

# **National President's Report**

**June – September 2004**

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

I hope this report finds each of you in good health and spirits. Hopefully you were able to have some time off of the summer, such as summer has has been across the country.

For a number of our members, it has been a summer on the picket line. While we do not have a large number of members on strike/lockout, the disputes we are involved in are difficult ones. Some have gone on for a long period of time, and some see concessionary demands on the part of employers.

As always, the purpose of this report is to provide an update on key activities within our union – to share both our victories and our struggles – and to thank each of you, our activists and our staff for the tremendous effort you put into representing our members day in and day out.

## **1. Federal Election**

June 28<sup>th</sup> saw Canadians re-elect the federal Liberals, although they received support from just under four out of every ten voters. The Federal NDP more than doubled its share of the popular vote, with just over two million votes, but this unfortunately saw the party's seat count rise moderately to 19 seats. Another two seats and the NDP would have held the balance of power in parliament.

The Liberals squeaked out a minority government in large part because of their movement to the left, openly challenging New Democratic voters to switch allegiances in order to block the Conservatives. This saw the Martin Liberals pledge support for public health care, universal catastrophic drug coverage and a national child care program, and a New Deal for Cities. The trick, as always, will be to hold them to these promises.

The following CUPE members/staff ran in the recent election under the NDP banner, each and everyone worked hard, and I wish to thank them on behalf of our National Union, they did us proud:

Rui Pires – Davenport  
David Laird – Burlington  
Terry Albright – Saint John  
Sid Ryan – Oshawa  
Ric Dagenais – Ottawa-Vanier  
Rodolphe Martin – Madawaska Restigouche  
François Pilon – Honoré-Mercier

## **2. Rebuilding Strong Communities**

October 5<sup>th</sup> marks the official launch of our national Rebuilding Strong Communities campaign. This campaign will serve as a framework for all the work we are doing to defend public services, stop privatization, and improve the quality of life in our communities. Through this campaign we will be lobbying all levels of government for a new funding deal for towns and cities to meet the enormous infrastructure and social needs of residents. It is through this campaign that we will be pushing for a new pan-Canada child care system so that every family can get access to affordable, not-for-profit, quality child care regardless of place of residence. And it is through this campaign that we will continue to push for public investments in the education system, in social services, and in health care.

Our Rebuilding Strong Communities campaign will give profile to the work CUPE members do, day in and day out, to bring services to communities. This will help create a more favorable collective bargaining climate so that we can negotiate fair wages for our members and negotiate protections against privatization and contracting out.

We have forwarded to CUPE local unions and activists a comprehensive information kit about the campaign. The kit includes tips on how to move forward the campaign at the local level starting on October 5<sup>th</sup>, which we hope will become known over time as Canada's national Communities Day. All of our campaign material is also available in downloadable format from [www.cupe.ca](http://www.cupe.ca). Also available from this web site is a new data base on privatization initiatives and campaigns across Canada. This web site feature is a vehicle for CUPE locals to report on privatization initiatives and counter-campaigns.

Watch for more updates on this exciting campaign and get involved in rebuilding stronger communities.

## **3. Health Care – Federal/Provincial Debate**

In late July I attended the Premiers' annual summer meeting (formally called the Council of the Federation) in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

CUPE was well represented at these meetings with NEB members – Brothers Sid Ryan and Michael Hurley, and Sister Candace Rennick in attendance. OCHU activists were present along with their “Trojan Horse” as were local union activists and CUPE staff and a couple of our retired staff. (We also held a very spirited rally at The Niagara Institute in support of the striking members of Local 1287, who have recently achieved a fair settlement which has ended this dispute.)

The Ontario Health Coalition, the Canadian Health Coalition, the Council of Canadians, the CLC and the Canadian Federation of Nurses were also present at the one-day teach-in, which included a demonstration in support of public health care.

The Premiers’ gathering was disappointing in that there was no mention of public health care in their final communiqué. Their focus was on federal transfers along with a call for the federal government to assume responsibility for provision of pharmacare services to Canadians. Their message seems clear – they want no strings attached to federal transfers.

The mid-September meeting between the Prime Minister and the Premiers’ will see this debate continue. We are working with the CLC, other unions and our coalition partners to make sure we impact upon these talks scheduled to be held in Ottawa.

This key national debate deserves our full attention. It is clear from polling and the recent federal election debates that Canadians want expanded public health care, but our elected leaders are all over the map on key questions like privatization and PPPs.

#### **4. Collective Bargaining Update**

As mentioned in my June report, our National Executive Board adopted a “Plan to Fight Concessions and Defend Collective Bargaining”.

The purpose of this strategic plan is to defend our right to free collective bargaining and to unite behind any CUPE local that finds itself on the picket line. I am very pleased to report that this initiative is being acted upon, particularly in Ontario where the CUPE Ontario Executive Board have endorsed it and acted on it through all-presidents’ meetings in a number of areas. (All presidents’ meetings have been held, or are planned, in North Bay, Sudbury, Peterborough and Barrie, Ontario.)

This has resulted in strong shows of support on many picket lines, and in my view, these actions assisted greatly in the settlements we have achieved recently in Local 3 (Town of Thessalon), Local 905 (CCAC – York Region), Local 1287 (The Niagara Institute) and Local 3798 (Sojourn House).

Throughout the fall period, all division executive boards will be discussing how they can implement this plan to fight concessions and defend bargaining in their respective regions.

Our defence of bargaining also has to include support for other unions that find themselves on the picket line, such as striking PSAC members at Parks Canada. At our summer strike rally in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Local 1287 members were very touched by the show of support from members of the USWA Local 1005 (Stelco) who marched with us. We have a collective responsibility to support each and every picket line we encounter, and such actions can only serve to strengthen the solidarity of our movement.

One final initiative that merits mentioning, is a an agreement struck between the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to bargain jointly with health care employers in Ontario, commencing this fall. This is a progressive move – we are stronger when we are united, and while we expect a tough round of bargaining given the restraint pronouncements of the McGuinty government, we will be in a better position to achieve a fair settlement through our coalition with the SEIU.

## 5. Strikes/Lockouts

Listed below, please find mention of the strikes/lockouts that have occurred (with some ongoing) during the period of this report.

PROVINCE	LOCAL NUMBER	EMPLOYER	# OF MEMBERS	STRIKE BEGAN
Ontario	255	Westario Power	36	August 20, 2004
British Columbia	339	City of Nelson	71	June 11, 2004 (lock out)
Ontario	3253	North of Superior Community Mental Health Programs	29	June 26, 2004
Ontario	3798	Sojourn House	23	July 22, 2004
Québec	4255	Municipalité de Saint-Jean-de-Matha	7	March 11, 2003
Québec	4290	Municipalité de Sainte-Béatrix	7	March 11, 2003
Saskatchewan	4552	Deer Park Villa	26	June 3, 2004
Ontario	4705	Greater Sudbury Hydro Plus Inc.	97	June 19, 2004

While this report will not go into great detail on each of these disputes, there are some clear trends. The Local 4552 strike in Saskatchewan is a first contract strike, with seniority rules a key unresolved issue.

In the Local 1287 strike, the employer was attempting to force a wage settlement that would see incomes not keep pace with inflation. In the Local 4705 strike at Sudbury Hydro, concessions on retiree benefits is a key issue. The Local 905 strike at CCAC York Region, which is now settled, was largely over employer demands for concessions in a range of areas.

In Nelson, BC, Local 399 members were locked out for 10 weeks – a first by a municipality in BC, over the issue of job security and announced plans by the employer to reduce the size of the bargaining unit.

The above are but an example of some of the reasons we are on picket lines and these are issues for all CUPE members, not just those in the locals directly affected.

As mentioned in a previous report, we now make collective bargaining a regular feature of all NEB meetings. In my view, organizing and bargaining are our core functions. Improving members' wages, benefits and working conditions are our goals. This requires research, strong staff and activists, a viable strike fund, and most important, our collective will to back up our bargaining demands with the full resources of our union.

## **6. CLC Update**

a) In mid-September the Congress will hold its first ever Industrial Policy Conference. This is a senior leadership event, in which we will discuss the necessary components for a national industrial strategy, one which promotes a strong economy with decent paying jobs.

We face many challenges 15 years after the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (followed by NAFTA) and it is appropriate for our movement to begin a public dialogue on the components of an industrial strategy that puts the interests of jobs and communities first as opposed to global interests. For CUPE, any industrial strategy must talk about the need for public services. No business can thrive in a community without adequate infrastructure such as power, roads, water systems, etc. In addition, medicare, education and other social services serve as needed supports for workers and businesses.

b) This past spring the CLC imposed level 2 sanctions on the IWA-Canada as a result of their actions in signing voluntary agreements within the health care sector in BC, agreements that violate the CLC motion adopted in November 2003.

We have continued to press the CLC to hold the IWA accountable, and we have made progress this summer. The IWA has lost some key BC Labour Board rulings which effectively nullify volunteer agreements with two multi-national corporations. The HEU has been very busy organizing. We currently have 70 certification applications for work done by over 3,000 employees of contractors (work HEU members formerly did). This sad chapter of BC labour history is drawing to a close, but we will continue to press the CLC on this issue.

c) In July, we joined with NUPGE to file a complaint with the CLC against the BC Nurses Union over their actions in initiating discussions with the BC government to have LPNs (represented by CUPE/HEU and the BCGEU) bargaining moved into the nursing bargaining association. It is a clear violation for one Congress affiliate to initiate discussions with government on the bargaining structure of another affiliate.

We strongly suspect that the BCNU would like to represent the LPNs, but to date they deny that this is their motive. In any event, a meeting of national leadership was held, followed by talks with the BC wings of the three organizations in question with the CLC.

## **7. Provincial Updates**

### British Columbia

CUPE BC had a very busy summer providing support to Local 399, locked out in Nelson. After 10 weeks on the picket line, a settlement was achieved which included job security measures that we proposed prior to the lockout. K-12 bargaining will get underway this fall and Local 15 members (City of Vancouver) ratified a new three-year agreement in June. This fall the "Strong Communities Campaign" continues with a very comprehensive billboard campaign.

### HEU

The HEU was fined \$150,000 by the courts for their illegal strike action this past May. Many affiliates have sent donations to assist with this fine, and we have circulated an appeal to CUPE locals. Plans are underway for the biennial HEU convention in October, where delegates will set directions for 2005 and beyond. Organizing efforts continue to reclaim work that was contracted out by the Campbell government.

### Alberta

CUPE Alberta members held a very well attended and successful demonstration at the Medicine Hat Health Care Centre to draw attention to the current bargaining of our Local 189.

In late June, the CUPE Alberta Municipal Committee hosted the annual CUPE Western Municipal Workers Conference in Edmonton. Delegates adopted a statement supporting the calls for a "New Deal" for Canadian cities.

### Saskatchewan

Striking members of Local 4552 (Deer Park Villa) have been on the line since June 3, 2004. One of the issues includes seniority recognition for purposes of layoff and promotion. This is a tough sector in Saskatchewan, but members, with the support of many area locals, are determined to win a fair first agreement.

Health care bargaining will commence this fall, with our union being adamantly opposed to announced provincial bargaining guidelines of 0%, 1% and 1% wage hikes. Local 3078 at the Wadena School Division has scored a significant Labour Relations Board victory. Their long and bitter strike ended last December and the LRB has determined that the strike was prolonged because the employer bargained in bad faith. The employer has been ordered to pay the union three months' worth of strike pay and make up the difference between strike pay and the workers' regular pay and benefits.

### Manitoba

Health care bargaining for about one-half of our 11,000 members is ongoing. One of the key issues is pensions, and the funding of the plan. Members of Local 2348 at Sara Riel, have taken a strike vote to back contract demands, and job action will occur shortly should a fair settlement not emerge.

CUPE Manitoba is working closely with the MFL on a government review of the Workers Compensation Act, the first comprehensive review in almost 20 years.

### Ontario

A secretive P3 hospital deal has been exposed by the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions and the Ontario Health Care Coalition. An analysis of the Brampton private (P3) hospital contract identifies that costs are ballooning and service cuts are projected. The capital cost of the project has increased from \$350 million to \$536 million in two years – a 53% increase. Comprehensiveness and universality of our health system will be lost if P3s are not stopped.

CUPE members in the Peterborough area have responded to the needs of its citizens following a devastating flood. CUPE locals have initiated a major food and fundraising drive which when completed will be presented to the disaster fund and local food banks. Our members played key roles during this crisis which of course highlights the contribution and quality of a strong public service.

Locals in the Barrie area have endorsed a plan which calls for the establishment of a Solidarity Fund to assist locals who are on strike/lockout. The fund concept was initiated as a result of a clear trend by employers for concessionary demands in bargaining. As a national union, we certainly encourage these types of initiatives and applaud the actions of the locals involved.

I participated in Toronto's Annual Labour Day parade along with thousands of CUPE members. We had numerous floats and pieces of equipment which celebrated the work we do as public employees.

### Quebec

The labour movement continues to mobilize against the regressive anti-union policies of the Charest government. Most recently, the government has tabled proposed legislation to create an agency on Public Private Partnerships. CUPE in collaboration with the

Quebec Federation of Labour has prepared a document opposing the creation of this new agency. Presentation of the document will be made to the Parliamentary Commission dealing with this issue.

In the health and social services sectors, we continue to be involved in a preliminary series of representation votes. It is anticipated that the results of our efforts will be known by October. Needless to say this is the first series of representation votes in this sector with others to follow in the near future.

Referendums on demerging recently merged municipalities were held in June. In Montreal for example, citizens in 15 municipalities voted to demerge. These actions have prompted renewed focus on CUPE structure within these newly-formed municipalities.

### New Brunswick

Local 1252 – New Brunswick Council of Hospitals is gearing up for a potential strike action. The government of New Brunswick's intransigent stance of a 3% wage increase over four years is a catalyst to the real potential of a strike in this sector. It is anticipated that in the event of a strike the government will introduce return to work legislation, which will in turn prompt collective action by our 20,000 members in the province.

In addition, the federation of labour adopted a resolution (Solidarity Pact) to mobilize all affiliates if CUPE's members are targeted as a result of a refusal to follow government legislation to return to work.

CUPE is in the process of finalizing court documents to commence a legal challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to secure for casual employees the right to freedom of association.

### PEI

Our public awareness campaign to reverse the decision of the P3 rink/pool complex in Charlottetown has resulted in a commitment from the new council to move away from the P3 arrangement.

Regional meetings are being planned for the months of October and November at which the Strategic Plan developed by the PEI Division will be introduced. Included on the agenda for these sessions will be a "Solidarity Pact" which will enunciate the principle that "an injury to one is an injury to all".

### Nova Scotia

The Division through its Political Action Committee is meeting to put forth a strategy for the upcoming municipal and school board elections which are set for October of this year. To date, seven (7) CUPE members have stated they will be running in this year's elections.



In line with one aspect of the Nova Scotia Strategic Directions Initiative, the Division is looking at ways to increase its profile in the province. Focus is also on generating new affiliations and strengthening participation overall.

On the negotiations front, contracting out issues are anticipated to be a major concern as Local 108 and the City of Halifax commence negotiations in the very near future.

#### Newfoundland and Labrador

As a result of the provincial government's announcement in the spring budget to reduce the public sector by 4,000 workers, CUPE has been actively involved in the challenges associated with restructuring and amalgamations in the school board and health care sectors.

Transition agreements have been reached with school boards in the eastern region, which will permit CUPE and NAPE to essentially remain status quo with their current membership. It is anticipated that this agreement will bode well in our discussions for the province's western region. Hopefully discussions in the health care sector will provide similar results.

On the municipal scene, Local 1289 – St. John's inside workers obtained a new three-year agreement with significant improvement in wages, pensions and job evaluation.

#### Airline Division

I am pleased to report that in July, at a conference convened in Calgary, Airline Division delegates ratified a new structure for our Airline Division, a structure that will meet the needs of all components. These bylaws will now go to the NEB for approval.

Air Canada restructuring efforts continue with September 30<sup>th</sup> being the date set for emergence of the airline from bankruptcy protection. The past 17 months have been very challenging and stressful for all Air Canada employees.

### **8. Communications Branch**

It was with regret that we received the resignation of Brother Robert Fox, our former Director of Communications who was with CUPE for seven years. Brother Fox brought a high degree of professionalism and integrity to our Communications Branch and he will be sorely missed. We wish him all the best.

I am pleased to announce that Brother Ron Verzuh has been appointed as our new National Director of Communications. Brother Ron has worked in a variety of Communications jobs within CUPE for the past 18 years, most recently in BC. We welcome him aboard and wish him all the best.

## **9. Retirements Across the Country**

Several long-term dedicated CUPE staff have announced their retirements (or their intentions to retire). They include national representatives Jules Tupker (Lakehead Area Office), Mark Marin (Calgary Area Office) and Alex Somerville (Atlantic Regional Office).

On behalf of our union, I salute these individuals and wish each a long, healthy and happy retirement.

## **10. Correction**

My June 2004 report mentioned Brother Lofty MacMillan, whom I referred to as our first National Director of Organizing and Servicing. Well, I was almost correct. Two eagle-eyed retirees (Brothers Gil Levine and Kealey Cummings) called to point out that for our first two years after CUPE's formation, Brother Bill Buss served as our Director of Organizing and Servicing (followed by Brother Lofty MacMillan).

We have a new practice of sending these reports to all of our retirees, and I promise to publish all future corrections that they provide to future mistakes I make, in future reports!!!

We are currently pulling together a list of all former National Executive Board members (up to this point we apparently have not kept such a list) so that they too may receive these reports on a regular basis. It is my personal belief that we owe much to our former leaders and staff, and keeping them updated on the affairs of our union is in a very small way, a small token of our appreciation for their past efforts in building our union.

In closing, I would like to thank the many people who have taken time to provide feedback on these reports. We want them to be informative and we welcome any and all suggestions you might have to offer. Our union is both large and full of activism on a day in and day out basis. While it is a bit daunting to try and summarize our activities over a three or four-month period, it is important that we share our stories – this is how we learn, and in the process strengthen our union.

In solidarity,

PAUL MOIST  
National President