

Counterpoint

**WORLD SOCIAL
FORUM COMES
TO MONTREAL**

**PROFILE: AMAN
CHEEMA – HEALTH
AND SAFETY
ACTIVIST**

**Focus: Electoral
reform**

*Who Cares in
New Brunswick?*

**Quebec
defends free
collective
bargaining**

KEEPSAKE POSTER:
SCRAP C-51



Outreach – both online and in person – is a core activity of every modern library and one in which CUPE staff should be viewed as partners.”

Allison Hardman, CUPE 561, p6.

World Social Forum in Montreal: CUPE and public services at the forefront

The World Social Forum (WSF) ranks among the world's largest gatherings of social movements and civil society. It brings together thousands of people concerned with social justice, democracy, the environment and other causes to build international solidarity and to promote strategies for a fairer and more just society.

This year the event took place in Montreal and over 15,000 people from around the globe participated in the hundreds of activities that took place from August 9th to 14th. CUPE was very active in leading sessions on a wide range of topics, including the impact of free trade on public health care, blue communities and public water, bargaining and energy democracy, among others.

One of the main outcomes of the event was a joint declaration calling for an end to austerity and to the commodification of public services. The strengthening of public services was seen as the clearest way to combat rising income inequality and environmental degradation. The growing influence of private finance and the profit motive in health care, education and energy was linked to reduced access to good quality, universal services and to driving down working conditions around the world.

■ **Mathieu Vick**



Ontario lags provinces in hospital care, funding

Chances are that if you are a hospital patient anywhere in Canada but Ontario, you are receiving higher levels of care. A recent report by the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU/ CUPE) comparing funding, staffing, nursing, and re-admissions in Ontario with other provinces, reveals that Ontario's hospital funding is much lower than funding in the rest of Canada's hospitals, as much as \$4.8 billion lower.

“The \$4.8 billion shortfall in hospital funding in Ontario is counted in six hours less nursing care per patient (per year). Ontario

hospitals have significantly higher readmission rates than the rest of the country because of our radically shortened lengths of stays,” says OCHU President Michael Hurley.

Using data available from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), the *Fewer Hands, Less Hospital Care* report shows that Ontario has fallen a long way behind other provinces since the provincial Liberals were elected in 2003 — and especially since the beginning of their austerity program in 2010.

According to CIHI, Ontario government per capita funding for hospitals is \$1,395.73. The rest of

Canada, excluding Ontario, spends \$1,749.69 per capita on hospitals. In other words, provincial and territorial governments outside of Ontario spend \$353.96 more per person on hospitals than Ontario does — 25.3 per cent more. If funding was on par with the average for the rest of Canada, says the report, there would be an additional 45,500 hospital employees, 15,200 of them nurses.

Along with local hospital sector leaders, OCHU has released the *Fewer Hands, Less Hospital Care* report in nearly two dozen communities across Ontario.

■ **Stella Yeadon**

CUPE'S QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FALL 2016

Counterpoint

ISSN print 1920-2857
ISSN online 1920-2865

Counterpoint is published by the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Address all letters to the editor to: CUPE Communications, 1375 St. Laurent Blvd. Ottawa, ON, K1G 0Z7 T: 613-237-1590 F: 613-237-5508 Publications Mail Agreement Number 40005741

Union-printed on 50% recycled, 30% post-consumer waste, elemental chlorine-free paper, certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: CUPE Communications, 1375 St. Laurent Blvd. Ottawa, ON, K1G 0Z7

Visit CUPE's website at cupe.ca or contact us at cupemail@cupe.ca

Managing Editor Catherine Louli
Communications Director Robert Lamoureux

Graphic Designer Jocelyn Renaud

Editorial Assistants Hélène Bélanger • Manon Lajoie • Michel Saucier

Contributors Mathieu Vick • Stella Yeadon • David Robbins • Charlie Brenchley • Archana Rampure • Mario Emond • Luc Leblanc • James Chai • Ronald Boisrond • Philippe Gagnon • Greg Taylor

CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD

National President Mark Hancock
National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury

General Vice-Presidents Daniel Légère • Denis Bolduc • Fred Hahn • Kelly Moist • Marle Roberts

Regional Vice-Presidents Wayne Lucas / Newfoundland & Labrador • Nan McFadgen / Nova Scotia • Odette Robichaud / New Brunswick • Lori MacKay / Prince Edward Island • Benoît Bouchard, Marie-Josée Alvarez / Quebec • Michael Hurley, Candace Rennie / Ontario • Henri Giroux / Northern Ontario • Gord Delbridge / Manitoba • Judy Henley / Saskatchewan • David Graham / Alberta • Paul Faoro, Victor Elkins / British Columbia

Diversity Vice-Presidents Gloria Lepine • Yolanda McClean



Aman Cheema's deep conviction rooted in personal history

City of Surrey worker Aman Cheema knows how high the stakes can be when it comes to workplace health and safety.

When his father, Joginder, first came to Canada, he worked on farms where they sprayed chemicals on the crops without providing any kind of face mask or respiratory protections for the workers. Joginder contracted lung cancer, which spread rapidly to his throat and brain. Two days before Aman's 22nd birthday, his father passed away.

His father's experience ingrained in Aman the

need for workplace health and safety – and respect for workers' rights. Today, Aman is a leader in CUPE 402 at the City of Surrey, serving as recording secretary, chairing the local's political and community action committee and co-chairing the CUPE BC Municipal Committee, among other roles.

He says he wasn't always active, or vocal.

"In high school, I was quiet and shy. I could never speak to a group," he explains. "Now I don't have an issue going to a mic and speaking up. I wish my high school teachers could see that!"

It wasn't until Aman started a job at the City of

Surrey when he was 23 that he started to learn about the role unions play in making things better for everyone. A foreman who was retiring encouraged him to go to a meeting. He did – and got a hoodie sweatshirt that first-timers get, which was pretty awesome, he says.

Aman credits CUPE BC health and safety activist Tom Wiebe for encouraging and supporting his activism from day one. He also points to a course on young workers delivered by the Canadian Labour Congress for helping him connect the dots between being a young worker, having rights, and being able to act to make things better.

"That course is what opened it up for me. It

all started to make sense, I cared for these things all my life and that set the flame. I honestly had no idea I cared so deeply and was so passionate about these things," he says.

Aman has channelled that passion into helping young people who are just coming into the workforce learn more about their rights, including the right to refuse unsafe work.

"If my dad had a health and safety representative, maybe he would have had more protection. If he had known about the chemicals, maybe he wouldn't have gotten cancer."

Health and safety is like second nature to Aman.

"Someone's going to work, I ask them if they

have their mask. It's the truth, people need to know."

■ David Robbins



Much on the agenda for Fall parliamentary session

After selfies and photobombs galore over the summer months, it is time for our federal politicians to get down to the business at hand. Here are CUPE's priorities:

- Develop a new national health accord, including improved access to necessary prescription medicine.
- Create a national framework to develop affordable and quality child care.
- Fix corporate tax loopholes.
- Work toward a fair election system.
- Get infrastructure funding right, focusing on public transit, social infrastructure and green infrastructure without resorting to expensive public-private partnerships.
- Repeal C-51, Harper's dangerous spy bill that threatens the civil liberties and democratic freedoms of all people living in Canada.

■ Charlie Brenchley

NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

Our responsibility to fight for a better Canada

Far too many Canadians are being conditioned to expect less and less from their employers. And yet as workers, we are expected to work harder for lower wages.

The most troubling aspect of this attitude is seen when workers demand better. They are called 'greedy', or told they should be thankful just to have a job.

Workers continue to face a growing list of challenges that make their work increasingly more precarious. These challenges include almost non-existent job security, fewer and inferior benefits, less control over working conditions, and employers demanding 'flexibility' that really means more casual, part-time and term positions.

These are the hallmarks of precarious work, the symptoms of the outright attack on workers.

Our research shows as much as a third of all jobs in Canada have one or more characteristics of precarious work.

And if you are a woman, or under 35 years old, or a part of an equity-seeking group, the odds that your work is precarious are even higher.

Women are more likely to work less than 30 hours per week with no benefits.

Young workers, or those below 35 years of age, are less likely to have workplace pensions, or sick leave.

Racialized workers, non-citizens, those whose first language is other than English or French, are far more likely to be precariously employed.

This is not the way to build a better Canada.

As precarious work becomes more and more common, the gap between the richest Canadians and the rest of us grows.

As we've seen over the past 40 years, that gap has grown and grown. Under constant assault from corporations and employers, wages for working people have now been stagnant for decades, while governments in Canada and around the world descend into a state of permanent austerity.

As Canada's largest union, we have a responsibility to take a stand against the spread of precarious work – for our members, our communities and all Canadians.

Our campaigns and political action work are an important part of this fight, but we must never lose sight of the most powerful tool we have. We must organize these workers, allowing them the single best way to fight precarity and inequality in the workplace – a union.

MARK HANCOCK ONLINE twitter.com/MarkHancockCUPE



FOCUS:

ELECTORAL REFORM



Growing coalition for reform

CUPE is not alone in supporting electoral reform and in calling for proportional representation (PR). In fact, we have joined dozens of civil society groups who are part of the Every Voter Counts Alliance, created in February 2016 to campaign for PR. Over 80 countries use a proportional voting system, including 85 per cent of OECD countries, such as Germany, New Zealand, Sweden, and Denmark.

The Alliance brings together organizations and individuals in support of a fair voting system where every vote counts, independent of party interests. Supporting organizations include ACORN-Canada, Broadbent Institute, Canadian Federation of Students, Canadian Labour Congress, Council of Canadians, Democracy Watch, Équiterre, Fair Vote Canada, Groupe Femmes Politique et Démocratie, Mouvement Démocratique

Nouvelle, Idle No More, Institut du Nouveau Monde, Leadnow, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Unlock Democracy, and YWCA Canada.

People as diverse as Mélanie Sarazin, president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec, Guy Giorno, former chief of staff to Stephen Harper, Alex Himelfarb, former Clerk of the Privy Council, and Col. Pat Stogran (retired), former Veterans Ombudsman, have already signed on in support of the Alliance, as have many of the major unions in Canada.

CUPE will work with the Alliance to provide evidence-based facts so that Canadians can make an informed decision about electoral reform. We also provide a platform for Canadians to add their voice and to let their elected representatives know they support fair and democratic elections. Evidence shows only PR will allow Canadians

to choose local representation and see their political views represented in Parliament with equal and effective votes for all.

While even the Liberals know that the current first-past-the-post electoral system is broken, some of them have suggested that it can be repaired by switching to ranked ballots – a system in which Canadians will get to rank candidates in individual ridings. But for CUPE National President Mark Hancock that would only make things worse: “Adding ranked ballots to our winner-take-all federal system would actually exacerbate the problem with our current system by producing larger false majorities and making the House of Commons even more unrepresentative of the popular will. We can’t get this wrong. That’s why CUPE is participating in the consultation process.”

■ Archana Rampure

Têtes-à-têtes!



Members in action for proportional representation

MPs across the country held lively discussions on electoral reform this past summer. At the request of the federal government, MPs held town halls in their ridings to consult their constituents. Their findings were to be summarized and submitted in reports to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE). These reports, coupled with ERRE’s own hearings into electoral reform and individual input from MPs, will lead to recommendations to the House of Commons, due by December 1st, 2016.

CUPE members across the country mobilized to attend the town halls where they actively engaged MPs and fellow Canadians on how to strengthen our democracy. Members advocated for proportional representation (PR), which the membership voted overwhelmingly to endorse at the 2015 national convention.

Under a PR system, each party would have about the same percentage of MPs in the House of Commons as the share of the popular vote they get in the election. So if 39 per cent of Canadians vote for the Liberals, the Liberals would end up with about 40 per cent of the MPs in the House, not the 53 per cent absolute majority they have now.

Because people like having a relationship with their local MP, CUPE endorsed a mixed member proportional representation (MMP) system (see *Electoral reform long overdue* article for details). CUPE members discussed this option during the town halls. One of the first town halls was in Charlottetown and Leo Cheverie, from CUPE 1870, was there.

“I think the principles of fairness and equality are really important to us as a nation. If we find ways, next year and years later, to have a stronger democracy, that’s a really great legacy for the future,” said Cheverie.

■ Archana Rampure



“I think the principles of fairness and equality are really important to us as a nation. If we find ways, next year and years later, to have a stronger democracy, that’s a really great legacy for the future”.

Leo Cheverie, from CUPE 1870.

Electoral reform long overdue

The world may see Canada as a young country but what it doesn’t see are the brittle bones of its aging electoral system.

Canada’s electoral system dates to its pre-Confederation days – days when women, people of colour and aboriginal people couldn’t vote. Though our system has become much more inclusive since then, it still lags in the bottom 15 per cent of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in terms of truly representing voter intentions.

It’s a system where a minority that earns less than 40 per cent of the popular vote can form a majority government and then impose its will on the other 60 per cent. That’s what happened in 2011 and again in 2015.

The discrepancies also come up in the average number of votes per parliamentary seat. In 1993, for example, the Liberals won 177 seats with 5.6 million votes, while the Conservatives won only two seats with 2.2 million votes. In other words, the Liberals earned one seat for every 31,000 votes while the Conservatives earned one for every 1.1 million votes.

Reform is needed to bring Canada into the 21st century.

The Liberal government has recently struck a parliamentary committee to examine the question of electoral reform. This committee will be holding public hearings before drafting a report to be tabled by December 1st.

CUPE advocates for a system based on proportional representation. Of the various proportional representation models that

exist, CUPE favours mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) as the most representative model.

Here is an overview of three of the most prominent electoral models:

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)

What is it? Only the candidate in each constituency who receives the most votes is elected, regardless of the percentage. All other votes do not count. It’s our current system.

Who’s for it? Only the Conservatives.

Pros: It’s simple to understand, promotes local accountability and often produces stable majorities.

Cons: In the past two federal elections, the Conservatives and Liberals received only 39.5 per cent of the popular vote but went on to form majority governments, also referred to as “false majorities”.

Preferential Ballots (PB)

What is it? Also called ranked ballots or preferential voting, this allows voters to rank candidates according to preference. If no candidate receives 50 per cent of the votes on the first round, then the candidate with the lowest votes is eliminated and the second place votes are counted on the ballots and added to the totals of remaining candidates. The process continues until someone receives 50 per cent.

Who’s for it? Justin Trudeau and many other Liberals.

Pros: Easy to implement and understand.

Cons: It favours centrist parties, like the Liberals, who are more likely to be a second choice for voters to the left and right of them. Like the FPTP, it is a winner-takes-all system and is not proportional representation.

Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP)

What is it? It is a system where each political party receives a proportion of Parliamentary seats that more closely reflects the party’s proportion of the popular vote. Each voter gets one ballot with two votes. The first vote is for the local candidate and it works exactly the way elections work now: the candidate with the most votes wins.

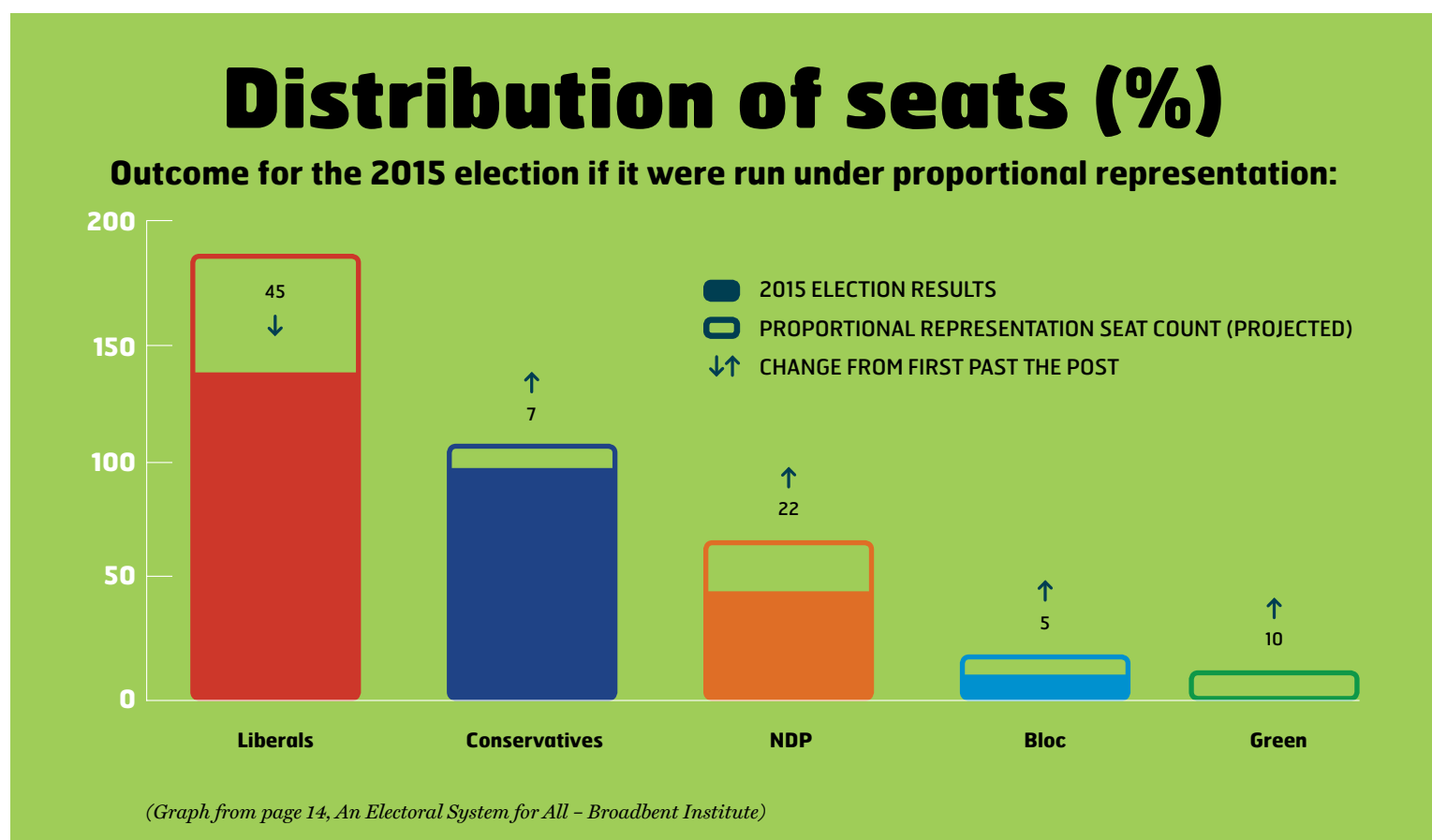
The second vote is for the party. The results of this vote are tallied and the proportion of votes determines how many of these at-large MPs each party gets. These additional MPs would come from a pre-determined “topping up” list.

Who’s for it? CUPE, the NDP, the Greens as well as many Liberals, including Bob Rae and Stéphane Dion. Also the Council of Canadians, Fair Vote Canada and Lead Now.

Pros: It’s the best of both worlds: every vote counts and you still have an MP with a connection to your riding. It eliminates “false majorities,” where parties win a majority government with only a small part of the popular vote, but still sweep in and make drastic changes. It also reduces the likelihood of regional party blocs such as the monopoly the Liberals currently have in the Atlantic provinces (32 of the 32 seats available). It encourages cross-party cooperation and greater representation of regions.

Cons: Can lead to minority and coalition governments, which may make governing more complicated. Unless there is a minimum percentage for seat eligibility, it may allow extremist parties to gain seats and influence. The MPs selected from the pre-determined lists, sometimes party insiders, aren’t accountable to local constituents.

■ Mario Emond



The real world of self-scanning library kiosks

Tech change and workers aren't always besties.

In fact, we can trace a clear line through the history of work and workers where technological change has disrupted, displaced and disrespected the work that actual people do. From the loom to the assembly line to the digital "revolution", technology not under democratic or worker control often ends up hurting workers – often in the name of progress.

Today's digital disruptions are no different.

Take the example of library self-checkout kiosks. These are the new machines where library patrons check out books or other materials by stacking them under a scanner. The materials have

small tags inserted into them that use a technology called radio frequency identification (RFID). These tags contain short-range transmitters that are activated by the readers in the scanning machines. Folks can check out multiple items at one "beep." It's pretty quick.

A self-scanning kiosk "enables employees to focus on customer service within the branch," the Ottawa Public Library claims on its website. The manufacturer says that "time saved by staff...could be allocated to other activities, such as providing one-to-one support to patrons."

Key word: "could."

It sounds promising, but it's not really what library managers in places like

North Vancouver, Ottawa and Halifax are doing with all this new, freed-up time. They're using the technology to reduce staff hours and cut positions, adding to the growing precarious nature of work in our library systems. And they're relying on library patrons to use the technology themselves – in other words, to perform the work they used to pay a worker to do.

Your union is responding. CUPE library workers have a lot to say when it comes to reimagining our libraries in the digital age – beyond relying on automation and free labour to cut jobs.

Doing more with technology and "finding new ways to connect with the community is something that CUPE



members will support and be engaged in," says Allison Hardman of CUPE 561 at the Coquitlam Public Library.

Hardman reminds us: "We already have staff who are very comfortable with technologies and who are eager to play a part in expanding what the library has to offer. Outreach – both online and in person

– is a core activity of every modern library and one in which CUPE staff should be viewed as partners."

It's that sense of partnership that can keep technology – and our workplaces – balanced, inclusive and fair. You can't automate partnership, even in the days of digital disruption. Like solidarity, it's a practice.

■ David Robbins

Who Cares in New Brunswick?

This fall, CUPE New Brunswick will launch its *Who Cares?* campaign to raise public awareness of the precarious nature of the work performed by community care workers across the province. The campaign aims to shed light on the low pay, the lack of job security and the difficult working conditions of the community care workers, most of whom are women, working in nursing homes, group homes, special care homes, transition homes, shelters, etc.

A key objective of the campaign will be to prod

the government into reforming the current system of community care services. The province currently

does not have an administrative structure to govern the delivery of these essential services, meaning

there is no coherent administrative or funding structure for community care services. The existing patchwork of independent care providers overseeing services today includes not-for-profit organizations and private companies.

Not-for-profit organizations work better when properly regulated by the government, as is the case in New Brunswick's health care sector. Not-for-profit hospitals, for example, are managed and regulated by health authorities such as Horizon Health Authority or Réseau de santé Vitalité,

and benefit from standardized working conditions that do not vary from hospital to hospital.

The *Who Cares?* campaign wants to see the creation of a Community Care Services Authority modeled after the province's health authorities. Bringing community care service providers under direct public administration will help eliminate administrative duplication and help focus increasingly limited public funds on front-line service delivery and better working conditions for workers.

■ Luc Leblanc



Who Cares?

COMMUNITY CARE SERVICES

in brief

Ontario library workers strike over sick time plan

"Our members remain united in solidarity to fight for respect and fairness," said Lori Wightman, unit chair of CUPE 2974. "Management admits sick time is not an issue and yet they are pushing a sick time plan that will not save any money and in fact will cost more to administer – it does not make any sense and we are determined to fight this."

The local started a petition to demonstrate the community's support for the workers and within a 24-hour period collected over 2,000 signatures urging Essex County to move off their sick time position to resolve the strike and open the libraries. The workers have been on strike since June 25.

■ James Chai

What are your Councillors doing to end the Essex County library strike?



We Libraries



Bargaining rights threatened in Quebec

In September 2015, mainly at the request of the Union des municipalités du Québec (UQM) and the mayors of Quebec City and Montreal, the Liberal government signed an agreement with the province's municipalities.

This agreement, also known as the "fiscal pact", would allow municipalities to decree the working conditions of their employees, even though currently more than 95 per cent of collective agreements in the municipal sector are signed without a work stoppage.

The entire labour movement considers this fiscal pact to be unconstitutional.

CUPE Quebec, as well as the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) were quick to respond.

They first denounced the bill at various press conferences. A website was also launched, egalegal.ca, offering members and citizens the opportunity to send an email to their Members of the National Assembly or to sign a petition.

A poster operation and extensive radio advertising were conducted across the province using themes

related to the campaign *Égal à égal, c'est fondamental* [Negotiating as equals is fundamental].

CUPE Quebec also produced a collection of "The Untrustworthy" postcards with the image of municipal politicians who have had a checkered record on labour relations or run-ins with the law.

Last May, a major demonstration was held in Quebec City during the annual

meeting of the UMQ.

This bill is based in large part on the manipulation of results compiled by the Statistical Institute of Quebec (ISQ) contending that municipal employees are better paid than provincial workers.

In May 2016, CUPE Quebec tabled an analysis in which it demonstrated that salaries in the municipal sector are similar to those in crown corpora-

tions, the federal administration and the unionized private sector. These facts were all deliberately ignored by the UMQ when quoting the ISQ study.

Given the evidence of the rights protected by the Canadian and Quebec Charters, the government abandoned the idea of allowing municipally elected officials to impose working conditions.

Nevertheless, it tabled

its bill in June and public hearings were held during the month of August. With this latest effort, it seems clear that the government is seeking to create an imbalance that will favour city officials during the negotiations of collective agreements. To the surprise of the unions, employees of public transport companies are also affected by this bill.

CUPE Quebec presented a brief in which it demonstrated that the bill is based on biased premises and numbers. It underlined that if adopted without major changes, the bill would pave the way to a long period of disputes in Quebec's municipal sphere.

■ Ronald Boisrond



NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY

Energy must be under public control. It is a matter of democracy

In August, more than 15,000 activists from social movements and unions from around the world participated in the 12th World Social Forum, held in Montreal. The event was a success and we are proud of the contribution made by CUPE representatives who lead presentations arguing forcefully for the need to improve and protect public services such as water, energy, transportation and health care.

Personally, I had the honour of representing the 30,000 members of CUPE in the energy sector during a workshop on the role of workers in combating climate change and supporting energy democracy.

I argued that energy in all its forms is as essential to society as water. Energy plays a significant role in

economic and social development. For this reason, we must work together to ensure that energy remains under public control.

Unfortunately, corporations and governments often present the privatization of energy as the only option. That is simply not true. In fact, the privatization of electricity, as is currently happening in Ontario, diminishes our control over our energy resources, thus moving us away from energy democracy.

In Ontario, the struggle to keep Hydro One under public control is essential. That is why CUPE will continue to play a key role in the coalition opposing the sale of this Crown Corporation.

This project to privatize electricity will lead to a reduction in service and decreased investment in facilities, resulting in more service interruptions, especially in rural areas. The cost to consumers may also increase.

In Australia, two states have privatized their electricity services. During the ensuing eight years, prices have increased by 40 per cent and the quality of service has declined.

Whether hydroelectric, solar or wind power, energy must clearly be under public control. It is in the common interest. It is a matter of democracy.

CHARLES FLEURY ONLINE twitter.com/CUPENatSec



C-51

ANTI-TERRORISM LEGISLATION



**TELL YOUR MP
TO SCRAP C-51**