



Global Justice

Spring 2008

CUPE solidarity boost



Strike leaders wear CUPE caps at Lesedi rally.

STRIKING municipal workers got a boost from CUPE when about 3,000 supporters gathered outside municipal offices in Lesedi, a community in Heidelberg, South Africa, near Johannesburg on April 25. Visiting CUPE international officer Ron Verzuh brought greetings of solidarity to the rally. Later, CUPE national leaders wrote to offer solidarity.

The strikers, members of the South African Municipal Workers' Union, had been on strike for six weeks. About 300 of them were threatened with firing while the local managers awarded themselves substantial increases and bonuses.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the equivalent of the Canadian Labour Congress, organized the rally and regional leaders urged that the crowd to stay orderly and respectful.

Violence erupted in the 11th week of the strike, killing one SAMWU member. At press time, a settlement had just been reached giving workers between 2.5 and 5 per cent wage increases.



Global Justice is published by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and is available online at www.cupe.ca/globaljustice.

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CUPE

Global solidarity message spreads at conventions

GLOBAL JUSTICE activity was evident and sometimes prominent at division conventions this spring. Several saw the inauguration or renewal of provincial global justice committees.

Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador have new standing committees, for example, and they have mandates to engage in Global Justice Fund projects. Other committees are considering projects and developing partnerships abroad.

Many conventions adopted resolutions calling for an end to both the war in Afghanistan and free trade negotiations with Colombia. Delegates also want CUPE to counter global warming and halt pension funds going to Latin American mining. Other resolutions scorned the Canadian government's actions in Haiti, called for help in Burma and shunned the abysmal human rights record in the Philippines.



CUPE 4400 gave about 20 children a taste of international solidarity in Guatemala during the "kid's camp" at the CUPE Ontario convention in Toronto on May 21-24.

Oxfam-CUPE campaign in high gear

DIVISION conventions had at least one thing in common this year: they hosted a new booth jointly staffed by CUPE Global Justice and Oxfam Canada to promote public services and the Global Justice Fund. The booth was also set up at the Canadian Labour Congress convention in Toronto May 26-30.



About 200 delegates toasted public water at CUPE NS convention using CUPE-Oxfam No. 1 water bottles.

GLOBAL JUSTICE FUND UPDATE

THE GLOBAL Justice Fund contribution form was circulated widely at division conventions. National officers and others spoke about the value of the fund and our work with unions in other countries. The CUPE fund recently donated to three worthy charities: Co-Development Canada, the Workers' Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, Ont., and Oxfam Canada. Discussions are underway to explore ways CUPE can interact with these organizations to further promote international labour solidarity.

May Day 2008 sees arrests, repression



About 5,000 South African trade unionists celebrated May Day at Vereeniging near Johannesburg.

AS MAY DAY was celebrated around the world, workers and union leaders fought for democracy, human rights and an end to violence.

The Iranian government banned all independent May Day events. They even prevented workers from holding a picnic in a park in the capital of Tehran. In other cities, demonstrations and gatherings took place despite official bans and the presence of security forces.

Despite the bans, May Day resolutions emphasized workers' solidarity around the world. They tackled job insecurity, privatization, dismissals, unpaid wages, and lack of independent workers' organizations.

In the ongoing post-election repression in Zimbabwe, the president and general secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) Lovemore Motombo and Wellington Chibembe were arrested on May 8 for speaking out on May Day.

CUPE leaders send action letters

PUBLIC SECTOR union leaders representing a million workers signed a joint letter in May pressing Prime Minister Harper to stop free trade negotiations with Colombia. The letter was sent after the leaders learned that free trade negotiators were considering a proposal to allow Colombia to pay a fine when a

trade unionist was murdered.

Our leaders also signed an open letter calling for an end to human rights abuses in the Philippines. Another letter went to police authorities in Harare, Zimbabwe, when we were informed that leaders of the teachers' union were being detained and tortured for their role in

the March elections.

Another letter urged the Colombian government to curb the violence against university students and workers at the University of Valle. A letter of condolence went to the family of Crispin Beltran, the well-known trade union leader who died in early May.

Former CUPE activists volunteer in Ethiopia

LONG-TIME CUPE global justice activists Shirley Lord and George Harris are just completing a six-month posting with Volunteer Services Overseas (now merged with CUSO) in Ethiopia.

Lord was a municipal hospital unit president with CUPE 500 (Winnipeg city workers). Harris was a shop steward and treasurer of CUPE 2348 at Nine Circles Community Health Centre in Winnipeg.

“The opportunities offered me as an activist in CUPE both in education and experience provided me with the skills that I am now using in my VSO placement in Ethiopia,” Lord said.



Lord chats with local staff member in Addis Ababa.

CUPE local helps Colombian families

FOR CUPE 2204's Shellie Bird, it seems “a lifetime ago” that her local joined with other members of the Ottawa-Colombia Sisters in Solidarity (OCSS) group to assist two Colombian families to settle in Canada last year as part of the Canadian Labour Congress’ sponsorship program.

The project began four years ago when the CUPE local, which represents Ottawa child care workers, joined with the Public Service Alliance of Canada’s regional women’s committee and Canadian Union of Postal Workers Local 567 (Ottawa) to sponsor the families.

Today, both the Vargas and Romero families are on their own. But between 2003 and 2007, CUPE 2204 and the others raised more than \$30,000 to support the families to make a new home in Canada.

New CUPE rep on PSI women’s committee

THE NATIONAL officers have named National Executive Board member Candace Rennick (Ontario) to replace the late Donald MacDonal as CUPE’s representative on the Public Services International women’s committee. In late March, Rennick attended the PSI InterAmericas Region and women’s committee meetings in Panama City.



Candace Rennick with African delegate at PSI youth workshop in Vienna, Austria.