

National President's Report

January – March 2005

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

I hope this report finds each of you in good health and spirits. It is hard to believe that we are almost one-third of the way through 2005!

As usual things have been very busy throughout CUPE since my last report. There is much happening on the federal front in terms of legislation and other critical issues such as the commitment of \$5 billion for child care.

We are also busy with provincial governments throughout Canada and will have elections in British Columbia (on May 17th) and possibly in Nova Scotia where a minority government situation exists.

This report will attempt to highlight both key national and regional issues. As always, I would be very pleased to receive feedback from you on the contents of this report or any other matter.

1. Tsunami Relief – CUPE National Pledges \$100,000

We all watched the devastation that hit South Asia (and other areas) on December 26th. Hundreds of thousands perished and many were left homeless as a result of the earthquakes and the Tsunami.

I was very proud that in the space of two days, our National Executive Committee, followed by our full National Executive Board, voted unanimously to support a CUPE National donation of \$100,000 to assist with relief efforts.

Our donation went to Oxfam Canada, one of the designated relief groups. Oxfam is a CUPE worksite and their efforts in South Asia were concentrated around the provision of water, food and medical supplies beginning in Sri Lanka and continuing in Indonesia.

I cannot think of a more appropriate agency for CUPE to donate to.

I would also like to thank the many locals who have pledged their own donations to both Oxfam and to other worthy charities. While we have many international challenges worthy of our support, the sheer magnitude of the events in South Asia demanded a response and CUPE was there (along with many others).

2. Federal Scene

Both on our own and through the Canadian Labour Congress our union remains very active on a range of federal issues.

Of paramount importance is our ongoing push for a universally accessible, publicly run, child care program. We have met twice with Federal Social Development Minister, Ken Dryden, along with countless provincial ministers responsible for child care.

While the federal commitment of \$5 Billion is a very welcomed initiative, the absence of an agreement on accountability measures to ensure that the system is not-for-profit and universally accessible is most worrisome. We are calling for a publicly funded, sustainable system with low parent fees, federal legislation that guarantees standards and key principles, public accountability and money for children, not profits.

Many CUPE activists from across Canada continue to work very hard on this file. I urge all of you to check our child care web site (www.buildchildcare.ca) and lend your voice to this most important campaign.

The federal budget did not provide progressive changes such as our ongoing demand for amendments to Employment Insurance (EI) entitlements. It is shameful that only 30% of the unemployed qualify for benefits while the federal government swims in levels of surplus never before seen at the federal level. One positive development in the budget was that paramedics gained the legislative right to earlier retirement options without penalty. This is the culmination of a lot of lobbying work by CUPE paramedics.

The other ongoing issue that CUPE is heavily involved in is our support for legislation enshrining the same-sex marriage rights for all gay and lesbian Canadians. The debate around this legislation has at times been hysterical, but each of us must continue to keep the pressure on MPs to uphold the Charter of Rights for all Canadians.

The CLC has continued to conduct MP lobby meetings and functions focusing on their five key issues (medicare, child care, cities, EI reform and labour law reform at the federal level). At the most recent CLC Executive meeting an evening lobby was held and over 100 MPs from all political parties attended a CLC sponsored function.

3. National Political Action Committee

Our PAC had its founding meeting in February. The PAC was mandated at the 2003 convention to coordinate political activities within the union, focusing especially on federal issues that impact CUPE members. The resolution further stated that the committee's mandate include not just party politics, but also mobilizing members to lobby in their communities on federal issues.

The committee is made up of members and politicians from across CUPE's many sectors and from across the country. The PAC made a clear statement that it would work with existing national committees to maximize effectiveness.

The action plan coming out of this inaugural meeting includes an immediate start to local lobbying in their home provinces, an outreach strategy for the upcoming division conventions, and convening the committee's next meeting to coincide with the federal New Democratic Party convention in July 2005.

Watch for lots of exciting work from this committee!

4. University of Toronto – Sexual Diversity Studies – Citizenship Award

In February I was pleased, along with three members of our National Pink Triangle Committee (Brothers Fred Hahn and Gerry Lavalley, and Sister Martine Stonehouse), to receive the above award presented to CUPE for our work on equality and sexual diversity issues.

The U of T award is a tribute to our past and present leadership, staff and activists, all of whom have pushed equality issues within our union including the inclusion of transgendered members on our Committee, and our groundbreaking supreme court case from the 90's regarding benefits for same sex partners.

In receiving the award I thanked our past leaders and activists and pledged that CUPE would continue to push the equality agenda both in the workplace and in society as a whole. The citation that was read at the event has been translated and copies are available by contacting my office or via our national web site.

5. Collective Bargaining Update

As I write this report we have no locals on strike or lockout, which is a first in a long, long period of time.

The February 25th settlement by Local 3253 (North of Superior Programs) came after eight long months on the picket line. These 30 members stuck together, and their solidarity and the support they received from CUPE locals and others resulted in a good settlement. My sincere congratulations to Sister Diane Atkinson, President of the local and her negotiating

committee, and National Representative, Brother Dan Pike, for their leadership throughout this long struggle. I can certainly vouch for these members' solidarity and strong spirit after spending a day on the picket line with them just prior to Christmas.

After seven months on the picket line, the members of Local 4522 representing group home workers in Ituna, Saskatchewan, voted to refer their dispute to binding first contract arbitration thus ending their strike. It was a difficult decision for them, but the hard line position of the employer offered no hope for a negotiated settlement.

With no strikes or lockouts at this time, our strike fund is growing as outlined in Brother Claude's report which I urge you all to read. And I join Brother Claude in thanking each and every local for your support through the levies we have had in place over the past number of years.

In terms of recent settlements and major rounds of bargaining under way, some highlights include:

- OCHU, representing over 20,000 acute care workers in Ontario, have arrived at a tentative agreement that members will vote on shortly.
- Local 1867, representing 1,600 Nova Scotia Highway Workers, have ratified a new three-year deal that provides a \$1.35 per hour wage hike and improved language on seniority, promotions and overtime.
- McMaster University TA's, members of CUPE Local 3906, have achieved a new collective agreement after setting a February 28th strike deadline.
- CUPE Saskatchewan Health Care workers, one year into their current round of bargaining, have formed a coalition to promote medicare with the SEIU and the SGEU.
- Local 4400, Toronto School Board workers, continue with their work-to-rule campaign to back contract demands.
- CUPE Local 2729 members, blue collar workers in the City of Sherbrooke, staged a three-hour job action to back contract demands. Bargaining has been ongoing for over two years.
- CUPE PEI held its first ever province-wide bargaining conference on February 24th. About 65 members attended which proved to be a very successful conference.
- Area leadership meetings continue in Ontario to forge Solidarity Pacts amongst area locals, in order to defend free collective bargaining and to resist concessions. The meetings have been very well attended and many have passed motions to pledge financial support and picket line support to any CUPE local forced on the line by employers.

6. **CUPE Celebrates**

We have just completed a report (entitled **CUPE Celebrates**) on our National Union's activities over the past year, 2004. This is a first such effort on our part and we hope you find it of interest. In addition to reports on bargaining trends etc, the report also outlines some interesting facts about our union, including:

- Our 540,000 members have a collective payroll of just over \$16.8 Billion, an amount greater than the budgets of six provinces!
- CUPE operates 64 offices across Canada, employing 660 staff (139 at National Office, and 521 in the regions).
- We have 2,017 local unions and about 3,700 collective agreements from coast to coast. A total of 737 agreements were renewed in 2004 and at year-end 1,260 agreements were open.

Brother Claude and I believe that **CUPE Celebrates** represents an important accountability measure where we offer our locals, staff and activists a picture of the breadth of activity within our national union.

The report will be mailed to all locals, staff and retirees shortly, and will also be distributed at this spring's division conventions. We look forward to your feedback.

7. **Provincial Updates**

Newfoundland and Labrador

CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador's annual convention will be held between May 2nd and 4th in Grand Falls. The division has been very active in recent public hearings on automobile insurance. Division President Brother Wayne Lucas called for a public auto insurance system to provide rate fairness and relief to all citizens.

Nova Scotia

CUPE Nova Scotia's annual division convention will be held from April 25th to 27th in Sydney.

CUPE Nova Scotia activists have been active on the health care front. In late December 2004, CUPE drew attention to the fact that the province's announcement of four new MRI's had to be tempered by the fact that there are severe staff shortages which puts into question whether the machines will be used properly.

Prince Edward Island

CUPE PEI's annual convention will be held from May 19th to 20th in Summerside.

The PEI Division has been very active in provincial pre-budget activities. With a stated \$125 million deficit, there are concerns that the Binns government might turn to contracting out, or severe bargaining restraint, to solve their problems. CUPE has put the government on notice that this will not be acceptable. Area meetings to chart the strategic direction for CUPE PEI have been very well attended.

New Brunswick

CUPE New Brunswick's annual convention will be held in Fredericton, between April 14th and 16th. Division President Brother David Rouse has announced that he will not be seeking re-election due to ongoing health related problems. On behalf of CUPE, I want to thank Brother Rouse for his strong leadership and activism through some very challenging times in New Brunswick.

Local 1251, the New Brunswick Council of Nursing Homes is in bargaining. The Council recently responded to a report by the provincial auditor general which criticized care standards within provincially regulated homes. CUPE called for increased staffing levels to improve care to patients.

Quebec

CUPE Quebec's biennial convention will be held in Quebec City between May 10th and 13th.

The P3 debate continues to rage in Quebec. The plans to build two hospitals in Montreal, utilizing a P3 model continues to be very controversial with the general public. CUPE Quebec has launched a huge information campaign. Over 60,000 P3 pamphlets have been distributed across Quebec, with activists personally handing out leaflets in Montreal and other major centres.

CUPE Quebec has published its "year in review" outlining the key struggles faced within the province in the past year.

Ontario

CUPE Ontario's annual convention will be held in Niagara Falls between May 26th and 28th.

The division has been very busy with area leadership meetings designed to build support for no-concessions bargaining and to educate members about the McGuinty government's agenda. These culminated in a leadership meeting held in Toronto on February 25th where over 600 activists approved a plan of action to fight P3's and to confront the McGuinty government's agenda.

CUPE Ontario, along with Locals 250 and 251 in the City of Oshawa are launching a campaign to defeat City Council's plans to construct a P3 arena in Oshawa. Over 100 people attended a public meeting with many voicing opposition to the proposed P3 scheme.

Manitoba

The annual CUPE Manitoba convention will be held in Brandon, between April 21st and 23rd.

The division's Contracting Out and Political Action Committee held a very successful "Ways of Winning" conference recently, focusing on the division's readiness to confront any and all moves to privatize public services in Manitoba.

Talks continue towards a renewal agreement for 5,000 health care workers whose agreement expired last year. As well, school bus drivers in the new Sunrise School division have chosen CUPE in a run-off vote brought about by the merger of two former divisions. Congratulations to Local 1618 on running a successful campaign!

Saskatchewan

CUPE Saskatchewan's annual convention was held in Regina between March 10th and 12th. The new CUPE owned Regional Office in Regina was officially opened and named the "Glen Makahonuk Saskatchewan Regional Office", in memory of the former Division President, GVP and long-time CUPE activist.

CUPE, along with all trade unions in Saskatchewan, have been lobbying hard for labour code changes that would see part-time workers receive extra hours according to seniority. As well, the division is very active in various campaigns including a coalition with SEIU and the SGEU on health care, our ongoing pay equity campaigns, and recent campaigning to avert strike action by Local 21 at the City of Regina.

We continue to face significant labour relations issues at the University of Saskatchewan, with numerous disputes going to arbitration, and an escalating issue regarding our demands for pay equity which the University is ignoring.

Alberta

CUPE Alberta's annual convention is set to be held between March 31st and April 2nd in Red Deer.

New Division President, Brother D'Arcy Lanovaz, was sworn in as Alberta RVP at the December 2004 NEB meeting. Since his election Brother Lanovaz has been establishing CUPE's voice in the province with good media coverage on the province's no-smoking legislation, the child care debate and Alberta's demands for "no strings attached" federal money.

In January and February, I was privileged to be able to spend time in Lethbridge (and surrounding area) and Medicine Hat, campaigning with our health care locals, both of whom are in bargaining, and facing possible raiding campaigns from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE). In addition to meeting hundreds of our health care workers, both communities hosted “meet and greet” events for all area locals which were well attended. My congratulations and thanks to all CUPE activists in both of these communities who are working very hard on behalf of our members.

British Columbia

CUPE BC’s annual convention will be held between April 13th and 16th in Victoria, BC. The convention will be focusing our full attention on the May 17th provincial election where labour and community groups throughout BC are working overtime to ensure that the NDP are returned to government in BC.

The division held a very successful political action conference in Vancouver in mid-February. Again the focus was on getting our entire membership election-ready.

CUPE Local 2090 was successful in a campaign to contract-in maintenance and management of its recreation complex. Six jobs will return to the City.

Longtime Division Secretary-Treasurer, Sister Colleen Jordan, who also serves as RVP for BC, has announced that she will not seek re-election at this spring’s CUPE BC convention. Sister Colleen has had a long and distinguished career in CUPE and on behalf of our union I would like to thank her for not only her outstanding leadership within CUPE BC but also within the NDP and the broader labour movement.

Hospital Employees’ Union (HEU)

My congratulations to Sister Judy Darcy who has been selected as HEU’s new Secretary-Business Manager and will commence her new duties this month. Sister Judy has picked a very busy time to assume this important role with HEU, and on behalf of our entire union I wish her every success.

Laid off members of HEU have begun receiving their long-awaited severance payments from a \$25 million fund negotiated by the HEU last year. There had been delays in payments while an arbitrator sorted out who was entitled to payments.

HEU continues to win votes of contracted our health care workers, including 700 workers in 30 Vancouver area hospitals and two rest homes. We have now brought over 2,000 workers back into the HEU fold through our organizing efforts. The CLC dispute with the former IWA (now Steelworkers) local continues, as do our organizing efforts. The clear message from health care workers is that they want the HEU to be their union.

Airline Division

Long-time Air Canada component activist, Brother Richard Nolan has recently retired and I was privileged to be able to attend a surprise party for Brother Nolan held by his component colleagues. I was able to thank Richard for his many years of activism and to wish him a long, healthy and happy retirement.

I also met with the ACC Executive to get briefed on the ongoing labour relations issues at Air Canada, who have now moved out of bankruptcy protection but still pose many challenges in terms of labour relations issues on a daily basis. Air Canada has recently contracted out its human resource function to a U.S. firm.

8. Other News

My sincere congratulations to the following CUPE staff who have announced plans to retire:

Sister Carolyn Bell, Saskatoon Area Office (April 1, 2005)
 Brother Johnny Pizar, Quebec Regional Office (April 1, 2005)
 Brother Kevin Galichon, Victoria Area Office (April 1, 2005)
 Brother Robert Allan, Ontario Regional Office (May 1, 2005)
 Brother Rick Weind, Manitoba Regional Office (May 1, 2005)
 Brother Marcel Rousseau, Rouyn-Noranda Office (May 1, 2005)
 Sister Dale Harris, Manitoba Regional Office (July 1, 2005)

My sincere condolences to the family of Sister Barb Kowalski (National Representative, Sydney Area Office) who lost a valiant battle with cancer in February 2005.

I am very pleased to announce our newest NEB member, sworn in at our March 2005 meeting, Brother Leo Cheverie, as our new Diversity Vice-President – Aboriginal (replacing Brother Randy St. Denis). Brother Leo is an Executive member of CUPE PEI, and President of Local 1870, University of PEI. He is a long-time labour activist who I know will bring solid leadership to our National Union on behalf of all Aboriginal members.

It is also exciting news for CUPE that Sister Anne McGrath (Senior Officer – Job Evaluation) has been appointed Director of Operations in the Federal NDP, office of Leader Jack Layton. Our best wishes go to her as she assumes this new role.

9. Rebuilding Strong Communities

As mentioned in previous reports, our National Union continues to work towards providing CUPE locals and divisions with the tools necessary to establish CUPE as Canada's community union. Look for specifics in upcoming issues of *Organize* and through materials at your upcoming division conventions.

In terms of a few National Union strategic initiatives under the Rebuilding Strong Communities banner, we are planning to hold a first ever gathering of large municipal locals to talk about the “New Deal for Cities”, and to plan our lobby efforts at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Conference. In addition we hope that municipal locals will take on a leadership role for “Rebuilding Strong Communities” initiatives within their home cities and communities.

For the first time in a decade, we will have a gathering of CUPE energy workers to talk about national energy issues as well as local/provincial issues on the energy front. As well, later this year we will also hold meetings of CUPE pension trustees from across Canada to discuss the challenges we face in various pension related issues.

The above initiatives are strategic in nature. They are designed to strengthen our union in these important policy areas, and as you know, strengthening our union at its base is one of the three strategic directions that we received from the 2003 national convention.

In closing, I again want to thank all CUPE activists and staff for your activism and leadership on a daily basis. As this report indicates, at any one time there are a multitude of issues that face CUPE members and through your collective efforts we seem to find a way to meet these challenges on an ongoing basis.

I look forward to seeing you at this year’s division conventions.

In solidarity,

PAUL MOIST
National President

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