved in the struggle for democracy in Haiti and Burma. In 1993, he was one of four international judges to sit on the Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights at the United Nations Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The next year, he served on a panel of experts on the International Tribunal on Rights in Haiti, and was subsequently named by former President Jean-Baptiste Aristide as international advisor to Haiti's Truth and Justice Commission.

From 1997 to 1999, Broadbent held the J.S. Woodsworth Chair, a teaching and research position at the Institute for the Humanities at Simon Fraser University. He was also a Visiting Fellow at Oxford University in Great Britain.

In 1982, Broadbent became a member of the Privy Council of Canada. In 1993, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Here are his views on some of the issues and concerns of CUPE members and all Canadians.

CUPE: *In the months leading up to the Jan. 23 election, a lot of concern was voiced, both in the media and among the general population, about the poor quality of political debate in this country. Politicians no longer argue about ideas,*

they take cheap shots at each other and call each other names. There's no stimulating dialogue. You've always preserved a reputation for gentlemanly and dignified conduct. What are your views on this?

ED BROADBENT: We have this structure where the government sits on one side and the opposition on the other. The message, we're told, is that our party is always right and the other side's always wrong. There's virtually no dialogue. It's highly exceptional for there to be any sort of a reciprocal, considerate dialogue. When that occurs, it's at the committee stage normally, and that is unlikely to happen when there's a minority government. So the structure of Parliament lends itself to personal conflict... It's highly exceptional for the parties here to agree with each other.

And then, if you're confronted with a scandal such as we've had for about two years running now, it's very easy for that to become personalized and people start hurling totally uncivil abuse at each other and they try to attack a whole party because of the behaviour of a few people in it. Frankly, I'll say this: it's going back and forth between the Conservatives and the Liberals. I honestly can say the NDP did not indulge in that.

CUPE: *Has that kind of behaviour become worse since you began your career in politics?*

EB: Yes, it is worse. The year I became leader of the NDP, in 1975, (Pierre) Trudeau was prime minister and (Robert) Stanfield was the leader of the Conservative Party. We certainly had a tense and serious debate, but we never hurled personal abuse at each other. You can have strong disagreement and still respect what I would call the "integrity of the person." That definitely has gotten worse in the recent years.

I want to add immediately, it's worse outside the House of Commons, too. In most democracies there's been a decline in civility and a decline of respect of our institutions of authority. Not just Parliament, but corporation leaders, church leaders, all traditional sources of authority are reaching all time lows in respect.

You might well ask: what's the reason for this? And I think it's appropriate that I'm talking to somebody from CUPE, because as I see it, all this started years ago with Margaret Thatcher [in Britain] and Ronald Reagan in the United States, when they began attacking government institutions. They put all the emphasis on the market and personal consumption.

This kind of Parliament we have now doesn't happen overnight. It's been going on for a couple a decades of downplaying cooperation in society, downplaying government action as a means of solving our needs, whether it's health care or daycare, with a new, pounding emphasis on private consumption and private solutions to social problems.

We're creating a population that is much more egocentric, and that doesn't surprise me. I was teaching students who were brought up under this mythology. They were told by the Ralph Kleins and Mike Harris and the neo-conservatives – whether they're in the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party – that you kind of look after yourself, whether it comes to pensions or trying desperately to privatize health care.

It's a whole culture of "me-ism," of looking after yourself first. A lot of young people would otherwise not have moved in that direction in my view, but when they saw governments getting out of all kinds of social responsibilities, whether it's housing or health care or post-secondary education, these students did



Broadbent supported Ottawa Centre NDP candidate Paul Dewar in the last federal election. Dewar was elected.

start looking after themselves. So we've produced a much higher percentage of people in our population that are primarily looking after themselves. And I argue that this is a consequence of under funding and the attacking of public institutions and public solutions for social problems.

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were the first heads of government in the post-war period who actually attacked government. They didn't say, "this program is bad; we have to replace it with another." They said government itself is bad. That we should turn everything we can into private consumption; whether it's health care or buying a car, it should be a commodity. Well this, in my judgment, is the root of our problem. It's been 20 years of systematic attack on what we do as citizens in the collective or social way.

There's a major role for the private sector, obviously, as it generates the revenue to pay for things, but there are many things in our lives that we should organize on a cooperative basis through governments. Well that's come unstuck. People look after themselves. People show disrespect for authority because authority is not doing anything for them.

CUPE: *What about trust in our governments? That's been eroded as well.*

EB: Right, that's very important. Trust has gone down in all institutions. Now, some of that is because of corporate wrongdoing. There have been some major scandals in both Canada and the U.S., so that's part of the problem. But the real genesis of that mistrust is this: the high point of Canadian and North American democracy was in the early 70s. And then we started making cuts in the 80s and that maxed out in the 90s with all the massive cuts that [then Liberal

finance minister Paul] Martin brought in, just leaving people on their own. If you leave people on their own, they get selfish and they don't respect authority. So we're inheriting all that. That's my diagnosis.

CUPE: *So what role do you see the labour movement, and particularly public sector unions, playing to counteract that? Does labour still have the crucial role that it has had in the past?*

EB: It should have. Labour should be very active. And in my view, it should be publicly supporting and endorsing the NDP. Why? Because it's the party that believes in the public sector. That's not just because I'm in the NDP! I joined it because it believes in these things.

I gave a speech not long ago on the relationship between labour and the NDP. I talked about how this is a natural relationship because we, like the labour movement, are for expansion of democracy within the places of work, greater equality, greater respect for the dignity of people.

I, for one, always welcome labour support for what we're doing. In the [previous] caucus, our labour critic [was] an auto worker, our Whip [was] a steelworker. We've got Gary Doer as a premier [in Manitoba] who came out of a public sector union. We have more union activists in our party in key positions than the other two parties put together and it's not an accident, because we have the same values.

CUPE: *Under your leadership, the NDP enjoyed some very healthy numbers in the House of Commons. We just saw with the last government what numbers mean in terms of clout. How will the NDP maintain that momentum?*

EB: Well, look what we were able to do with 19 MPs; just think what we could do with [more]. [In] another minority government, we'll be in a real position of influence. [Electing the NDP] maximizes influence for working families. Because, contrary to what a certain union leader said, [former prime minister] Paul Martin did nothing for ordinary people until he was forced to do it in the June [2005] budget.

CUPE: *And that was thanks to the NDP.*

EB: Yes, exactly. In the February [2005] budget, there was nothing in there for housing, nothing for students, nothing to protect workers in case of a bankruptcy. And the NDP got all that because the Liberals needed our votes.

CUPE: *We have the health care and child care debates, and a number of other pressing issues. What do you see as the biggest battleground in the coming months for the left and for the NDP?*

EB: It's going to be to re-establish this whole notion of the public good being met through public legislation and laws, whether it's in health care or early childhood learning, daycare, improved education, reducing the number of students per teacher, etc. This is recognized as the best social policy, if you really believe in equality of citizenship. You don't just buy these services so richer people can get better access to them. You have to ensure they're provided equally so you build up a sense of communality and equality of citizenship. We have to get back on that track.

CUPE: *Thank you, Mr. Broadbent.*



National women's task force: making our union stronger



Women in CUPE
Strengthening our union

Task force members

Front row, l to r: Donna Ryan, Barbara Moore (co-chair), Donalda MacDonald, Geraldine Harris, Odette Robichaud, Arlene Macklem.

Middle: Cidalia Ribero, Helen Kennedy, Candace Rennick, Lucie Levasseur, Paul Moist (co-chair), Cheryl Stadnichuk (staff coordinator).

Back: Hitomi Suzuta, Shelina Hassanali, Sheila Rowswell, Sheryl Burns.

Absent: Elizabeth Borden-Paris.

On March 8, International Women's Day, CUPE officially launched the national women's task force. Its creation was mandated at the 2005 national convention. The task force's purpose: to make our union stronger by increasing women's participation and representation.

"This is one of the most important initiatives that our union has undertaken in years," said CUPE's national officers, President Paul Moist and Secretary-Treasurer Claude Généreux, in a letter to all members.

The task force will consult with and reach out to CUPE members, looking at the status of women in our union and in society generally.

The group has 16 member representatives and will get help from assigned staff in the regions and at CUPE National. The full-time coordinator is Cheryl Stadnichuk, a Saskatchewan-based CUPE researcher.

"The task force is about working from the bottom up to get results," said co-chair Barb Moore at the group's inaugural meeting in Ottawa in February. "We're going out to the members to find out about the issues and come up with solutions, small and large, that will make a difference for women. Solutions that will make CUPE stronger."

While two-thirds of CUPE's members are women, their numbers in leadership at national and provincial levels have declined over the last decade. Yet more women are now in the paid workforce – 58 per cent of women aged 15 and over. Many of those women are caring for children or elders. Many do it alone. Many work part-time to shoulder those responsibilities.

“I can't think of a greater barrier to being involved in our union than to have to hold down three jobs,” said Moist, the other co-chair. “More than a quarter of our sisters are part-timers.”

For these reasons and more, women need unions. And CUPE needs women so we can continue to fight privatization, raise wages, achieve pay equity, secure pensions and gain a national child care program.

Here are your 16 task force members on what they hope to gain from the experience:



Cidalia Ribero

[Cidalia Ribero, member of CUPE 4092](#)
[\(Air Canada flight attendants\):](#)

“My most valuable experience coming into this exercise was attending the CUPE national convention in Winnipeg in 2005. It was my first convention and I attended all the women's caucus meetings. I heard the stories and experiences of my sisters and realized that all is not golden within CUPE. It was my first real encounter as a woman listening to women's issues and I greatly appreciated the courage that those sisters had to relay their experiences, both in caucus and on the floor of the convention.

I would like to engage young women like myself in union life. I think that most young women feel there are no problems of representation and equity within their union and in society. They look at their mothers and grandmothers and think that today's woman has come a long way. While it may look like that on the surface, this is far from the truth and we need to ensure that young women are actively involved in their futures.”

[Arlene Macklem, executive member, CUPE 998 \(Manitoba Hydro, Winnipeg\):](#)

“My most valuable asset is my ability to communicate effectively. I have never been shy about expressing my own opinion or asking others for their opinion. My mother worried that someone would carry me off, as I would strike up conversations with complete strangers at the age of three or four!

Over the years, I have worked, volunteered and unionized in areas where communication is important. As a woman in CUPE, I think that my experiences working in a non-traditional job (drafting) opened my eyes a little wider to the inequities borne by women in the workforce. Why should I stay home until my children are grown? Why do I have to be one of the boys?

I was always conscious of the inequalities of women growing up, mostly the blatant stuff. As a young woman, I found out what it was like to be denied a credit card, a mortgage or a job because of my sex. Later, I encountered the subtle discriminations of life: the glass ceiling, not being taken seriously, being interrupted by men. At first I was angry, but then my experiences moved me to join the union and effect change.”

[Elizabeth Borden-Paris, member, CUPE 2330](#)
[\(group home care workers, New Glasgow, N.S.\):](#)

“My mother worked for 25 years in the same nursing home where I now work, and she embedded “union” into her children. I think that being a strong union activist allows me to reach out to women in my own local who are not very vocal or who are not participating much in the union. I am also committed to building alliances with women's groups in the community who do not have a union background, and with a new generation of young women who will fill our shoes when we're gone.”



Candace Rennick



Barbara
Moore

Barbara Moore, task force co-chair, member of CUPE 3912 (Dalhousie University employees, Halifax, N.S.):

“As a social researcher, educator and proud unionist, I have a clear vision that the role of the women’s task force is to give women in our union a full voice in sharing their experiences in the workplace and in the union. The barriers that women face in their day-to-day lives need to be identified and transformed if women are to enjoy full equality in their living and working conditions. Transformation of this kind is linked to true equality of opportunity. My hope is that the research we will be doing in the coming months will provide long-term answers to the urgent questions around gender equity in our union.”

Candace Rennick, regional vice-president (Ontario); member, CUPE national executive board; president, CUPE 2280 (long-term-care workers, Peterborough, Ont.):

“I come to the task force with unusual experience for my age. At 23, I became the president of a local with 200 members, CUPE 2280, at a long-term-care facility in Peterborough, Ont.

I am now 27 and continue to have the privilege of representing my local. We have a predominantly female membership and an executive board made up entirely of women. I am currently serving my second term on the CUPE Ontario Division executive board as the fourth vice-president and my second term on the national executive board as regional vice-president for Ontario.

I bring to the task force an understanding that achieving leadership roles cannot by itself address the problems women face. I understand those problems: part-time/casual work, inadequate child care, the overload of unpaid work, lack of employment security, lower paid classifications, fewer employee benefits, inferior or no pensions and government cutbacks, to name a few.

These workplace struggles create real barriers to full participation in the union. It is a huge challenge trying to make a living and taking on union activity on top of that. To advance the situation of all women, fundamental change is needed. To achieve real change, our union needs to put women’s wages, pensions, benefits, working hours, child care, parental leave and a lot of other concerns higher on the agenda. It’s everyone’s responsibility.

I hope to ensure that the task force not only addresses the serious issue of the lack of women’s participation at leadership levels, but also identifies key workplace inequities and finds meaningful solutions to correct them.”

Donalda MacDonald, president, CUPE Prince Edward Island; member, national executive board, executive member, CUPE 1770 (P.E.I. school administrative support workers):

“My involvement in this wonderful union of ours has been made easier for me because of the sisters who came before me. I have been amazingly fortunate to have the support and friendship of strong CUPE women like sisters Julie Davis and Judy Darcy. They have been my inspiration. I hope, in some small way, to encourage and support the women of our union in a similar fashion.

There are many experiences that I bring to the task force, like raising three children, working full-time and being a union activist. The skills needed to juggle family, work, and union while keeping guilt to a minimum is one most women activists have to acquire!

I hope to bring insight to the task force on how CUPE women can survive and indeed thrive in the quagmire of union politics.

Two years ago, I was asked to be the guest speaker at the Atlantic Region CEIU (an affiliate of the Public Service Alliance of Canada) women’s conference. My topic was ‘Challenges facing Women Leaders in the Labour Movement’. While researching, I came across a speech given 20 years ago by sister Judy Darcy to the same union on the same topic. She was not yet president of CUPE, but had been newly elected to CUPE’s national executive board representing Ontario.

In her speech, sister Darcy stated: “I am very nervous about discussing this topic...precisely because it is so personal, because it does touch each one of us so directly, because it is very contentious, in my union as well as in yours.”

Twenty years later this still holds true. And rather than discouraging me, it encouraged me to work and push harder on women’s issues within our union. And now the women’s task force takes on the issue, as does our entire union. Together we can and will make CUPE stronger for all of us.”

Odette Robichaud, president, CUPE 1840
(New Brunswick court stenographers):

“I have been a court stenographer for almost 30 years. From the first day, I’ve been involved with my union. The barriers we encounter are the reason I have become so passionate about this. I hope that my knowledge and experience will be useful as this task force does its work. In my region, I plan to be a team worker who will involve people in the union and in the workplace at all levels.”



Hitomi Suzuta

Hitomi Suzuta, president, CUPE 2419 (University of Regina employees, Saskatchewan):

“I recently attended the Saskatchewan CUPE winter school. The majority of the students were male. I was the only visible minority. Active participation and discussion were encouraged, and it was interesting to see how the classroom dynamics unfolded. Those with the loudest voices (male) were heard and those who adhered to raising their hands and more cooperative types of participation (women and youth) were often voiceless and/or frustrated with the process.

As an academic who studies female/male group dynamics, as a visible minority and as a female president in the union movement, I feel this demonstrates why women, youth and other under-represented groups should be alarmed at their lack of voice. Equality of opportunity and recognition remain an insurmountable task for those who do not hold power and/or authority. Despite the implementation of rules, regulations and laws to encourage equality, changes often need to be made at the individual level.

Our unions should be at the forefront of the movement to push toward equity, diversity and respect, so that our workplaces reflect democratic principles and fair participation of everyone.

I am the diversity member on the CUPE Saskatchewan executive board.

Through these two positions, and through my work on the task force, I can assist in building awareness through education and communication of issues surrounding diversity and equity in general.

Democracy means that everyone has an equal and active opportunity to participate in society. That should be a goal everyone strives to achieve.”

Geraldine Harris, senator, CUPE Saskatchewan Aboriginal Council; member, CUPE 3967 (Regina Qu’appelle regional health authority support workers):

“I believe that my work as a senator on the Aboriginal Council will assist me in making the task force a success. I am also very involved with the national rainbow committee as well as with my local. I hope to get more Aboriginal members involved and educated on how important it is to participate in their union. By becoming more involved, we can all work to fight inequality. As CUPE women, we have a lot to offer.”

Sheryl Burns, vice-president, CUPE 1936
(Greater Vancouver social services):

“As a woman who was born hard of hearing, I have experienced many challenges and barriers to full participation in all aspects of society. As a small child, I attended schools for children with disabilities until my parents relocated to a small village. I was a full grade behind in my studies, as students with disabilities were not encouraged to challenge themselves and their potential went unrecognized. I have vivid memories of entering my new school and suddenly being expected to “perform.”

I quickly learned that I was expected to pretend to be “hearing.” The belief was that this would help ensure success. As I got older, I realized that pretending only erected more barriers to my participation in society. I now ask for what I need. This not only benefits me, it helps others.

I have been part of the women’s movement in British Columbia for over 13 years. I have met and supported women from all walks of life. I understand how race, culture, class, education, age, ability, sexual orientation and other factors affect whether a woman can access the benefits of society. I also witnessed the strength, endurance, resourcefulness and sheer courage of women. I hope to tap into these qualities as a member of the task force.

I believe that women themselves are the experts on what they need. I hope to listen to women, to hear their stories as well as their suggestions for breaking down barriers to their participation in and access to union leadership roles.

I view myself as the mouthpiece of these women. I will bring forward their stories and solutions in order to help make recommendations for positive change that will benefit all members of CUPE.”

Sheila Rowswell, British Columbia Hospital Employees' Union:

"Women make up the majority of CUPE members and 83 per cent of members of the Hospital Employees' Union in British Columbia. Times have changed since I was catcalled when I stood up to speak at my first CUPE local meeting in 1977. But if we look at the facts, in so many ways, women are not yet at a place we would call "equal."

There are many suggestions on how we could include more women in our union and enable them to be activists. It's about collective agreement language, about sharing tasks at home, in the family and community, and about women in leadership. Having strong women in leadership brings in more women who want to be active. If you don't have women, who make up the majority of members, wanting to be supporters, activists and leaders, the union cannot be sustained. It's that simple.

Members do want to see union structures improved and they have good suggestions. It just takes reaching out, being open and non-judgmental, and listening, listening, listening (something we're not that used to in unions!)."

Helen Kennedy, president, CUPE 79 (Toronto inside workers):

"I became a member of CUPE when I was a single mom with three young daughters. I couldn't believe it when a brother asked me to come to a union meeting. It was at 5 p.m. – no child care, no food. But then we went on strike and I realized how important it was for women to get involved in the union.

I was in CUPE 94 (inside and outside workers for the City of North York), and although the inside membership was larger and female for the

National women's task force Q & A

Is the main goal of the task force to build support for five designated seats for women on the national executive board (NEB)?

No. The national women's task force has a much broader mandate. The proposal for five seats for women on the NEB was the intent of a resolution at the 2005 national convention. The proposal was meant as a temporary measure, not a permanent solution, to the immediate problem of under-representation of women on the NEB. The resolution did not receive the two-thirds majority vote it needed to pass.

The idea behind the task force, which was created with the adoption of resolution 106, is to discuss long-term solutions to the larger issue of women's participation and representation in the union. The task force is mandated to consult broadly with CUPE members across the country to examine the wide range of women's equality issues and to explore what members see as possible solutions.

Is the task force necessary? Haven't women achieved equality?

Women have made significant gains in our union over the last few decades. We have had two women national presidents. Women are active as members and leaders. CUPE has championed issues that are important to women workers such as pay equity, working conditions and child care.

About two-thirds of our members are women, but this is not reflected in the top leadership levels of our union. We need to ask why. And we need to ensure that we are not encouraging structures and practices that make it more difficult for women to participate fully in our union.

Women still face many barriers in society, in the workplace and in the union. We need to understand the barriers that prevent women from becoming union activists and leaders. We need women's voices and leadership to make our union stronger and to ensure we understand and respond to women's issues.

Who are the task force members?

The 16-member task force reflects the diversity of women in our union. There are younger and older women, women of colour, women from small and large locals, Francophone women, an Aboriginal woman, a woman with a disability, an immigrant woman, and women from each region of Canada. Each province is being encouraged to create regional subcommittees that reflect the women in their region.

Why is CUPE's male national president the co-chair of a women's task force?

The national president provides the support of the top elected leader to this important initiative. Having the national president – whether that person is a woman or a man – act as co-chair of the task force demonstrates the importance that the national union places on this project.

most part, the union was dominated by the outside, mainly male membership. I put in my time and was elected to the executive. It was really tough slogging in the beginning. Racist and sexist jokes were common. The other members of the executive (all male) slowly learned that I would challenge these comments and they stopped making them (in front of me, anyway).

While this experience was really hard, I reflect on it often. I think it made me more committed to fighting for equality issues in the labour movement and also to look for activists beyond the executive committee.

A key to the success of the task force would be to reach those women who feel their voices are not reflected in CUPE. I particularly want to ensure that women of colour, women with a disability, lesbian and transgendered women, young workers and Aboriginal women are fully involved.

Grace Hartman, CUPE's first female national president, was the former president of my local. I made a promise to myself that I would never let the boys see me cry at an executive meeting. When times were particularly tough, I would walk down the hall and stand in front of the portrait of Grace. On many occasions, Grace and my quiet times with her in the hallway inspired me to stick it out. And here I am today!"



[Donna Ryan, regional vice-president \(Newfoundland and Labrador\); member, national executive board; president, CUPE 488 \(health care support workers, Newfoundland and Labrador\):](#)

"In 2004, the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a decision regarding pay equity in Newfoundland and Labrador. The court ruled that the female provincial workers had been discriminated against. But because the government claimed financial difficulties, it did not have to pay the equity retroactively to the female workers. This decision really opened my eyes to the barriers that women face."

[Shelina Hassanali, CUPE 4731 \(social services workers, Calgary, Alb.\):](#)

"My goal is to organize more non-profit social service agencies and to help workers improve their situations and gain greater respect for the services they provide to our communities.

I was born in Pakistan and raised in a patriarchal environment, so I learned about oppression. As a social worker, I learned to listen to people's concerns and to advocate for them. I see my clients struggling. I work with battered women every day. I see women of diverse backgrounds faced with many systemic barriers. Many of them don't have enough money to put food on the table for their families.

Those same skills will help me have a dialogue with our women members about the barriers we face. And I believe the task force will help bring about the social change that is needed to address those barriers.

All my life, I wanted to be a doctor. When I couldn't realize that goal, I felt discouraged. I wanted to help people, but I didn't think I would become a social activist and a trade unionist. I didn't become a medical doctor, but I have become a kind of social doctor. I work with people to help fix social problems.

When I receive a note or a call from a client to thank me for helping them get on their feet again, for changing their lives for the better, it fulfills me as an emotional doctor who cares about individuals and the community. I hope to bring that same energy and compassion to my role as a member of the task force."

[Lucie Levasseur, vice-president, CUPE 2051 \(Télé-université workers, Montreal\):](#)

"What I bring to this group is my 17 years of experience as an activist in a milieu dominated by women. I'm vice-president of CUPE 2051, which is 70 per cent women. I'm also president of the provincial council for the university sector, which is made up of more than 70 per cent women.

For me, the best way to contribute to this exercise in a tangible way is to never lose sight of the fact that women themselves can give us the answers we need. We need to talk to them, consult with them on the questions and find out from them why they don't participate in the union at the local level, and why they aren't getting to leadership positions within our structure. ■





Vancouver Island fights to keep water public

Residents of British Columbia's Vancouver Island have shown they're willing to speak out to keep their water and wastewater systems public. And the Island Water Watch campaign is there to help them fight privatization and defend public water.

Private corporations have set their sights on the island. Edmonton-based Epcor is in Sooke, Port Hardy and French Creek in the Regional District of Nanaimo. Terasen is in Langford and is seeking entry into other municipalities.

"Corporations are relentlessly pursuing elected municipal councils with offers to manage their water," CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill said.

Island Water Watch coalitions have been at the forefront of dozens of community forums and actions to raise public awareness and resist privatization attempts. The Water Watch campaign began in September 2005 when coordinator Leslie Dickout was hired to work out of CUPE's Nanaimo area office.

Working closely with CUPE 401 president Rodger Oakley, who chairs CUPE's Island Water Watch committee, Dickout has overseen the establishment of a number of active community coalitions and an island-wide computer network connecting water activists and CUPE members.



Island Water Watch chair Rodger Oakley, left, and CUPE Saskatchewan VP Frank Mentos flank a Venezuelan colleague at a World Water Day rally in Mexico City.

"Island residents are really concerned about what is happening," Dickout said. "They are committed to stopping private corporations like Terasen and Epcor from getting control of water and wastewater."

Oakley, who was part of the CUPE delegation at World Water Day Forum events in Mexico City in March, sees the similarities between global and local struggles. "The fights that we have had in communities like French Creek are absolutely linked to struggles in places like Bolivia," he said.

In preparation for November 2005 municipal elections across B.C., CUPE commissioned public opinion research on water. Almost nine out of 10 British Columbians agreed with the statement, "water is a basic public service and should always remain in public hands." The sentiment was even stronger on Vancouver Island, where a whopping 92 per cent of islanders agreed.

The poll helped to get the issue of public water on the political agenda. "We put local politicians on notice there will be consequences if private corporations get a

friendly reception," O'Neill said. "They know we are watching and that we will organize to stop privatization."

Island Water Watch continues to work at the community and political levels. The campaign has approached all elected local politicians across the island to provide information and seek meetings. It was instrumental in convincing the Campbell River municipal council to keep its water-quality monitoring program in public hands.

On the mid-island, where Epcor recently obtained approval to purchase the private water utility in French Creek, activists are running a successful campaign to convince the Regional District of Nanaimo not to allow further private access to the district's water system.

The next phase will see the island campaign playing a major role in Mayworks activities and at music festivals throughout the summer, with an emphasis on working with First Nations communities.

Go to www.keepwaterpublic.ca for more information.

■ Roseanne Moran



Alberta: Gambling with the union doesn't pay



For six weeks, Casino Calgary workers walked a dangerous and often violent picket line. Over 36 picketers were hit by irate drivers. Fights with gamblers were common and police were an almost constant presence. All for a little dignity.

Last fall, more than 400 casino employees walked out on jobs that paid as little as \$7 an hour. Fed up with an employer who hadn't raised wages since opening the casino in 2001 (except after the Alberta government raised the minimum wage), they became the first casino workers in the province to unionize.

"Every day we were yelled at," said blackjack dealer Betty Wong, who served as a picket captain. "Every day we were bumped by cars, the police were always being called to the scene. Every day we literally risked our lives for the strike."

"Calgary is an expensive city," said CUPE Alberta president D'Arcy Lanovaz. "The idea of trying to raise a family with any sort of dignity on casino wages is laughable."

Casino Calgary, part of a \$100-million gambling empire, offered a wage increase of one per cent. "We were dealing with an employer who was trying to break the union," Lanovaz said. "They never expected

us to strike, and they never expected the strike to hurt their business."

But business was affected. Almost immediately, the number of cars in the casino parking lot dropped by as much as 70 per cent, according to eyewitnesses.

"Some customers supported the strikers all the way, some didn't like to gamble in an empty casino, and some just couldn't be bothered with the hassle of being delayed by a picket line," Lanovaz said. "It was reported that the charitable take from that casino (50 per cent of revenues) had gone from \$70,000 per day to \$5,000."

Wong said that in spite of the decline in business, there was never a dull moment on the picket line. "Most of the customers were gone, but those that crossed the line were the most hostile," she said. "They

were addicted gamblers, and the combination of addiction, booze, cars, and an ugly strike resulted in a very dangerous situation."

Wong recounts how one picket was hit by an SUV. "She held on for her life as the gambler drove her half a mile down the road before being pulled over by police."

In the end, the workers didn't get the wage increase they wanted (they settled for 4.5 per cent), but they did thwart the employer's attempts at union busting.

"I think our members showed they were made of pretty tough stuff," Lanovaz said. "I'd be very surprised if these casino workers have to strike next time. I don't think their employer has the stomach for another fight like this one."

■ Lou Arab



A hopeful spring for Saskatchewan school workers

When Lorry Okraince gets home from school on this sunny day at the end of March, she sees a couple of new born calves in her farm yard – a sure sign of spring on the prairies.

It's a good time of year for Lorry and her husband, who run an organic, mixed farm with 200 head of cattle in southwestern Saskatchewan.

"I've been a ranch girl all my life," she explained. "I always look forward to calving season."

But there's something else Lorry is looking forward to this spring: the opportunity to negotiate better wages and benefits now that she and her six co-workers at Glentworth Central School – a rural school with 120 students in 12 grades – have joined CUPE.

"We were the lowest paid school workers in the region with hardly any benefits and the only ones who had not joined

[CUPE] yet," she said. "So the question wasn't so much if we should join, but why we hadn't joined earlier."

Lorry is one of 819 rural school workers in Saskatchewan to respond to CUPE's organizing drive in K-12 education over the last year, as 59 rural school boards prepared to amalgamate into 12 large school divisions on Jan. 1, 2006.

Nearly 70 per cent of the 8,800 school support workers in the province are now represented by CUPE, up from 2,500 only 10 years ago.

CUPE member-organizer Cheryl Aschenbrenner says there is no question education workers signed union cards because they are worried about job security in the wake of school amalgamations. But many school support workers like Lorry also joined to achieve a more equitable system of pay and benefits.

Unlike teachers, who negotiate provin-

cially, school support workers bargain locally in Saskatchewan – a reality that has created enormous inequities across school divisions.

Only half of the school workers represented by CUPE have 100 per cent employer-paid extended health benefits, and nearly all those members work in large urban centres.

Most rural school support workers are either paying half the cost of benefit premiums or have no coverage at all. The only benefits school support workers receive at Glentworth, for example, are sick leave and one day of compassionate leave. Teachers at the same school enjoy complete benefit coverage fully funded by the employer.

That's one of the reasons CUPE school

support workers are lobbying the provincial government to provide the same type of comprehensive benefit coverage to school support workers that it provides to teachers.

"It's intolerable that our members – the lowest-paid workers in the school system – are the ones that often have to pay to get any benefit coverage," says Rona Tyson, a librarian/educational assistant in Major, Sask. She chairs the CUPE education workers' steering committee. The committee is organizing meetings with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and was planning a provincial bargaining conference in April to discuss strategies to achieve provincial bargaining.

Provincial bargaining has been the ultimate goal of Saskatchewan school support workers for the past decade, and Tyson feels it may be close at hand. In March, the provincial government increased its share of funding to K-12 education to 60 per cent, up from just 41 per cent just a few years ago.

"Now that our union represents nearly three of every four school workers in the province and the government now funds most of the cost of K-12 education, can provincial bargaining be far off?" Tyson asked.

It's a question education workers hope will get a positive answer from the government.

■ Beth Smillie

Research projects highlight Manitoba privatization



Compared to other provinces, Manitoba has a reputation for being privatization-free. It's true that the New Democrat government has done a lot to keep services in public hands.

However, like the rest of Canada, the province is under increasing economic and political pressure to privatize and contract out. That's why CUPE Manitoba is working on two research projects to support the union's ongoing campaign to keep services public.

The first project is a collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). Slated for publication this fall, the State of Public Services Report for 2006 will highlight the effects of privatization on Manitobans.

The report will analyze how health care, educational, social agency, and municipal services are being eroded by privatization. Experts will expose how work is being contracted out to individuals, companies or non-governmental agencies. They will then



This 1912 photo shows a crew from Winnipeg's publicly owned city roads department. (Manitoba Archives)

show how people using these services are paying more and getting less.

"This research is focusing on how the quality of services and accessibility are affected when service delivery is in private hands and governments lose the control of them," says Wayne Antony, CCPA board member.

CUPE 500 (City of Winnipeg support workers) is conducting the second research project. The local wants to document the history of how public services and assets were built up in Winnipeg before being sold or given away.

"There are lessons to be learned and documented on how a range of important public services were created and then destroyed," says CUPE 500 president Gary Swanson. "There are warnings in how these social benefits were lost and how public officials failed to protect them."

A hundred years ago, the city took on the provision of many public services, including electric power, telephone, garbage collection, water and recreation.

"The services and utilities were developed at a time when cooperatives and unions flourished and political activism was vibrant," notes Swanson.

"Over time, Winnipeggers have forgotten why these public services were developed and how important they are to us. They've forgotten that the profit motive couldn't deliver services in the past, and that it won't now."

■ Dennis Lewycky



Ontario inching closer to two-tier health care

This spring, the Ontario Liberal government forced into law controversial new legislation allowing health system changes that inch health care ever closer to a two-tier system and open the door to widespread privatization of services.

CUPE Ontario members in the health care and community-based social services sectors mounted an aggressive campaign opposing Premier Dalton McGuinty's plan to regionalize health service delivery under so-called local health integration networks or LHINs.

CUPE and three other health care unions, collectively representing about 200,000 nurses, technologists, home care, hospital and long-term care workers, formed a coalition to fight the restructuring proposed under the LHIN plan.

Bill 36, the LHINs legislation, gives the minister of health or his agents – the LHIN boards – unprecedented power to merge, transfer or suspend health services and redistribute them throughout the networks.

The 14 planned LHINs cover large geographic areas; some serve populations of more than a million people. Local decision-making will be in the hands of LHIN boards appointed by the government. Access to local health services will diminish as services are transferred out of smaller communities and consolidated in larger centres. Smaller community hospitals are particularly threatened under this plan.

“Under the LHINs, the services people now access locally at their community hospital and through community social service agencies will be consolidated and moved somewhere in a health network, which is a large geographic area,” warned Michael Hurley, president of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU/CUPE). “That means the sick,



the elderly and families will have less access to services in their communities.”

Along with integration, the Liberals intend to introduce competitive bidding to hospitals, long-term care and community health-related social services. The job security of thousands of CUPE members is threatened, as is patient care.

“The competitive bidding approach has been detrimental in the Ontario home care sector, where patient care has diminished and wages, benefits and working conditions have been degraded,” Hurley added.

In communities across Ontario, through public meetings, the media and paid advertising, the union coalition raised the alarm that the LHIN scheme will

increase for-profit delivery of services, bring in new user fees and erode universal health care. Until the campaign, Ontarians knew little about LHINs. The McGuinty government had downplayed the widespread changes proposed under their plan.

Regulations accompanying the LHIN legislation will not be cemented in place until a provincial strategic plan is completed over the next year. Meantime, CUPE and its allies are developing the next phase of the fightback campaign. They will continue to stand up for public health services and fight the LHIN plan.

■ Stella Yeadon



OMERS fight put pensions front and centre

For 30 days early in the new year, CUPE Ontario achieved what many would have considered impossible: putting workers' pensions in the headlines, on the radio talk shows and in coffee shop conversations across the province.



CUPE Ontario president Sid Ryan: "Let our workers retire with dignity."

It all started when the provincial Liberal government introduced Bill 206 last June. The act was designed to hand over governance of the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) to its member employees and employers in municipalities, school boards and children's aid societies.

CUPE Ontario, along with coalition partners from other unions and retiree organizations, had been campaigning for more than a decade for joint trusteeship of the pension plan, one of Canada's largest with almost \$40 billion in assets. CUPE represents about 45 per cent of active plan members.

But Bill 206 was a far cry from real joint trusteeship. It also proposed a cap on benefits that are already based on a lower accrual rate than many other public pension plans, did not give paramedics access to benefits similar to those enjoyed by

police and firefighters, and left CUPE seriously underrepresented on its governing boards.

"Give us an opportunity to negotiate these workers out of poverty and let them retire with dignity and a sense of respect and a decent pension plan," CUPE Ontario president Sid Ryan told the legislative committee hearing the bill, where he presented 15,000 postcards signed by CUPE members.

Toronto's CUPE 79 president Ann Dembinski echoed Ryan's comments. "There is serious, systemic gender discrimination inherent in this proposed legislation," she told the committee. "Most of our members are women. Many of them have difficult, stressful jobs. Some of our members also have dangerous jobs. The cap would apply to all these workers. It would not apply to the male-dominated occupations: police officers and firefighters."

Victory, when it came, was fleeting. The Liberals got rid of the cap, included paramedics in at least some of the provisions of the bill and made slight improvements to CUPE's representation.

But, in their 100-plus amendments, they also created a requirement for a two-thirds majority vote for any plan improvements that would benefit CUPE members, gutted the mediation-arbitration process and put a management representative on the employee side of the administration board.

The gloves came off. Mobilization was fast and furious. At a late January emergency leadership meeting, locals gave CUPE Ontario a mandate to hold "political protest" votes. In one February week, 93 per cent of members who came out to 20 area meetings said yes to taking action. That's when pensions became front-page news.

"CUPE will not call for strike action unnecessarily," Ryan said at a news conference on Feb. 3. "The premier and the government will trigger a strike if they introduce Bill 206 for third reading in its current state."

For the next 12 days, despite intense questioning in the Legislature from opposition leaders and from reporters who increasingly understood Bill 206's lack of fairness, Premier Dalton McGuinty ignored CUPE's demands. As the tens of thousands of members who belong to OMERS lobbied their members of provincial Parliament and prepared picket signs, talks were taking place behind the scenes between CUPE Ontario and government officials.

On Feb. 22, Ryan announced that the government had agreed to introduce a "CUPE bill," legislation that would guarantee a review of the efficiency and fairness of the new OMERS governance structure by 2012. There would also be an opportunity within the next three years to raise issues that arise as the structure is implemented.



CUPE members at an OMERS protest outside Queen's Park in Toronto.

One thing that won't be under review is the general principle of transferring governance of OMERS from the province to the employee and employer members. And, for the first time, municipal, school board and children's aid society workers will be able to put pension issues on the negotiating table through supplemental plans.

■ Pat Daley



Who owns the wind and water? Everyone, of course. Who should benefit from the electricity produced by these two resources? Again, everyone. That's the opinion of CUPE's four large Hydro-Québec locals. They recently declared war on the provincial government's plan to privatize wind energy.

Activists from CUPE 957, 1500, 2000 and 4250 launched the *Restons maîtres chez nous* ("Let's stay in charge") campaign to inform and sensitize the general public.

Since February, hundreds of CUPE members have tried to make the Charest government understand that it is on the wrong path, and that it is essential to preserve public control of electricity production in Quebec.

To alert the public, members have pulled out all the stops: meetings with elected representatives, presentations to allied groups, media presence, advertisements, a website, an on-line petition, distribution of pamphlets, public activities, and even a song written by Jo Beaunier, a CUPE 301 member.

Since Jean Lesage, every Quebec premier has viewed electricity as a collective resource – except Jean Charest. With a call for tenders ending in December 2006, the production of 2,000 megawatts of wind energy will be entrusted to private, and possibly foreign, companies.

Quebec nationalized hydro-electric power in 1962. Since then, Hydro-Québec has ensured the energy security of the population while offering electricity at one of the lowest costs in North America.

"It worked for water, so why not for wind?" asked CUPE servicing representative Charles Paradis, a campaign spokesperson. "Why should we let private companies get rich from this natural resource? Why not become leaders in wind energy?"

Yvan Tremblay, member of CUPE 1500 and spokesperson for the Saguenay region, said the union will seek the support of municipal and provincial representatives and other elected officials.

"We will explain the risks and advantages of going private or staying with Hydro-Québec," Tremblay said. "There hasn't been any debate. The government has done an about-face, caving in to market and financial pressures, and to their friends."

Visit www.restonsmaitrescheznous.qc.ca to sign the petition or for more information.

■ Alexandre Boulerice

Another victory for falsely accused Montreal CUPE educator

Alvin Gibbs, the Montreal-area educator and CUPE 2718 member falsely accused in 2000 of sexually molesting the teens in his charge, has won another victory in court.

In her March 17 decision, Quebec Superior Court Judge Carole Julien quashed the arbitration award that prevented the educator from being paid retroactively for the period when he was accused of sexual touching and not allowed to work. If the employer doesn't appeal, the case will go back to the arbitrator, who will determine the amount owed Gibbs.

Gerry Joyce, a CUPE representative, was delighted. "It's been five years of hell for Alvin Gibbs," he said. "But it would seem that everything's turned out fine now. Let's hope the employer will show some common sense and decide not to appeal this fair and reasonable decision. Let's also hope that Alvin will quickly be paid lost earnings and related damages suffered in this saga that has dragged on much too long."

In 2000, youth attending the Batshaw Youth and Family Centre filed complaints against Gibbs that resulted in his firing and in criminal charges being laid against him.

At the end of a long and harrowing process, Gibbs was exonerated of any wrongdoing. Some teens recanted their testimony while others admitted that they had made false accusations in the hope of suing the centre for money. (For more on Alvin Gibbs, read *Five years in hell* in the Summer 2005 issue of *Organize*.)

In November 2003, an arbitrator overturned the firing. In 2004, the provincial court dismissed all charges and cleared Gibbs' reputation. But his employer still refused to pay him what he was owed for the period between Sept. 22, 2001 and June 1, 2004, claiming that he was not "available to work". During this period, there was a court order against Gibbs forbidding him from showing up for work.

CUPE contested, but lost the first round in arbitration. The recent Superior Court ruling overturned the arbitrator's decision, with Judge Julien commenting that it "offends the most basic sense of justice".





Fight for fairer electoral system not over, vows CUPE PEI

On Nov. 28, 2005, Prince Edward Islanders rejected a proposal to adopt a proportional representation electoral system. Supporters of electoral reform, including CUPE, were disappointed by the results, but have vowed to continue the fight for a fairer, more representative system.

Electoral reform has been on the radar for some time in P.E.I. The province has been debating moving from the traditional, "first-past-the-post" voting system to the more representational mixed member proportional (MMP) system. Last year, after lengthy consultations and studies, the Pat Binns government decided to put the question to Islanders.

The MMP system, used in Germany, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, is a hybrid of the winner-take-all approach and more proportional systems. On election day, people cast two votes. One is for a rid-

ing representative, elected the traditional way: the candidate with the most votes wins.

The second vote, however, is cast for a party. Based on the percentage of support for each party, the remaining seats are filled from a list so that each party has a portion of seats reflecting votes. Parties can fill these seats with women and minorities, correcting imbalances and ensuring better representation.

During its 2000 convention, CUPE PEI adopted a resolution supporting the MMP system. It was natural for the union to take the lead and organize the 'yes' campaign in favour of the change.

"We truly believe that a government elected through the MMP system would better represent our communities and provide more opportunities for women to be elected to the provincial legislature," said CUPE PEI president Donald MacDonald, co-chair of the Yes Coalition.

Coalition volunteers, including many CUPE members, canvassed door to door to explain why the MMP model would give ordinary people more influence over the province's political landscape. But on voting day, the proposal to adopt the MMP model was defeated by a 3-2 margin. The coalition was critical of the way the plebiscite was organized. Polling stations were cut to one quarter of those normally available to Islanders, causing confusion, long lines and low turnout.

Although the next provincial election will be fought under the current system, the debate over political reform is not over. A workshop was held in April 2006 to prepare recommendations to ensure that proportional representation is not moved to the back burner.

■ Danielle Savoie



Atlantic/Maritime provinces host joint political action conference



Delegates to the Nfld. political action conference were snowed in at the St. John's airport.

In March, activists and leaders from Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island gathered in St. John's, Nfld., for the first Atlantic/Maritime joint political action conference.

Delegates spent three days mapping out strategies for working more closely together on common issues such as privatization of health care, a national child care system, labour law and more.

The close to 200 delegates were not deterred by a late winter storm that walloped St. John's the same week. Flights were delayed, and some guest speakers from central Canada didn't end up making it.

"This is the first time the four provinces have joined forces for something like this," said CUPE provincial president Wayne Lucas. "With close to 50,000 of our members providing public services across the region, we have a number of pressing issues facing us in the political arena, not the least of which is Tory governments in each of our provinces.

Issues that dominated the conference included a plan to fight the Harper government's plans to abandon child care, moves to introduce 'two-tier' health care, minimum wage laws and electing worker-friendly governments. Guest speakers and panelists included Newfoundland Federation of Labour president Reg Anstey, CUPE NS president Danny Cavanagh, CUPE NB president Daniel Légère, CUPE PEI president Donald MacDonald, CUPE national diversity vice-president Leo Cheverie and Halifax New Democrat MP Alexa McDonough.

"CUPE is putting provincial governments and other employers on notice that we are prepared to fight to preserve the public services that communities in all four provinces rely on," added Lucas.

■ John McCracken

Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price

directed by Robert Greenwald

www.walmartmovie.com

Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price exposes the world's largest retailer as a corporate bully that follows only one motive: profit. It is also a cautionary and alarming tale of the restructuring of America.

Communities, workers' rights, women's rights, health care, race relations, the environment and pretty much everything else gets pushed to the margins and dismissed by Wal-Mart in favour of pure greed.

As the title suggests, the movie explores what is really behind Wal-Mart's low price mantra. Along the way, we get a glimpse of how globalization and hyper-capitalism shape and inform the debate around Wal-Mart's practices in the United States and, to some degree, in Canada.



Protesters at Wal-Mart's annual shareholders' meeting in Bentonville, Arkansas.

The film falls short in the segment on contracted-out factory workers in China and their working conditions. The filmmakers treat the workers as nameless and faceless – not much better than Wal-Mart itself. Pacing and editing are also problematic throughout.

But the movie is successful in exploring issues like Wal-Mart's failure to provide adequate health care insurance to its employees, encouraging workers to use state social assistance and exposing the company's gender and race discrimination practices.

In these areas, Wal-Mart has no defence. Not only are workers robbed of basic rights, but state and local governments end up subsidizing Wal-Mart's obscene profits. The largest employer in the U.S. is also the largest corporate welfare recipient.

Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price is well worth watching as a primer on how rampant capitalism, corporate power and consumerism have altered the fabric of our lives.

■ Reviewed by Barry Doyle

Meeting new challenges of Harper government

Spring is upon us and along with the advent of birds chirping and trees budding are some significant dates for labour activists.

March 8 was International Women's Day. March 21 was the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. March 22 was World Water Day. April 7 was World Health Workers' Day. April 28 is the International Day of Mourning and on June 21 we celebrate Aboriginal Awareness Day.

May 1 was, of course, May Day. That's our day to celebrate our achievements as workers and as activists.

In the midst of all of these events, on April 4, the Stephen Harper minority government delivered its first Speech from the Throne. There were no surprises.



Claude Généreux

Harper's government presents many challenges. But his minority status means that, working with the other political parties, we can win some important battles and defeat his agenda.

With our healthy financial base, CUPE can take on with renewed vigour our fight for a national child care system. We can step up to protect our health care system and public services. We can pursue our ongoing campaign against public private partnerships. We can continue our lobbying activity with the federal political parties.

And that's not all. In the 2006 CUPE national budget, we have increased the cost-share program to \$1.4 million in response to the growing need for local campaigns.

Working together, we can make a real difference.

In solidarity,

Claude Généreux

Claude Généreux
National Secretary-Treasurer

CUPE's website has a brand new look!

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