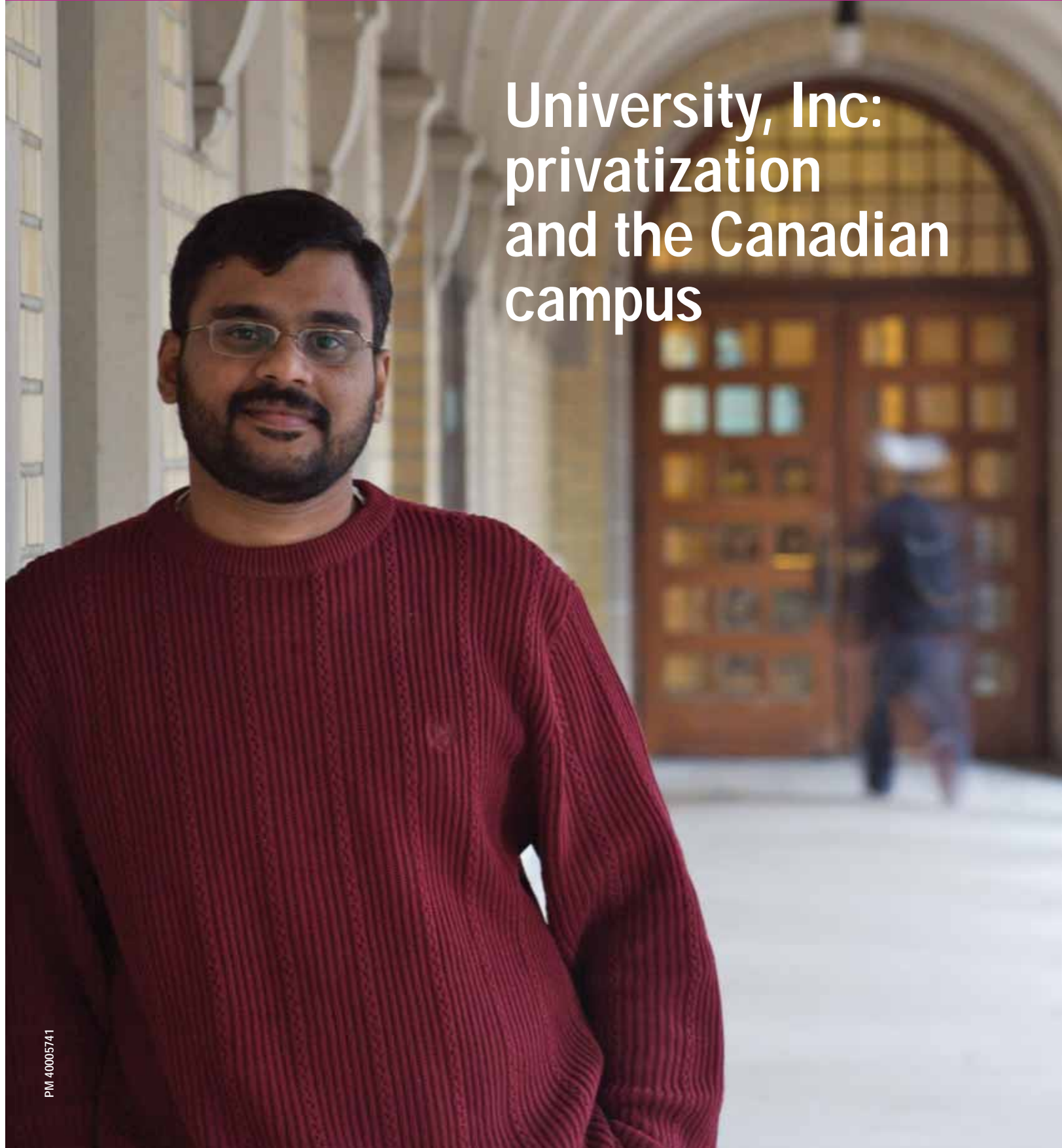


# ORGANIZE

## University, Inc: privatization and the Canadian campus



Want to know what it would be like to have a disability in the workplace? Spin the Wheel of Chance and find out.

# WHEEL Of Chance



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Details

## A new year brings changes for the better



This first *Organize* of 2007 covers a lot of ground, capturing many of the issues that CUPE members face each day.

At the 2005 national convention, delegates said they think CUPE needs to be a stronger union. Members also made clear their desire to see us improve coordination within CUPE's various sectors. One way we are responding to both these directions

is by convening national sector meetings, allowing members across the country to meet and share experiences.

One of these was the first CUPE national university workers' meeting, held in Montreal in October 2006. The meeting, highlighted in this issue's cover story, was a great success.

This year we'll hold our first social services sector meeting. In addition, a gathering of CUPE pension trustees will take place in 2007. And, in 2008, we are planning our first national meeting for school board workers.

CUPE is stronger when members work together. It's important to ask ourselves how we can change and improve how we work. This allows us to be better prepared for the bargaining table and other challenges like privatization.

With this in mind, the national union has begun profiling CUPE's various sectors. We need to know who our members are in each sector, what other unions represent workers in those sectors, and how many workers still need to be organized.

To date, we have completed profiles of the municipal, health care and school board sectors. For the latter, we asked some long-term, strategic questions, such as what will it mean for CUPE school board workers as enrolments continue to decline along with per pupil funding.

Our strategic planning doesn't get a lot of airplay. That's because we are mostly driven by the demands of the moment and the myriad issues our employers throw at us.

But forward thinking is key if CUPE is to meet its challenges over the next decade and beyond. Effective leadership for our 560,000 members demands that in addition to the pressing issues of the day, we also plan and prepare for the future.

In solidarity,

*Paul Moist*

Paul Moist  
National President

## Contents

### 2 Frontline

Women's task force survey; CUPE members visit Colombia; Earth Day poster contest; Promoting literacy; CUPE Celebrates; National Human Rights conference; new video on disability rights.

### 16 CUPE across Canada

B.C. government loves privateers; Improving legal aid in Saskatchewan; Ontario community living workers launch new campaign; Progressive candidates win big in Ontario municipal elections; Health care workers choose CUPE Quebec; New Brunswick school custodians regain right to strike.

### 20 Cultural Revolution

What's new in books and film.

### 20 From the National Secretary-Treasurer

CUPE's coming of age

### Features

#### 7 Canada's universities: higher education or education for hire?

How privatization is hurting our campuses – and how CUPE members are pushing back.  
By Catherine Louli

#### 12 Hospital worker gets to the heart of the union

Eilene Gan: hospital worker, union activist, literacy promoter.  
By Anne Paquette

#### 13 N.S. labour coalition leads to historic pension win

A risky coalition led to huge pension gains for Nova Scotia hospital workers.  
By John McCracken, Kevin Skerrett and Sandra Sorensen



## CUPE members' response wows Task Force

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Annick Desjardins, a Quebec equality  
representative.

It's unprecedented in CUPE's history. With more than 200 consultations and thousands of surveys, the work of the National Women's Task Force (NWTF) has tapped an overwhelming response from CUPE members – women and men – who want to be involved in our union.

Across the country, Task Force groups have been listening to members talk about how our union can better respond to issues that matter to women and involve them at all levels of decision-making in CUPE.

"The majority of women we've heard from in communities across the regions have talked about their increasing workloads, job pressures in the workplace and

the difficult balancing act between the workplace and family," said Task Force co-chair Barb Moore. "What's heartening is how enthusiastic these members are about CUPE reaching out to them and how many of them want to get involved in the union despite the barriers to their inclusion."

The NWTF met in December and January to look at the feedback from its canvass of CUPE members. The information shows some significant patterns that are common across the regions.

"It's becoming clear that our union processes – from how and when local union meetings are held to education, collective bargaining and our difficult-to-understand CUPE structure – too often exclude women and marginalize issues that are critical to our union gaining ground on important issues like pensions and child care," said CUPE National President Paul Moist, co-chair of the NWTF. "By looking at solutions to better involve these members in our union decision-making, we can only become a stronger, more effective union."

The NWTF will be making presentations at various CUPE events, including the provincial division conventions. The aim is to generate discussion about the findings as well as options and challenges for change that will improve representation and participation of women members. The Task Force will make its final report to the CUPE National Convention in October.

For more information about the Task Force, visit the website at [www.cupe.ca](http://www.cupe.ca) and click on the NWTF box on the lower front page.

■ Doreen Meyer

## CUPE embraced by Colombian counterparts



Canadian public sector unionists join Colombians to fight privatization.

CUPE members have strengthened ties with Colombian unionists after two tours to the troubled Latin American country.

A project called Defending Public Services, Canadian and Colombia Workers on the Front Line brought public sector unionists from the two countries together in a common action against privatization. The tours were co-sponsored by CUPE, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and coordinated by Co-Development Canada.

The first tour was undertaken by Ken Davidson (CUPE 1004, Vancouver city worker), Joanne Foote (CUPE/HEU) and Sharm Dusun (CUPE 600, Yorkton, Saskatchewan). Barb Moore (CUPE 3912, Dalhousie University), Tracy Fall (CUPE 3324, Charlottetown paramedic) and CUPE Manitoba communications and research officer Dennis Lewycky were on the second tour. Moore and Davidson co-chair CUPE's global justice committee.

"Conditions in our two countries are so different," noted Moore. "Colombia is a police state. But when we talked about privatization, or the importance of protecting human rights, or what women have to bear in defending public services,

we were all speaking about the same things."

Tour participants met with public sector counterparts working in Colombia's post office, municipal services and health

care. They also met human rights activists, including a women's organization that is providing support to victims of the paramilitaries. Agricultural workers spoke about how they have lost their land, their jobs and their lives.

"Meeting our Colombian counterparts was just fantastic," added Fall. "We learned so much from them about how privatization is destroying their country, and how they can keep up their spirits in the face of such terrible conditions."

"CUPE is proud to help rural Colombians understand and defend their human rights," Davidson added.

Visit [www.cupe.ca/globaljustice](http://www.cupe.ca/globaljustice) to find out more about this and other projects, or to donate online to CUPE's Global Justice Mondiale Fund.

■ Dennis Lewycky

## Every Day is Earth Day!

Eleven talented children have won cool, environment-friendly prizes in CUPE's 2006 Earth Day poster contest.

The winners come from across the country and

range in age from six to 13. Their posters tackled everything from climate change to endangered species to waste reduction and recycling, all in honour of Earth Day, April 22.

"Walk don't drive," said 10-year-old Stephanie's poster on climate change, while eight-year-old Vanessa's poster suggests using less wasteful showerheads, collecting water in rain barrels and planting trees every spring.



A winning poster from the 2006 contest.

The annual Earth Day poster contest is sponsored by CUPE's national environment committee through the work of the Health and Safety Branch. Kids are invited to illus-

trate actions we all could take to protect our environment. They can use crayons, paints or coloured pens or pencils to show how we should be dealing with climate change, pollution, or any environmental issue they find important.

The contest deadline for the 2007 contest is **Friday, May 4, 2007**. Visit [cupe.ca](http://cupe.ca) for an entry form or to see the 2006 winning posters. ■



National literacy working group co-chairs Sarah Bjorknas and Bernard Gallant.

Judging by the energy of a packed Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) forum, Stephen Harper's cuts to literacy programs aren't the end of the story. In fact, they mark a new beginning, says CLC executive vice-president Barb Byers.

"The literacy community is becoming much more politicized and speaking up," she says.

"Although the government has put up a roadblock, this movement is getting bigger and bigger," says Moncton Zoo worker and CUPE 51 member Bernard Gallant, who co-chairs CUPE's national literacy working group.

CUPE members and staff, including members of the national literacy working group, took part in the half-day forum that kicked off a national CLC education conference. The forum used skits to show the power of clear language and literacy, and highlighted success stories from across the country.

"This is more than just reading written words," says working group coordinator

Sylvia Sioufi. "It's a movement to open up processes and encourage participation."

Sarah Bjorknas agrees. "It's about breaking down barriers and union-building," says the Burnaby, B.C., library worker, CUPE 23 member and the working group's other co-chair.

One skit showed how easily a new union member could be alienated by jargon from a collective agreement the size of a phone book – and how that same person could be welcomed.

"When you put things in clear language, it's a lot easier for everyone to understand," says Laura Hupalo, president of CUPE 4606. "And that means there'll be more involvement in the union." Hupalo, who works with seniors in Dauphin, Man., came to the CLC conference fresh from facilitating two literacy and clear language courses.

"It definitely builds a stronger union, one where everyone can feel equal and included and able to participate," she adds.

The people Bjorknas saw at the library inspired her to become more involved in adult literacy work.

"I've seen people needing help with basic things like filling out forms," she says. "It was really scary to me that people had to figure out tricks to survive, to do really basic and important things to keep their lives going."

Literacy work has changed the lives of many of Gallant's co-workers, including one older man who wanted to leave his truck driving job for the better pay and stability of foreman's work.

"We've pushed our union and the city to get on board and educate our workers, so he was able to get all the proper courses and qualify," says Gallant. "It gave him a better chance at life."

Clear communication is vital in a municipal local like Bjorknas', which brings together many different occupations with a multitude of worksites and shift schedules. She hopes her local's fledgling communications committee will benefit from a new clear language kit jointly produced by CUPE and the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA).

"It's great timing, because [the committee] can start off on the right foot in terms of how to better reach our members," says Bjorknas. "I hope it will help us get information out more effectively and engage more people in the union."

The clear message from the forum is that literacy is a tool for equity and social change, opening doors, encouraging participation and increasing understanding. As a recent evaluation of CUPE's literacy work concluded, literacy and clear language is about "reading the world, not just the words."

Read the evaluation and download the CUPE/CAMA clarity kit at [cupe.ca/literacy](http://cupe.ca/literacy)

■ Karin Jordan

A big pension win in Nova Scotia. Our first National Human Rights conference. The founding of the National Aboriginal Council. A new, inspiring video about members with disabilities. These are just some of CUPE's proudest moments from 2006, and you can read all about them – and many others – in the third annual edition of *CUPE Celebrates*. Download the document at [cupe.ca](http://cupe.ca), where you can win CUPE gear by taking part in our *CUPE Celebrates* quizzes. You can also request hard copies by contacting CUPE National. ■



### OUR VOICES RISING!



Joshua Berson

Delegates to CUPE's first National Human Rights conference in November endorsed a declaration to strengthen diversity in our union.

The more than 420 participants adopted the declaration at the closing session of the Vancouver conference, held from November 23 to 26.

"The *Vancouver Declaration* unifies our efforts to promote human rights, equality and diversity," said CUPE National President Paul Moist. "It will build on CUPE's work in the struggle for equality for all and guide the work of our committees, conferences and conventions."



Joshua Berson

Highlights of the *Vancouver Declaration* include:

- The creation of a human rights course incorporating the work of the conference;
- Organizing and bargaining strategies to further improve union representation, wages, benefits and pensions for all equality-seeking groups;
- All levels of our union including committees, executives and staff to be more reflective of the full diversity of CUPE's membership; and
- An updated national diversity vice-presidents' action plan, after consultation with national equality committees.



Joshua Berson



Joshua Benson

“Our Voices Rising was the theme of our conference, and participants have made a historic declaration to ensure our voices continue to rise and be heard from coast to coast to coast, beyond this conference and into the future,” said Claude Généreux, CUPE’s national secretary-treasurer.

Musqueam Elder Larry Grant and CUPE National Diversity Vice-President Dharam Boodhoo set the stage for a productive conference when they welcomed delegates with inspiring personal stories that encouraged creativity and reflection.

CUPE delegates participated in workshops focusing on alliances and overcoming barriers to equity, and in panel discussions that examined the advances and cooperation that have characterized CUPE’s work on equality issues, as well as what members can do to promote and advance human rights.

In addition to lively debates during the plenary sessions, conference participants heard inspiring speakers, including lawyer/activists Anita Braha and Kiké Roach, Adriana Paz, an organizer with *Justicia for Migrant Workers*, Dr. Sherene Razack and social justice activist Itrath Syed.

The conference’s entertainment component included jazz/blues ensemble Jayne’s Gang, hip hop artists and activists Sara Kendall and Curtis Clearsky, the Korean youth drumming group Riverside Beats the Rhythm and the colourful FootEdge South Asian Arts Dance Group.

CUPE members spoke about powerful and painful experiences with racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, harassment, fear and ignorance. But there were also hope-filled examples of successful CUPE projects.

CUPE staff representative Don Moran gave a presentation on the Aboriginal Partnership Program. Lila Murao from the Hospital Employees’ Union talked

about reorganizing contracted out health care workers. Barb Moore, co-chair of CUPE’s national women’s task force, shared some preliminary results of the NWT survey. Gerry Lavallée spoke emotionally about his experiences as a gay man and CUPE’s contribution to the Worker’s Out Conference in Montreal and the International AIDS Conference in Toronto. Disability working group member Richard Sherring introduced an inspirational video featuring members with disabilities.

Delegates left the conference with hope and plans to work harder than ever for equality and justice in their locals, their workplaces and their communities.

■ James Chai

## New video spotlights disability rights



Richard Sherring

It started as an idea during a breakfast discussion: a simple tool to inform, educate and stimulate activism on issues facing members with disabilities.

The result: an eight-minute video that received a standing ovation when it premiered at

last November’s National Human Rights conference.

The overwhelmingly enthusiastic response came after an emotional presentation about the making of the video by Richard Sherring. Sherring, a member of CUPE’s persons with disabilities national working group (PWDNWG), was instrumental in kick-starting the project and contributed his editing and production expertise.

“This video...enables us to communicate with all CUPE members,” he told the audience. “It allows people to hear us,

understand where we are coming from. It shows what can be achieved when a group of committed individuals work together to further our union’s goals.”

The video features candid interviews with PWDNWG members, who speak movingly about the barriers and discrimination they face. It also shows how the union can make a difference when it takes up the cause.

The title, *Challenging Attitudes*, highlights the need to “overcome a certain mindset that perpetuates the myth of able-bodiedness as the norm,” as Sherring described it.

For equality representative Conni Kilfoil, the video’s real significance is the commitment it demonstrates.

“The video is compelling evidence that disability rights and issues are now clearly on CUPE’s radar,” says Kilfoil.

To order a copy of the video, email [equality@cupe.ca](mailto:equality@cupe.ca) or contact the National Equality Branch in Ottawa. ■

# Canada’s universities:

## higher education or education for hire?

From the food they serve to the structures they build to the teachers they hire, privatization is sweeping our universities. Catherine Louli looks at the consequences and talks to activists who are fighting the trend.



Vince Pietropao

From their earliest beginnings, Canada’s universities have prepared the professional workforce, contributed to research, knowledge and societal development, and acted as beacons for creativity, freedom of expression and critical thinking. However, these noble ideals are being jeopardized by deep cuts to government funding and growing reliance on privatization to make up the difference.

“Historically, the role universities play has been to further the public good,” explained Joel Westheimer, a professor at the University of Ottawa and a guest speaker at CUPE’s first national universities meeting in Montreal. Rampant privatization across

Canadian campuses was one of the hottest topics of discussion during the meeting, held Oct. 12-14, 2006.

“This [role] is now threatened by privatization in various forms,” Westheimer continued. “The threat impacts our communities generally and the community that is the university itself.”

Westheimer has dedicated much of his work to the concept of the university as public domain. Like many of the delegates to the conference, he is alarmed by the pervasive “corporatization” of our hallowed halls of higher education.

“Universities increasingly model themselves after corporations seeking to maximize profit, growth, and marketability,” he

warned. "Students become customers, classrooms become places of training rather than learning, research labs become sites of cheap labour for commercial industries, and the role of universities devoted to improving society is lost."

Barb Moore agrees. She's the president of CUPE 3912 and a member of the part-time faculty at Dalhousie University in Halifax.

"The privatization of university services has had a tremendous and insidious ripple effect on campuses across Canada," she says.

## Alma Mater, Inc.

Margot Young, a CUPE national researcher specializing in the university sector, is equally disturbed by the trend among universities to adopt the values and practices of the private sector. As CUPE members in the hospital, municipal and school board sectors have learned, the business model is all about producing products or services at the lowest price and maximizing profit. In universities, this is often done at the expense of students and staff.

"The benefit of university resources is increasingly controlled by private interests," Young says.

"The university acting as a corporation means that the focus is on the needs of business. Research is directed to the needs of the corporate world, while non-lucrative research on issues benefiting the social good isn't valued. The whole business model means the university will put priority of profit over public and community service."

There is no doubt that privatization is changing the look of campuses all over the country. Buildings that used to be named after historical figures or individual philanthropists now bear company logos.

But it's not just about bricks, mortar and architectural show-pieces. Take a stroll around any Canadian campus and you can't help but notice the marked increase in commercialization, from vending machines to fast food chain outlets. And while some may argue that this simply gives students and staff more choices and convenience, a little digging reveals just the opposite.

For example, CUPE members at the University of British Columbia documented a 44 per cent reduction in the number of water fountains on campus within three years of the university

"Rampant privatization across Canadian campuses was one of the hottest topics during CUPE's first national universities meeting in October."



Vince Pietropaolo

signing a deal with the Coca Cola Corporation, manufacturers of Dasani brand bottled water. UBC is the third largest employer in the province, with approximately 12,000 employees and 50,000 students.

"Corporations see UBC as a huge moneymaker," says Natalie Lisik, president of CUPE 2950, which represents administrative and library workers at the university. "There has been a significant amount of construction and building on campus. The administration wants to turn UBC into 'University Town' and have a 24/7 operation. [It's] operating the university more like a corporation."

"It makes you wonder what the impact of the commercialization will be regarding academic governance as well as academic freedoms," says Barb Moore. "What does a heightened corporate presence on campus do for public accountability when research decisions or results are taken out of the hands of the public and handed over to a corporate sponsor?"

## Privatization and the contingent workforce

Privatization now touches almost all areas of the support workforce in universities, including maintenance, trades, administration, libraries and child care services. But if you think academic and research staff are out of harm's way, think again.

"Privatization issues directly affect part-time faculty, research and teaching assistants," says Barb Moore.

The *Ottawa Citizen* recently reported that contract instructors, some of whom teach at several schools to make ends meet, have become a source of cheap labour. These stressed-out, overworked, underpaid "road scholars" have become familiar figures on campuses across the country. At some institutions, including the University of Ottawa, they teach half of all undergraduate courses.

Unfortunately, figures on just how many part-timers are employed by universities are hard to pin down. Part-time academic workers have a high turnover rate. Statistics Canada discontinued its survey of university and college part-time staff for lack of funding, and the agency has said it won't resume collecting data on part-timers until at least next year.

"A just-in-time workforce, part of the corporate model, proliferates in the academic workforce," explains Margot Young. "A contingent worker translates into low-pay, fewer benefits, less predictability and security of income, and dismal working conditions."

One example is sessional lecturers, who often do not have offices or telephones or simply have too many students to see. Barb Moore, whose local also represents part-time faculty and teaching assistants at Mount Saint Vincent University and Saint Mary's University, knows only too well how precarious her situation is.

"The whole business model means the university will put priority of profit over public and community service."



Vince Pietropaolo

"[Part-timers] teach over 40 per cent of classes at Mount Saint Vincent," she says. "We have no pensions and very few benefits; it makes life planning very difficult. Some of us have no idea when we will retire. For those of us who have worked all of our lives, our future is uncertain."

## Federal funding crisis

So how did we get to this point? Erika Shaker, a research fellow with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, says the situation is partly due to a manufactured crisis of funding and partly the result of an ideological push.

"Federal cuts to transfer payments in 1994-95 and the creation of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) amount to a \$7-billion cut from education and training," she notes. CHST does not stipulate how much funding is to be used for post-secondary education.

"In spite of political rhetoric about commitment to our 'knowledge economy,' Ottawa's cash contributions to provincial post-secondary education expenditures declined significantly over the past decade," Shaker says.

These cuts have had an enormous impact on university infrastructure. According to Shaker, accumulated deferred maintenance at Canadian colleges and universities has been estimated at over \$3.6 billion, \$1 billion of which is considered urgent. Small wonder universities are eager to sign deals with private corporations to make up the difference.

"What we have is a smaller pool of public funding, increasingly dispensed without accountability and without requirements," says Shaker. "We have significant amounts of federal and, in some cases, provincial funding directed to specific research, often with the requirement that it be matched with private funds. In these cases, privatization is a prerequisite for public funding. And we have a consistent lack of adequate funding for infrastructure and core education services."

## Coordinated bargaining: our not-so-secret weapon

As privatization at universities charges forward, so do resistance efforts. One of the most effective anti-privatization weapons in CUPE's arsenal is coordinated bargaining. At the October meeting, members heard success stories on this front from across the country.

Of the ten CUPE university locals in British Columbia, nine have a common contract expiry date, March 31, 2010. In 1999 and 2002, the B.C. locals worked hard to get everyone on the same timeline.

"The advantage of a common date is that together we are much stronger," says Doug Sprenger, president of CUPE 951 at the University of Victoria and chair of the CUPE BC universities committee.



"Organizing aggressively in universities can bolster the union's organizing efforts in other sectors."

Vince Pietropolo

"We have been able to bargain better collective agreements," Sprenger says. "In 2006, most of the employers wanted concessions. But because of coordinated bargaining, at the end of the day we ended up without concessions and made substantial gains. The one disadvantage is that it inspires the employers to work together as well."

A coordinated bargaining strategy is also in place in Quebec. "When it comes time to bargain our contracts, all the CUPE locals that are part of the *Université du Québec* network have the same end date to our collective agreements," says Denise Bêland, president of CUPE 1800, which represents administrative and technical staff at the *Université du Québec* in Trois-Rivières.

"This has helped us when it comes time to share information and build a common strategy," she says. "The strength of the coordinated bargaining is our solidarity."

In Ontario, some universities are participating in coordinated bargaining this year. Teaching and research assistants at several CUPE university locals have taken their first steps toward coordinated bargaining by filing for conciliation on the same date and by aiming for a common expiry date.

"We know that the university administrators get together and coordinate their plans against us," says Patricia Chong, a member of CUPE 3906 at McMaster University. "It was time we got smart and did the same."

Janice Folk-Dawson is a member of CUPE 1334 and a trades and maintenance worker at the University of Guelph. She also chairs the Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee

(OUWCC). Her many years of experience as an activist and at the bargaining table have taught her that for coordinated bargaining to be successful, some crucial elements need to be in place.

"A common communication strategy, a democratic decision making process and the development of trust relations between locals are key," she says. "We want to promote the concept that coordinated bargaining actually enhances local autonomy by ensuring each local has all the information, tools and resources to achieve the best collective agreement for their membership. We also want to promote to every CUPE member that they are not alone in this process."

Because you can't bargain if you're not organized, the OUWCC is also setting its sights on unorganized food service workers at the universities of Waterloo, Guelph, Western and Carleton. Just like everywhere else, the on-campus food service industry primarily employs women, workers of colour, students and immigrants, and is notorious for bad working conditions.

"There is a huge potential in organizing food service workers," says Chong.

Aramark, Sodexo and Compass, the three major on-campus food service providers, are also in hospitals, nursing homes, elementary and high schools and government buildings – other sectors in which CUPE is strong. Organizing aggressively in universities can bolster the union's organizing efforts in other sectors.

"CUPE represents almost half the Sodexo workers in Canada," notes Chong. "Imagine the bargaining power these

workers would have if CUPE moved to a master contract model with core language and a common expiry date."

## Students in solidarity

University students themselves are some of CUPE's staunchest allies in the anti-privatization wars. Students in almost every province are fighting back against skyrocketing tuition fees, which are widely viewed as just another unfair user-pay fee tacked on to cover funding shortfalls.

On February 7, 2007, the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), along with many CUPE locals, members and other unions, held a "National Student Day of Action" calling for reduced tuition fees and increased federal funding for post-secondary education. The CFS currently represents more than 450,000 students from across the country.

"It's a myth that the higher the tuition fees, the better the quality of education," says Denise Hammond, a member of CUPE 1281 who works for the student union at Ryerson University in Toronto. "The

battle we are fighting in post-secondary education is the same one being fought in health care, social services and municipal services."

Hammond heard French student leader Bruno Julliard at the universities meeting in Montreal. Julliard, president of France's largest student union, led a campaign last year against a controversial first employment law he warned would turn French youths into a "Kleenex generation" of disposable workers. Julliard drummed up support on campuses while forging an alliance between student and labour unions. Swayed by the show of solidarity and widespread national protests, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin revoked the law in April 2006.

"France is a huge success story," says Hammond. "The students and workers stood together on every aspect, from organizing on the ground to the message they sent out to the demands being made. Whether you work in a university or have a son or daughter in the post-secondary system, everyone has a stake in higher education. Workers and students need to stand in solidarity to push back against the privatization of our universities."

For Joel Westheimer, we all have a responsibility to raise the alarm and stem the tide of privatization in our universities.

"[Workers] at all levels and of all kinds need to fight to regain [universities'] central mission: to further the public good," he said in Montreal.

"If the mission of universities is allowed to become so anemic that those of us who work in them can talk about nothing except business partnerships, workforce readiness, commercialization for profit, market growth and clientele, then we risk turning our institutions of higher education into ones of education for hire. And that would be [a] catastrophe." ■



# HOSPITAL WORKER GETS TO THE HEART OF THE UNION

By Anne Paquette

*“The hook for me was seeing people develop the ability to have access to what the union was doing.”*

— Eilene Gan

When she was laid off, B.C.’s Health Labour Adjustment Accord kicked in. Gan was retrained and graduated from Vancouver Community College as a hospital unit coordinator, the job she holds today. In the meantime, she also got her BA in psychology from Simon Fraser University.

There is a pang of regret that she didn’t continue with academics. “I only use my degree in my personal life,” she jokes. But Gan couldn’t see herself climbing the academic ladder, and she was immersed in hospital work. And when she talks about that work, all regrets disappear.

“I like working with the patients and being their link to the physicians. I schedule patients for up to 36 physicians; each doctor and each specialty has different needs. I need to know what personalities are at play and book as best I can, so the clinic can run smoothly. With nobody waiting too long.”

Apart from her work, Gan’s passion in life has become literacy and giving union members clear language information they can use.

It started with HEU’s Basic Education Skills Training (BEST) program, which allowed Gan to brush up on her typing skills and medical terminology while recuperating from a shoulder injury. She went on to be a BEST tutor and ended up coordinating the program. She now represents HEU on CUPE’s literacy working group.

“The hook for me was seeing people develop the ability to have access to what the union was doing. Now they know how to object to things like heavy workloads, improper scheduling or paycheque problems. They understand parts of the collective agreement that they didn’t before.”

Surveys of HEU members – who are mostly female and include many new Canadians – show that communication in a language they can understand is crucial. Gan is gratified that the need for action on clear language was reinforced in a motion at the recent HEU convention.

“I like to think that the larger labour movement can learn a lot from the work that’s been going on in union literacy,” she says. “Literacy involves learning from each other. Literacy embodies the principles of equality and building on workers’ strengths. That’s what the union movement should be all about.” ■

Eilene Gan was a quiet, gentle nurse’s aide.

“I was one of those people who went to work, minded my own business and went home,” says Gan, 37, who immigrated to Vancouver from Malaysia at age 20.

“That was our culture back home: don’t make a fuss and never talk about politics. You could get thrown in jail for having an opinion.”

But, in the early 1990s, her employer, the British Columbia Children’s and Women’s Hospital, decided to lay off all nursing aides and housekeepers and merge the positions.

“I’d been there three or four years and I was a casual, so it shouldn’t have affected me,” says Gan. “But I was ticked.”

Members of CUPE 6010 (Hospital Employees’ Union) were rounded up and given notice, with no time to consider re-applying for the new jobs. Some nursing aides might qualify, but most housekeepers would not.

Gan and her steward went to a management meeting and spoke of the need to train housekeepers for the new jobs. She suggested the hospital needed to have procedures and policies in place before going ahead.

“The supervisor of the department said to me, ‘who’s going to write them, you?’ So I said, ‘sure!’ It was anger that was motivating me. I hadn’t felt it before – anger at injustice, the stress the full-timers were going through. These were people we worked with day in and out.”

Gan wrote the procedures and policies for the hospital. She also got her first taste of changing things through the union.

Gan went on to be a union steward. When she hurt her back after slipping on an operating room floor, she got involved in health and safety issues. A union representative urged her to apply for another job and use her union-related activities as expertise. She got a job in information technology (IT) support.

# N.S. labour coalition leads to historic pension win

By John McCracken, Kevin Skerrett and Sandra Sorensen



The labour sceptics have been proven wrong once and for all in Nova Scotia: coalitions can work, with dramatic results.

The five major health care unions in that province – CUPE, the Nova Scotia Government Employees’ Union, the Nova Scotia Nurses Union, the Service Employees’ International Union and the Canadian Auto Workers – stuck together over a process that ground on for close to 18 months and honoured a joint pensions proposal. For their efforts, they now have a \$100-million deal.

“We have shown our members, the public and the government what strength in numbers is all about,” says CUPE acute care co-ordinator Wayne Thomas, credited by many with keeping the coalition united.

While the deal was struck during acute care bargaining with only two of the unions, CUPE and CAW, it affects some 20,000 health care workers from the five unions who belong to the Nova Scotia Association of Health Organizations (NSAHO) pension plan.

## Background

The unions discovered that the employers had been taking significant contribution holidays and that member contribution rates had been increased without any consultation. The five unions proposed that member contribution rates be fixed in their collective agreements, and that the employers suspend their contribution holidays.

NSAHO had been arguing that the unions did not even have the right to bargain pensions. However, in September, the provincial labour board dismissed the employer’s complaint.

This led the parties back to the bargaining table, now under the authority of a provincially appointed conciliator. However, the employers refused to negotiate on pension issues. Talks broke down in mid-October, and a countdown began to a province-wide hospital strike. Some 6,000 CUPE and CAW hospital workers gave their unions strong strike mandates.



The imminent strike became a major issue in the media and a primary concern for the provincial government. An agreement on pensions was reached just 45 hours before the strike deadline. The unions achieved most of what they had set out to change, and they all ratified the agreement.

## Union strategies

After the initial exchanges in collective bargaining, the unions began communicating with their members – all 20,000 active hospital and long-term care workers who participate in the plan – through information bulletins and website postings. The coalition also adopted CUPE national researcher Kevin Skerrett as its resident expert on pensions.

“One of the most significant elements of this particular campaign was the fact that the pension surplus issue became politicized,” says Skerrett, who is also being partly credited with the victory. “Not only did we educate and mobilize our members, which was a critical and lengthy process, we also forced the employers to the bargaining table and splashed our issue all over the media, and into the faces of the premier and the provincial cabinet.”

The unions then launched a major member, public and media relations campaign.

“We mailed out colour pamphlets, bulletins, had Kevin do a speaking tour of the province, held information pickets, ran TV and print ads, and staged several press conferences,” says CUPE Provincial Bargaining Committee Chair Karen MacKenzie. “What may have appeared to be a sudden victory was actually the result of sticking to our strategy along with a fair bit of risk-taking on the part of our committee. When we listened, it was the members who ultimately told us that the pension problem had to be fixed.”

By the end of Skerrett’s speaking tour, more than 1,200 members had heard from their union. This was capped off with a press conference, which produced the first major media coverage of the dispute.

Another step was a coordinated response to the complaint at the Labour Relations Board. While the complaint had been filed against CUPE only, the other four unions sought and obtained “intervenor” status, to stand by CUPE and co-defend the case.

In the final weeks of the campaign, the members’ willingness to exercise their legal right to strike was tested. Not only were there strong strike mandates, but the actual steps necessary to launch a strike were taken, including the naming of committees, picket captains, scheduling and the negotiation of a protocol for emergency services.

It was in this context that a final move was made by the unions. The coalition was able to seize on a particularly bad mistake made by the employers and the plan managers.

“We discovered they had been filing false reports to the Superintendent of Pensions for the past ten years,” says Skerrett. “The reports they gave us, like those they’d been submitting, showed that no surplus had been used to make employer contributions. These false filings gave us the smoking gun we needed to win both media and public support.”

The secretive way in which the employers were using pension surplus proved to be their undoing. Within 48 hours of a union press conference, the employers requested a return to the collective bargaining table, this time with a declared intention of making a serious offer to reach a settlement on the pension issue.

After 14 hours of negotiations, a deal was reached within the framework of the union’s proposals, putting an end to the contribution holiday. Not only was the funding for the pension plan secured, but for the first time in Nova Scotia history, a major, multi-employer and multi-union pension plan was brought to the collective bargaining table.

The agreement marks a major turning point in the history of the Nova Scotia health workers’ pension plan. It also serves as a model for the thousands of other CUPE members fighting pension concessions.

## Five lessons learned

Five important lessons stand out in this story. The first is that the information is power. As the bargaining moved forward, the process turned into something that looked much more like a communications

campaign. The unions worked tirelessly to get their messages out.

Second, the membership wanted and needed opportunities to mobilize. This was not a campaign that was limited to members passively listening to “experts” and then going home. Through town hall meetings, local membership meetings and information pickets at workplaces, many members became actively engaged in this struggle.

Third, a wide range of resources and support was sought and obtained from the union. CUPE National provided direct assistance in the form of communications, research, and legal support. Through coordination and cost-sharing, similar resources were tapped by the other unions, and outside actuarial and legal support was also cost-shared.

Fourth, the success of this campaign depended crucially on the refusal to accept the status quo. When told that the pension plan had never been collectively bargained, the unions said, “we want it bargained.” When told that the employer had always taken contribution holidays, the unions said, “we don’t think this is fair, and you misled us about it.” When told that multi-union coalitions had never worked out in the past, the unions said, “let’s try one more time. There is no other way we can win this.”

Finally, the media coverage of this campaign was surprisingly positive. Considering that this ultimately involved a group of hospital workers threatening to take strike action, it is remarkable that the media coverage was not hostile. In fact, following the union’s final press conference on Oct. 27, the tone of the coverage changed from the usual, somewhat anti-union stance to one of some sympathy.

This positive coverage reached its peak when, following the announcement that an agreement had been concluded, the conservative Halifax Daily News published an editorial that suggested – somewhat reluctantly – that the unions had demonstrated that they needed the right to strike.

For the coalition, this campaign showed that when unions and their members work hard, work strategically, and use their collective strength, there are major victories to be won. ■

# NSAHO pension agreement – what they won:

## 1. End of employer contribution holiday

The employers’ partial contribution holiday is over. For the past 10 years, hospital employers have used some \$58.5 million in fund surpluses to make a portion of their required contributions to the plan. This practice will end immediately, as the employers are committed to beginning to contribute an additional 1.4 per cent of payroll to the plan, worth \$10.6 million in the first year and \$11 million in the second.

## 2. Surplus protection

The end of the employer contribution holiday means that the increased funding will remain in the plan. In addition, the agreement prevents any allocations of surplus to employer contributions, at least until a governance review process is completed.

## 3. Joint pension committee

Through the establishment of a joint pension committee, the unions gain equal representation on a joint labour-management committee charged with reviewing the plan’s governance structure and developing a proposal for structural change.

## 4. Collective bargaining

The NSAHO pension plan is subject to collective bargaining. After decades of the employer refusing to allow pensions to be collectively bargained, and after a major victory before the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board, this round of bargaining provides a definitive conclusion to the debate.

The consequences of this agreement will be lasting and significant. The NSAHO pension plan moves from a bottom-tier plan to the second-best plan in the country when it comes to the employer’s share of total funding.



## B.C. government lends privateers a helping hand



CUPE's campaign to keep sewage treatment public began last fall.



finds a privatization scheme it doesn't like.

Seeking to get a jump on privatizing a long-awaited sewage treatment project in the Capital Regional District (CRD) on Vancouver Island, Campbell also announced that provincial funding will be contingent on Partnerships BC taking a "hard look" at how the project can be done as a P3.

This isn't sitting well with area activists, who have worked for years to get proper sewage treatment in Victoria. CUPE locals and their allies are planning to fight any proposed P3.

"Residents and taxpayers should have the right to make up our own minds," says Justin Schmid, president of CUPE 374 in the Greater Victoria area and co-chair of the Island Water Watch campaign. "Why should we be blackmailed into a 30-year private deal just to get one-third of the capital cost covered by the province?"

■ Roseanne Moran

## Improving Saskatchewan legal aid – in the name of justice



In the name of justice, federal and provincial governments must improve funding to legal aid, according to Saskatchewan legal aid workers, members of CUPE 1949.

"Only 'the poorest of the poor' qualify for legal aid services," says legal aid lawyer and CUPE 1949 president Deb Hopkins.

The program is restricted to criminal cases (i.e., involving the risk of jail) and family law matters. "That means there are huge legal needs that are not being met such as wrongful evictions, the denial of social assistance and disability benefits, matrimonial property, immigration matters – the list goes on," says Hopkins.

Even with this limited mandate, legal aid is not properly funded. "The courts are continuing to expand into specialty courts such as mental health and domestic violence without our input or

involvement," says Hopkins. "We see expanding budgets for prosecutors and police, but nothing for legal aid."

CUPE 1949, which represents about 120 Saskatchewan legal aid workers in 14 offices, launched a TV ad campaign in December, cost-shared with CUPE National, urging the federal and provincial governments to improve funding.

The Canadian Bar Association (CBA) is also pressuring the federal government to increase legal aid funding and to expand the program.

"Decades of neglect have left Canada's legal aid system in crisis," says the association, which represents 35,000 lawyers across the country. "Provinces are cutting legal aid services, narrowing the types of cases they cover, and raising the eligibility criteria, all of which make it harder to qualify for legal aid services," says the past president of the CBA, Susan McGrath.

(cont. on page 17)

Last year, the association launched a legal challenge that focuses on poor people's constitutional right to civil legal aid and access to justice. Although the British Columbia Supreme Court dismissed the association's case in September 2006, the CBA appealed that decision.

Provincial and territorial justice ministers have also identified legal aid funding as one of the key issues facing Canada's justice system. At their October 2006 meeting, they unanimously endorsed a resolution calling for increased long-term federal funding for criminal legal aid and new funding for civil legal aid.



Hopkins hopes the growing pressure on governments will produce positive results.

"We have heard a lot of talk about the importance of legal aid to our justice system, but what we need is a commitment of additional funds on the budget line. That's the bottom line for legal aid workers."

■ Beth Smillie

## Ontario community living workers count, too!



Ontario developmental services workers are joining with employers and families of the individuals they support to lobby the provincial government for increased funding.

CUPE locals in the sector put the joint campaign on the table last year as one of their coordinated bargaining proposals.

"CUPE members, our employers and clients' families have all been engaged over the years in our own individual campaigns," says Jim Beattie, president of the associations for community living (ACL) bargaining committee. "Funding has increased, but it's still not enough to attract and keep people in the sector. So we began to approach our employers across the province about joining forces on this one issue."

The result in southwestern Ontario is "We Count, Too!", a campaign launched in December with the Windsor, Essex and Sarnia associations. Forums were held in each community where audiences heard stories about the benefits of consistent, quality support to people with developmental disabilities.

Meanwhile, CUPE locals in the Ottawa and Cornwall areas met with their employers to plan similar actions. Their campaign includes a postcard addressed to Premier Dalton McGuinty and his cabinet, asking them to count them in when planning the next provincial budget.

At a recent labour relations meeting held by Community Living Ontario, union, parent and employer representatives presented their campaign and spoke about working together in a new way.

"We are going to continue to have our differences," Ontario social services coordinator Kathy Johnson told the group. "But we have to work together to strengthen this sector, to attract good, qualified people to these jobs and to provide the conditions that will keep them doing the work that they love."

■ Pat Daley





## Labour-endorsed candidates win big in Ontario

A decade after the Mike Harris Tories took Ontario down the path to privatization, cutbacks and restructuring, labour activists know that a bad political decision can render a collective agreement meaningless. The downloading of services has put a greater focus on municipal decisions that, with the stroke of a pen, can destroy good jobs and erode social justice in workplaces and communities.

Not surprising, then, that CUPE Ontario members played a major role in the outcome of the province's municipal and school board elections in November. According to CUPE tabulations, over 49 per cent of labour-endorsed candidates were elected to office. That translates to 217 out of 438 labour-endorsed women and men elected as mayors, councillors, and public and separate school board trustees.

A list of labour-endorsed candidates prepared by CUPE, the Canadian Labour Congress and labour councils was the touchstone that guided union efforts in local areas.

"Identifying labour-friendly candidates across the province was no mean feat," said CUPE Ontario's campaign organizer, Maureen Giuliani. "Canadian Labour Congress councils and CUPE district councils undertook the arduous process of interviewing candidates. What's really exciting is that, in many areas, candidates contacted district councils to ask that they be considered for possible endorsement. That's a testament to how important labour's endorsement is becoming in Ontario."

CUPE Ontario got off the mark quickly to get leadership engaged in the election process. Area leadership meetings were held in early fall. The division

then booked off a person for one week in each of the 19 areas to call CUPE locals, encourage them to distribute election materials, and motivate their members to volunteer on campaigns.

While CUPE members turned out in droves to volunteer for candidates, district councils played a key part in sustaining election momentum. They supplied names for book-offs, worked the phones and held all-candidates meetings.

Given that parents and CUPE have been locked in a battle with the Dalton McGuinty Liberals to reverse the Harris funding formula that has starved school

boards for money, the large number of labour-endorsed school trustees who were elected was music to CUPE Ontario president Sid Ryan's ears.

"This spells a clear message for the McGuinty government that it needs to fix the school funding formula well before the 2007 election, or else," said Ryan. "It's also a message that Liberal policies are under scrutiny by labour and that our endorsement of candidates means something to the people of Ontario when they vote."

■ Valerie Dugale

## Quebec: Beauce health care workers choose CUPE



CUPE made an impressive showing at the end of a long series of allegiance votes in Quebec's health and social services sector.

In December 2003, the Charest government enacted two laws that were to have a major effect on the sector. Bill 25 merged different health establishments under the same administrative banner, while Bill 30 imposed a division of bargaining units.

Bill 30 provides for only four bargaining units per administrative centre, established according to employment categories. Thumbing their noses at the most basic trade-union rights and the right to freedom of association, the Charest government prevented the creation of general accreditation units or the preservation of small units. This led to a widespread campaign of allegiance votes affecting all health sector unions.

After two years of raiding, narrow victories and heartbreaking defeats,

CUPE ended this saga with substantial gains in the Beauce region. In November 2006, CUPE emerged victorious in two votes at the *Centre de santé et de services sociaux de Beauce*, with a net gain of about 300 members, at the expense of the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN).

CUPE took 71 per cent of the votes cast in the paratechnical, trades and auxiliary category (about 537 people). In the office personnel and administrative category (about 214 workers), CUPE came out ahead with 66 per cent of the vote.

In the other two staff categories, the *Fédération des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec* (nurses) and the *Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux* (professionals) also beat out the CSN.

The Beauce victories further strengthen CUPE's position in the region's health sector. In March 2005, CUPE made major gains in Québec City,



signing up 3,000 members at the *Centre hospitalier universitaire de Québec*.

"While initial projections saw CUPE losing several thousand members, every-

body put their shoulders to the wheel and we ended up gaining about 600 members across the province," said Serge Morin, an organizing rep at the

Québec City office. "Not only did we maintain our position but we actually made overall gains. That's remarkable."

■ Alexandre Boulerice and Robert Bellerose



## New Brunswick school custodians regain right to strike

A recent court decision restored the right to strike for school board custodians in New Brunswick.

"For the past 25 years, the union and the employer have always agreed to a very limited skeleton staff in the event of a strike," explained Delalene Harris Foran, president of the New Brunswick Council of School Board Unions, CUPE 1253. "The designation rate was always very low for custodians."

During the last round of negotiations, however, the government tried to change the rules. It argued before the Labour and Employment Board that school custodians were essential workers and should not be allowed to strike in large numbers. The board agreed that if custodians were to strike, the schools would become unhealthy. It granted the employer's request.

"The board ruling basically meant that it would have been business as usual in case of a strike," said Foran. "There would never be any reason for the employer to bargain in good faith if these school workers didn't have the right to strike like everyone else."

CUPE 1253 represents 2,600 members such as school custodians, bus drivers and maintenance staff in the public school system. However, the ruling was also potentially damaging to other workers who perform similar jobs in the public sector, like community colleges.

CUPE successfully appealed the ruling. The New Brunswick Court of Appeal said that the Labour and Employment Board had been mistaken.

"Realistically speaking, if school custodians were to strike, it is more likely than not that schools would ultimately

close," states the judge's ruling. "Furthermore, common sense would lead one to conclude that such closures could occur without impacting on the health of those directly affected: students, staff and teachers. This is the conclusion reached by the Board in [a 1981] decision. In my view, its logic is as sound today as it was over 25 years ago."

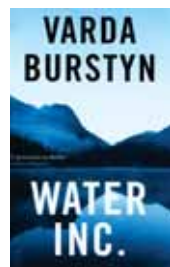
The decision came down the same day school board workers were signing their new collective agreement.

"This decision restores the balance of the employees' right to strike and the protection of public safety," added Foran.

■ Danielle Savoie

**Water Inc.**

By Varda Burstyn; McArthur & Company  
(www.vardaburstyn.com)



Canada's water is under threat from a greedy and secretive consortium, and it's up to a citizens' coalition to stop this environmental nightmare.

Latest bulletin from CUPE's water campaign? No; that's the synopsis

of Varda Burstyn's engaging eco-thriller *Water Inc.*

The novel, Burstyn's first, tells a story that's all too real. She's been soaking in environmental issues since her days on the Greenpeace board, and it shows in her encyclopedic knowledge of the many threats facing water in Canada and around the world. She converts that information into a fast-moving, compelling page-turner.

The main plot involves a shadowy consortium's scheme to pipe water from Northern Quebec to thirsty southern States. As the story unfolds, so does the intrigue as environmentalists and their allies tangle with corrupt government officials, corporate honchos and cold-blooded assassins. There's even a love story, although it often descends to cheesy depths: the lovers stick together "like Crazy Glue."

CUPE readers will recognize many of the players fighting to protect public water supplies, including the Montreal-based Eau NO coalition, which includes a member of the Canadian Public Employees Union. The portrayal of government-industry collusion around the pipeline project is chilling, and includes enough tales of wiretaps and other espionage to make readers ditch their cell phones for pay phones. In the end, the good guys win – a hopeful outcome for those fighting real-life privatization and bulk exports.

Burstyn's next book, featuring some of the same characters, will tackle toxic chemicals. Polluters, beware!

■ Karin Jordan

**CUPE's coming of age**

We have been saying it for years: "Now more than ever it is time for us to pull together." Today it is truer than ever.

In Winnipeg, P3s are an enormous threat. In Ontario, restructuring threatens public delivery of hospital services. In the West and the Atlantic, proposed trade agreements threaten our democracy and our jobs. These are all evidence of the push to privatization.

We are up against powerful corporate interests. We cannot fight this one community or one local at a time. We need a national focus on this pervasive and persistent threat to public services.

I am proud to say that CUPE is on very solid ground, largely because we have restructured our finances. This year, for example, we budgeted \$2.2 million for retiree benefits in our General Fund, rather than relying on surpluses to meet these obligations. We have also added 14.5 new staff positions.

In addition, we have moved most of the money we spend on elections to the General Fund from the National Defence Fund. Fighting federal, provincial, and municipal and school board elections is not



a one-time strategy. And, funding this work from our operating budget as an annual expense frees up money in our National Defence Fund.

Recently we have made other important changes, such as buying rather than leasing properties; accounting for our unfunded liabilities; securing the CUPE pension plan; saving money with new purchasing policies; and, improving our technological services. Taken together, these changes represent secure financing for our obligations and services to our locals. CUPE truly is "coming of age." But more needs to be done.

There is no question that we did the right thing by securing our Strike Fund: No CUPE member will ever be denied strike benefits. But this year, we have had to stretch just over \$6 million in our National Defence Fund for various initiatives across the country. We now need to look closely at this fund and the ways in which we deliver local, provincial and national campaigns and how we better tap into the strength of 560,000 members working together.

We are a strong national union. Today we face a national challenge. I look forward to discussing this issue with you at the division conventions. With a solid proposal to finance our political action more effectively, we will truly come of age as we enter the next phase of our proud activist history.

In solidarity,

*Claude Gagnéux*  
Claude Gagnéux  
National Secretary-Treasurer



Watch for more details  
in future general mailings or go online at  
<http://cupe.ca/communicationsawards/>

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