



Paramedics rally for wage parity, faster response times

B.C.'s 3,500 ambulance paramedics have been on strike for more than two months. The paramedics continue to provide ambulance services under *Essential Services Act*. Look inside for more from the regions in *Work bytes*.

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CUPE National's quarterly publication

cupe.ca

Summer 2009

Counterpoint

Recession highlights wage gap

Tough economy also offers opportunity to galvanize unions, says political economist



Political economist Armine Yalmazyan addresses hundreds of delegates at the CUPE National Women's Bargaining Conference. "This is no ordinary recession—it is a global rupture, like we have never seen before," she declared.

BY CATHERINE LOULI

One in five Canadian women lives in a low-income situation, according to Statistics Canada. That's the shocking impact of the wage gap – and that's one reason why raising women's wages is so important at CUPE. The facts clearly show that women are having a hard time making ends meet.

At the CUPE National Women's Bargaining Conference, political economist Armine Yalmazyan spoke to delegates about some of the realities facing the trade union movement in 2009. "Firstly, said Yalmazyan this is no ordinary recession – it is a global rupture of the supply chain like we have never seen before. It is the great repudiation of everything we were told for the past 30 years. We

were told that markets are the solution and that governments are the problem. No one can look you straight in the eye and say that any longer."

Approximately 72 per cent of Canadians working in the public sector are unionized and the vast majority of them are women. "Historically, women despite the wage gap have fought for change, fought for justice. It may be that bargaining shifts from money to time as the Quebec unions have begun to do," Yalmazyan said. This moment of crisis, said Yalmazyan is the crack in the wall, this is the opportunity to galvanize us, it is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

To hear the complete podcast
cupe.ca/bargaining/armine

CUPE launches new national publication

Welcome to **Counterpoint** – CUPE's national newsletter. **Counterpoint** is a quarterly newsletter that will replace Organize magazine. This newsletter has been designed to bring you news on issues affecting CUPE members from a national perspective.

In our first issue you will find a column by CUPE Economist Toby Sanger about the current economic crisis, a piece on women's wages that links to podcasts on

our website, an article on pensions, an interview with CUPE National President Paul Moist, and much more. There is a lot to share, and all of our articles can be found at cupe.ca/counterpoint

Let us know what you think, send us an e-mail at CUPE.ca/counterpoint/letters or write to us at:

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CUPE members help resolve hijacking, p. 4

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CUPE stands strong in face of economic crisis



By **ALLISON GIFFORD**

Allison Gifford spoke with CUPE National President Paul Moist about what CUPE is doing in response to the current economic crisis.

Twenty-five years of deregulation, privatization and free trade has put us on the path to recession. Employers and some governments view union wages as part of the problem. As a national union, where do we go from here?

Canadian workers' wages have barely moved in real terms since the last recession in the early nineties. Still, we can expect some governments and employers to use the recession as an opportunity to attack free collective bargaining rights and workers' wages and benefits. We have survived recessions before, and we will do it again. In times like this we must do what we do best: organize, think strategically and fight smart.

What does this mean for CUPE activists entering bargaining?

I think we can expect tough negotiations with some employ-

It is important for us to stand strong with other Canadian workers who are being hit hard by the recession, and to defend basic trade union rights for workers around the world.

ers demanding concessions. This isn't new, but it may be wider in scope and there is no question our resolve will be tested. It is critically important that bargaining committees work closely with their assigned CUPE staff and that we are disciplined and ready for whatever we might face. Finally, our members need our assurance that whether they are a group of six, 60 or 600 members, they are part of Canada's largest and strongest union and they will have the support of the entire national union whenever the need arises.

In your travels to the division conventions how have members been reacting to the recession?

The recession – and what it has done to communities – was front and centre. Many CUPE members have family and friends who have lost their jobs in the private sector, and some who have been denied access to employment insurance. In each and every region of the country we found CUPE members aware of the economic downturn and very resolved to defend their right to free collective bargaining.

What direction would you like to see CUPE going in response to the current times? What kind of achievements would you like to see?

I am pleased at the level and tone of the debate I have seen at this spring's provincial conventions, and I'm glad our national convention is this fall in Montreal. It is important for us meet and to reaffirm our commitment to organizing, to bargaining good agreements and to representing our members. Beyond CUPE, it is equally important for us to stand strong with other Canadian workers who are being hit hard by the recession, and to defend basic trade union rights for workers around the world. CUPE members will weather this recession in the same way we have others. We will pool our resources and work together to advance an agenda to build strong communities with strong public services available to all Canadians.

To read the complete interview with Paul Moist visit: cupe.ca/counterpoint/paulmoist



Work bytes



Windsor city workers are on strike to preserve their hard won pensions and benefits. The City of Windsor wants to roll back retirement benefits and create a two-tier system where some workers will continue to receive post-retirement benefits and others will not.

Work bytes are regional highlights of campaigns, bargaining, and member actions across the country. With close to 600,000 members there are a lot of stories to share, and this is just a glimpse of what is going on. For the complete story on any of these regional bytes go to: cupe.ca/counterpoint

Victory for N.B. casual workers

A New Brunswick court has struck down part of the province's labour law that strips casual workers of basic rights.

Justice Paulette Garnett of the New Brunswick Court of Queen's Bench ruled that the New Brunswick *Public Service Labour Relations Act* is contrary to section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights which protects the right to freedom of association.

Justice Garnett said for many years the province, as an employer, has subjected casual workers to practices which can "only be described as unfair."

The judge is giving the province one year to remedy this situation.

In other news, New Brunswick workers have been hit hard by the recent provincial government budget, which freezes wages, cuts programs and services and eliminates decent paying jobs from our communities.

In early March, the New Brunswick Council of Nursing Home Unions (NBCNHU) reached a tentative agreement with the New Brunswick Nursing Home Association (NBNHA). The

tentative agreement was ratified by the workers in 46 nursing homes in N.B.

The next day the N.B. government extended its two-year wage freeze for public sector workers to cover nursing home workers and the employer association reneged on their agreement.

Four thousand education support staff represented by CUPE 2745 will also be deeply affected by the cuts. Other CUPE locals including CUPE 1190, General Labour and Trade; CUPE 1840, Provincial Court Stenographers and CUPE 1418, Rehab and Therapy, are either in bargaining or getting ready to bargain. All are committed to negotiate the best collective agreement for their members and to resist the wage freeze policy.

cupe.ca/new-brunswick

On the P.E.I. front

The main campaign on the Island is to save 11 small schools. CUPE PEI was instrumental in bringing together representatives from the communities who will be affected by the school closures and formed the Rural Alliance Coalition for Education (RACE). A campaign has been launched to put pressure on the school board and the provincial government to save the small schools, which are the heart and soul of many communities.

cupe.ca/pei

Nova Scotia goes NDP

The NDP has rewritten the political landscape in Atlantic

Canada by forming a majority government in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotians went to the polls on June 9 after Rodney MacDonald's Conservative government fell following three years of minority rule.

CUPE mounted an internal membership campaign designed to ensure our 16,000 members and their families make an informed decision.

cupe.ca/nova-scotia

CUPE NL lends support to Abitibi workers

Delegates to the CUPE NL division convention joined with employees of the now closed AbitibiBowater paper mill in Grand Falls-Windsor to protest the company's attempts to renege on pension and severance obligations.

cupe.ca/newfoundland

Vidéotron: signed, sealed, delivered!

Good news for the CUPE communications sector: 95 per cent of Vidéotron's 2,800 unionized employees voted in favour of an agreement in principle reached by their negotiating committee. The five-year labour agreement will end in 2013 and provides for salary increases of three per cent per year.

An exceptional feat in light of the current economic climate, the agreement calls for hundreds of new unionized positions, primarily at a new customer call centre in Joliette. Contract gains include filling a number of positions, establishment of minimum

employment levels, and work being contracted back in.

In return, the company will benefit from increased flexibility as it modernizes its network and deploys its 3G wireless network. The outcome of negotiations is very encouraging, according to union representatives. "It was a long and sometimes arduous process, but we are pleased with the outcome," said Denis Plante, CUPE national representative. "In the long run, there's something for everyone: our members' jobs are safe, and we are improving their working conditions."

Union employees also negotiated a telecommuting plan and the opportunity for workers aged 55 and up to work reduced hours or days. This approach to work-life balance will also be offered to union members who wish to return to school to further their education.

cupe.ca/quebec

Ontario

Things are hopping in Ontario with CUPE 82, representing 387 "outside" workers, and CUPE 543, representing 1,400 "inside" workers in the City of Windsor, who went on strike in April. The City wanted to take away retirement benefits for new hires and also proposed a wage freeze.

A clear pattern has been established for coordinated bargaining in the Ontario developmental services (ACL) sector. Fifty bargaining units are at the table this year. At the time of writing, *Continued on page 4*



CUPE National President Paul Moist joins CUPE members and other workers at rally for jobs in Hamilton. "We need to join together to demand that government protect and deliver public services for all, protect and expand pensions, human rights, labour rights and real social programs," Moist said.

five have achieved settlements, all reaching the benchmarks for the priority coordinated proposals set by the sector.

CUPE 3903 reached a mediated settlement with York University following one of the longest strikes in Canadian university history that saw the contract faculty and graduate, teaching and research assistants legislated back to work by the Ontario government. One of the major outcomes was the creation of long-service teaching appointments, which provide a measure of job stability for contract professors who have been teaching for more than 10 years.

cupe.ca/ontario

CUPE Manitoba fights privatization

Since the new year, CUPE Manitoba has been strengthening its capacity to serve its members and respond to economic pressures to downsize. There have been a number of activities to train members, strategically plan and organize political action. A large anti-privatization campaign is underway in Winnipeg and health care workers in personal care homes are collaborating to address workplace needs.

cupe.ca/manitoba

Waiting for the "fines" to fall

CUPE health care leaders are wondering when the Saskatchewan Party government is going to "fine" the health regions for violating the *Public Service Essential Services Act*.

The employers' revised essential services plans deemed more than 75 per cent of CUPE's 12,600 health care workers as "essential," which is inaccurate, incomplete and does not comply with the legislation.

In a March letter to the health regions, CUPE identified four specific areas where the employers' plans violate the Act.

Under the government's *Public Service Essential Services Act*, anyone who fails to comply with the Act is guilty of an offence and could face fines up to \$50,000.

cupe.ca/saskatchewan

Government attacks paramedics, takes away choice from health care workers

Alberta Employment Minister Goudreau announced new regulations which force paramedics and health care workers to merge into existing bargaining units with other unions.

CUPE's 1,600 health care workers will be forced into a

massive provincewide bargaining unit of hospital support staff, and represented by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE). As recently as 2005, many of our members voted by a 2 to 1 margin to remain with CUPE over AUPE.

Speaking at a protest rally in opposition to the move, CUPE National President Paul Moist attacked the provincial government's disregard for the democratic choices of CUPE members.

cupe.ca/alberta

B.C. roundup

We've been busy in B.C. CUPE 105 won a major victory in the Queen Charlottes when the community voted to keep garbage services public. The fight for public services got another boost from The Parks P3s Report. The report explodes the myth that P3s are more economical. Five members of CUPE 2254 at the Grand Forks public library faced their first lockout and forced the employer back to the table and B.C.'s 3,500 ambulance paramedics are striking for wage parity and staffing levels. CUPE held its first B.C. bargaining conference in the run-up to next year's major round of negotiations.

Six hundred delegates at the CUPE BC convention passed 21 resolutions, including calls for moratoriums on run-of-river private power and oilsands development. CUPE BC has taken an active role for members in upcoming provincial elections, publishing 12 fact sheets in four languages.

cupe.ca/british-columbia

HEU mobilizes for change

Members spent thousands of hours on the phone and in local campaigns as part of our member mobilization for the recent B.C. election.

In March, HEU helped organize the first annual walk for Community Social Services in Victoria.

Tentative agreements with Sodexo, Aramark and Compass bring significant wage and benefit improvements to 3,500 hospital support services workers. Planning is underway for bargaining conferences to prepare for upcoming public sector negotiations covering nearly 40,000 members.

Currently, HEU/CUPE is fighting off a raid by the B.C. Nurses' Union on the union's LPNs.

www.heu.org



Alberta health care workers walk the line for democratic union choice.



HEU community social services walk in Victoria, B.C.

Public services demand on the rise during recession

For the first time in a generation, our recovery is entirely dependent on the public sector coming to the rescue of a failed private sector economy.

TOBY SANGER
CUPE ECONOMIST

Canadians and others around the world are now struggling with the impacts of a difficult economic downturn. Already, Canadian employers have cut 321,000 jobs since October, the unemployment rate has risen to eight per cent and many are suffering from wage cuts and losses in the value of their pensions and investments.

Other recent recessions in Canada, such as the 1981/2 and 1990/1 recessions, were caused by the government intentionally raising interest rates to slow down the economy and wage growth and to reduce inflation.

This recession is different and was caused by massive failures of our economic system itself: by an out-of-control financial sector, deregulation, slow wage growth, rising household indebtedness, growing inequality, privatization and poor economic planning. These are the very same policies that governments have forced on us during the past three decades—and the same policies that we have been critical of for just as long.

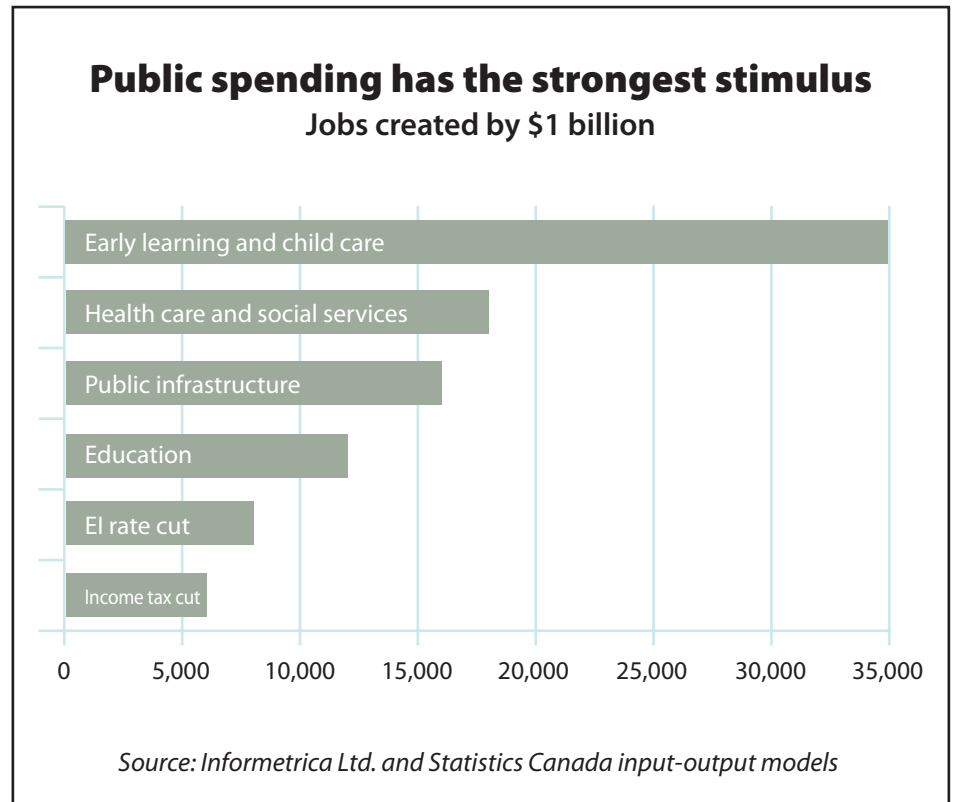
For the first time in a generation, our recovery is entirely

dependent on the public sector coming to the rescue of a failed private sector economy.

Economists agree that the focus of this support should be on public and social spending, infrastructure investment, saving jobs and maintaining social and community supports that protect the most vulnerable. Investment in these areas provides far more economic bang for the buck than tax cuts, and directs support to those most in need. Even private bank economists have said that Canada needs “trickle-up economics”: meaning that corporate tax cuts won’t help and that wage cuts could lead to a downward economic spiral.

The recession and rising unemployment are increasing the demand for a wide range of public services that CUPE members help to deliver: social services, health care, community services, child care, employment and training support, and many other areas. Families forced to cut back on their spending will rely more on community and recreational programs, public transit and libraries.

As workloads are increasing, CUPE members are getting squeezed in other ways. Employers



at all levels have lower revenues. Job and wage cuts in the public sector not only hurt those who rely directly on those jobs and services, but they can also lead to a downward spiral of lower spending in the community, greater dependence on public services by the unemployed, and lower tax revenues for governments.

Federal, provincial and local governments must maintain and

expand public services to create and save jobs, help those in need, and spur our economy into recovery—otherwise this recession will last much longer than it needs to.

We need much stronger public services not just for the short-term, but also for the long-term health of our economy.

For more information
cupe.ca/economics

Read Counterpoint. Win a Flip Video Camera!

Welcome to CUPE’s new newsletter. We’re celebrating the launch of this newsletter with a contest. Visit our website, type in the following code and you’ll be entered for a draw to win a Flip video camera – the hippest, most user-friendly video camera ever.

Visit: cupe.ca/counterpoint
Contest code: **olcplaunch**

Flight attendants get passengers to safety despite hijacking

In April, five CUPE flight attendants with CanJet airlines helped resolve a hijacking at Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Nathalie Stringer, a flight attendant and CUPE regional vice-president, stressed that the main role of flight attendants is to ensure passenger safety: “Flight attendants receive intensive initial training backed up by annual refresher courses. Simulations prepare them for hostage takings, terrorism, ill passengers, fires, smoke, turbulence, and crash landings.”

The passengers of the CanJet flight heaped praise on the flight crew for calming down the gunman and convincing him to let the 159 passengers off the airplane.



cupe.ca/counterpoint/airlines

Pension plans: taking stock

An interview with **Claude Généreux**,
National Secretary-Treasurer of CUPE



By **SÉBASTIEN GOULET**

What effect has the current economic crisis had on our pension plans?

The very core, the foundation of our plans has been affected. The stock market has fallen by more than 40 per cent. That's comparable to the Great Depression of 1929-1933. Our pension plans have lost much of the value they had gained over the last 10 or 15 years.

At this point, what can be done to put the plans back on track and secure their future?

We need to understand the rules that determine the health of a pension plan. Employers are telling us: "You need to review the rules to make them more flexible, to lower them." However this leads directly to underfunding.

So what can we do for these plans that are in jeopardy? We have to change the laws and regulations. For example, when retirees are not preferred creditors, when they are the last in line to be paid, there is a real problem. I believe that it is unjust and immoral to put a recent debt, whatever the amount, large or small, ahead of a debt to your retirees who have contributed themselves to the plan for many years.

So it's a matter of human priorities?

Yes, but even on an economic level, it makes no sense for pensioners to come second.

We've been talking about pension plans negotiated with employers, but their cornerstone is the public pension plans in which everyone participates. When these plans were established, the aim was

for contributions to provide a pension equivalent to approximately 25 per cent of salary at the time of retirement.

And when we created pension plans with employers, it was thought that they would provide about another 25 per cent, for an overall total of 50 per cent. But today, we count on more than that to maintain our standard of living. So we need more contributions and more income. And in the current state of the economy, there is less money than before. So we find ourselves in the midst of a "perfect storm."

So what should be our first policy priority?

I think the top policy priority, whether a worker is unionized or not, has a pension plan or not of whatever kind, is to review the universal pension plan and improve that base. The base needs to be reviewed to make sure that we raise the current level of benefits from 25 per cent to, I would say, 50 per cent.

People across Canada—workers, unions and even the financial sector—are in agreement. And for a very simple reason: if we don't act in order to avoid a problem, we will be faced with an even more complex problem in the future. If we leave our elderly without the financial support for a decent income and a decent life, there will be an enormous financial cost to pay—not to mention the human cost!

To hear the complete interview with Claude Généreux please visit: cupe.ca/claudegenereux/podcast

Highlights from the June National Executive Board meeting

Buy Canadian

Recent media about the Buy American policies of the Obama government does not tell the complete story. The Harper government and its corporate allies have been pressuring provinces and municipalities to give up their right to purchase goods and services from Canadian sources. This is designed to enable more free trade agreements which limit our democratic rights to support our communities rather than corporations.

The National Executive Board (NEB) adopted a resolution that commits CUPE to opposing proposals that limit the democratic right of provinces and municipalities to implement local purchasing policies and to work with allies to support "Buy Canadian" across the country.

2009 National Convention

The Board dealt with numerous issues in preparation for the National Convention, including approving Convention Assistance Fund applications from 45

locals. All locals are encouraged to look for the Official Convention Call early in July.

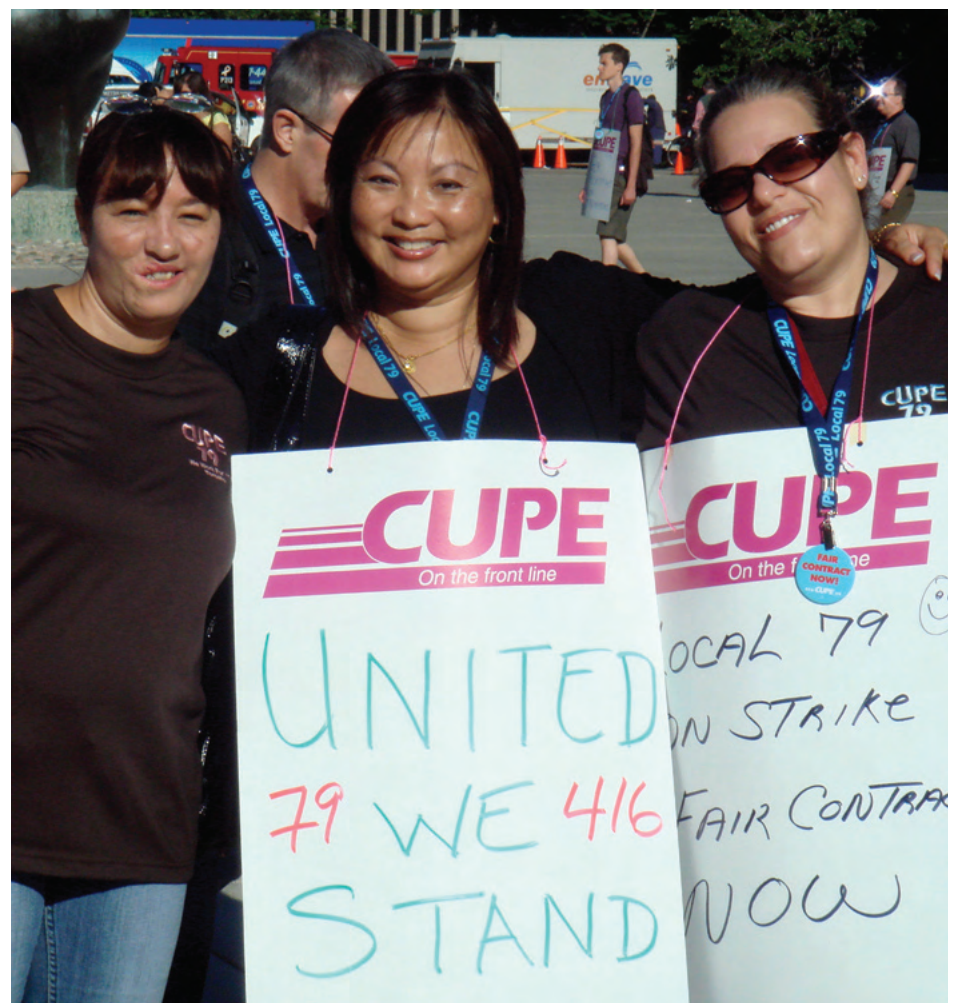
Financial matters

The Board approved a donation of \$10,000 to the Abruzzo Earthquake Fund, as another show of solidarity with populations who have been hit with devastating natural disasters, this one on April 6th in Italy.

Economic climate for bargaining

A lot of discussion was generated around the tough bargaining that many locals are facing in the current economic climate. The quarterly "Economic Climate for Bargaining," produced by CUPE's Senior Economist, address a key issue for CUPE members; that being, the benefits of public services. A major new study shows that the dollar value benefits of public services are very large and exceed the benefits of tax cuts for the vast majority of families.

Toronto city workers strike



City of Toronto inside and outside workers walked off the job just after midnight June 22 in a fight against management demands for concessions. "After six months at the bargaining table, the city has not heard the message from our members that they must be treated as fairly as all other unionized workers who provide public services to the people of Toronto," said Mark Ferguson, president of CUPE 416.