

# Counterpoint

## **SPECIAL ISSUE: FEDERAL ELECTION 2019**

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*“I believe it’s time for workers to push the country forward.”*

*Chris Stephen, vice-president of CUPE 255 and NDP candidate for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound*

PROFILE CHRIS STEPHEN

# Bringing workers’ power to Ottawa

*Chris Stephen was pushed to get more involved in his local after attending his first National Convention. Now he wants to give working people a voice in Parliament as the federal NDP candidate in his home riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.*

“I’m not really a politician, but my general instinct is to try and help people where I can – so this seemed like the next logical step for me” Chris says, speaking about his campaign to become the NDP Member of Parliament for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. “I ran in the municipal election last year, so I figured I’d keep the momentum going and try something bigger.”

For the last 6 years, Chris has been the Arran-Elderslie Unit Vice-President of CUPE 255, which represents municipal workers in his riding. He has always seen the power that workers have when they join together in

a union as an opportunity to improve the lives of everyone, and now he wants to take things to the next level.

This October, Chris wants to bring his experience fighting for working people into the federal election, as part of Jagmeet Singh’s NDP team.

“I’ve seen time and time again that the NDP really cares about ordinary people. I believe it’s time for workers to push the country forward,” Chris says.

“I’m worried about our future if we don’t address the climate crisis in appropriate ways. We need to put a party in power that will make the necessary changes for the next generation,” Chris says.

“I’m also a huge believer in Jagmeet’s pharmacare platform. When you want people to be successful, you have to take something off their plate. It’s sad to see people having to choose between their medication or something else,” he says.

Chris found it easy to connect the NDP vision to his experience in his local.

“As a leader in CUPE these days, I’m a go-to guy for our members. When you find out that you’ve helped someone directly, it’s a great feeling,” he says.

Chris found the inspiration to take a leadership role in his local – and now a leadership role in Ottawa – from his first convention, where he saw the wide range of causes CUPE members have thrown themselves behind.

“Our local is a small composite local, and you don’t always see the bigger picture – it’s only when I went to CUPE conventions that I saw the power and spread that CUPE has,” he says.

Chris has made it clear that he sees this power as one of the major forces for change in Canada.

“When you get on Facebook or Instagram and see CUPE members supporting a huge range of causes – say at Pride parades, or on the front lines of education

struggles in Ontario right now – you’re moved to act. Where there’s someone needing support, CUPE is there to help,” he says.

Chris is now encouraging younger members in his local to attend conventions, hoping that they will find the drive he has found. This year, however, Chris wants to bring that passion to Parliament Hill. “CUPE is great at standing out in front of Parliament and demanding better – I decided that I wanted to be the one in there making the decisions so CUPE doesn’t have to be out front protesting.”

■ Nathan Prier



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# Why CUPE supports the NDP

CUPE members have an important decision to make on October 21, when Canadians head to the polls to elect their next government. The central question is: who can CUPE members trust to protect our jobs, our pensions, and our shared future as a country?

Justin Trudeau is good at making promises – but he’s even better at breaking them. He has attacked workers’ rights – using back-to-work legislation against postal workers in December 2018 – and abandoned key commitments on

electoral reform, climate change, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Trudeau’s Liberals can’t be trusted.

Meanwhile, Conservative leader Andrew Scheer has called himself “Stephen Harper with a smile,” while doing his best to align his party with Donald Trump on every key issue, from workers’ rights to immigration to climate change. Scheer’s Conservatives will turn the clock back to the Stone Age.

Jagmeet Singh’s NDP is the only party we can count on, with a real plan that puts people and the environment first.

While the Liberals and Conservatives focus on helping the wealthy and the well-connected, the NDP’s plan is focused on making life better and more affordable for ordinary Canadians.

The NDP’s plan will:

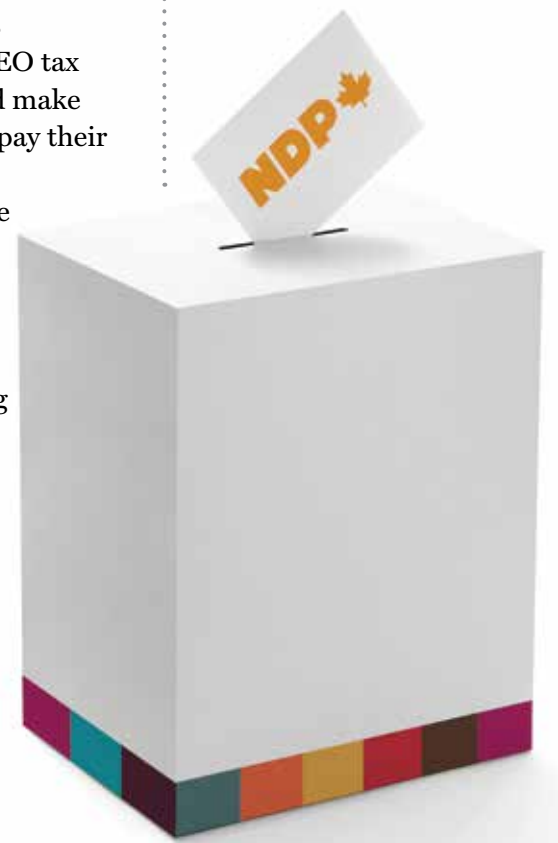
- Create a national universal pharmacare program and implement “head-to-toe” health care coverage that includes dental care, addiction treatment, and mental health care
- Advance workers’ rights, expand training opportunities, and make work fairer and more secure for everyone

- Advance the rights of Indigenous communities and the process of meaningful reconciliation
- Address the housing crisis by building 500,000 affordable housing units
- End unfair CEO tax loopholes and make corporations pay their fair share
- Tackle climate change with a real plan to reduce emissions while creating good jobs for the economy of the future

Every vote matters. As Canada’s largest union, with 680,000 members nationwide,

CUPE members truly do have the power to make a big difference this election. Let’s use our collective strength to make a difference on October 21.

**Vote NDP.**



## 3 things you can do before election day

The federal election is around the corner—and so is the kind of change this country needs. Here are a few ways you can be ready to cast your ballot on October 21:

### 1. Get to know where CUPE stands on the issues.

We’ve produced a series of fact sheets about the issues that matter to working people. Read more about where the current government has fallen short and how we can improve the lives of workers across the country. Visit [cupe.ca/cupe-votes](http://cupe.ca/cupe-votes).

### 2. Talk to your family, friends and colleagues.

Make sure the people in your life are planning to vote. Encourage them to cast a ballot in support of strong public services, good jobs and the rights of working people. CUPE has 680,000 members—if each of us speaks to the folks we know, we will have a major impact on this election.

### 3. Go vote!

Plan ahead: confirm you’re registered to vote and know where your polling station is. Don’t forget to bring your voter information card and proof of your identity and address. Not registered yet? Visit [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca) to find out how to register online or in person at your polling station. For extra credit, consider volunteering on a local campaign and signing up to help get out the vote on election day. **Every single vote counts.**

## NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

### Election 2019: Cast a vote for working people

In a few short weeks, Canadians will head to the polls to elect their next Members of Parliament, and with them, Canada’s next government.

It’s a time of excitement and optimism. But for many, it’s an extremely nervous time too.

People are afraid of Andrew Scheer. And for good reason. Since becoming the leader of the Conservative Party, he has shown us he will side with corporate interests over working people every single time. We already have Doug Ford, Jason Kenney, and a whole raft of new right-wing provincial governments. Canada can’t afford to let another Conservative government into office.

At the same time, we can’t let Justin Trudeau off the hook for his broken promises. Canadians elected the Liberals in 2015 based on their promises to reform Canada’s electoral system, change course from Stephen Harper’s weak climate targets, and make bold steps

towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Trudeau has broken every one of those important promises – and more. He doesn’t deserve another term.

Between the blue team and the red team, things can feel pretty bleak. But I’m excited about what the NDP is offering in this election. I know when the NDP makes a promise – unlike Trudeau and the Liberals – they keep it.

Just look at what is happening in my home province of British Columbia, where the NDP government is making huge progress on strengthening workers’ rights, building affordable housing, creating affordable child care, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The truth is, at the federal level, Jagmeet Singh and the NDP have the best plan to help working people across Canada.

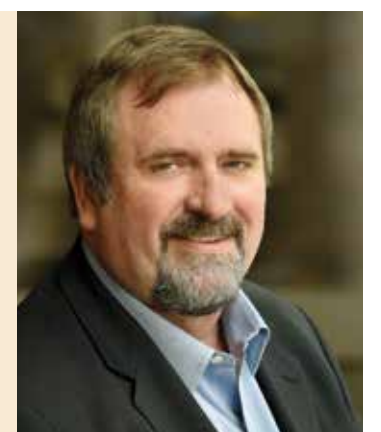
The NDP platform includes “head-to-toe” health care that will extend coverage to prescription drugs, dental care, addictions treatments and mental health care.

It has a real plan to tackle climate change and offers a just transition for workers into the economy of the future.

It has a real plan to build 500,000 affordable housing units, close corporate tax loopholes, and finally pursue meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples at the federal level.

I know we can get to where we want to be – but only if we show up and vote for it. On election day, let’s mark a ballot for change and progress. I strongly encourage all CUPE members to get out and vote for their local NDP candidate on October 21.

MARK HANCOCK ONLINE [twitter.com/MarkHancockCUPE](https://twitter.com/MarkHancockCUPE)



# We can have the services we need!

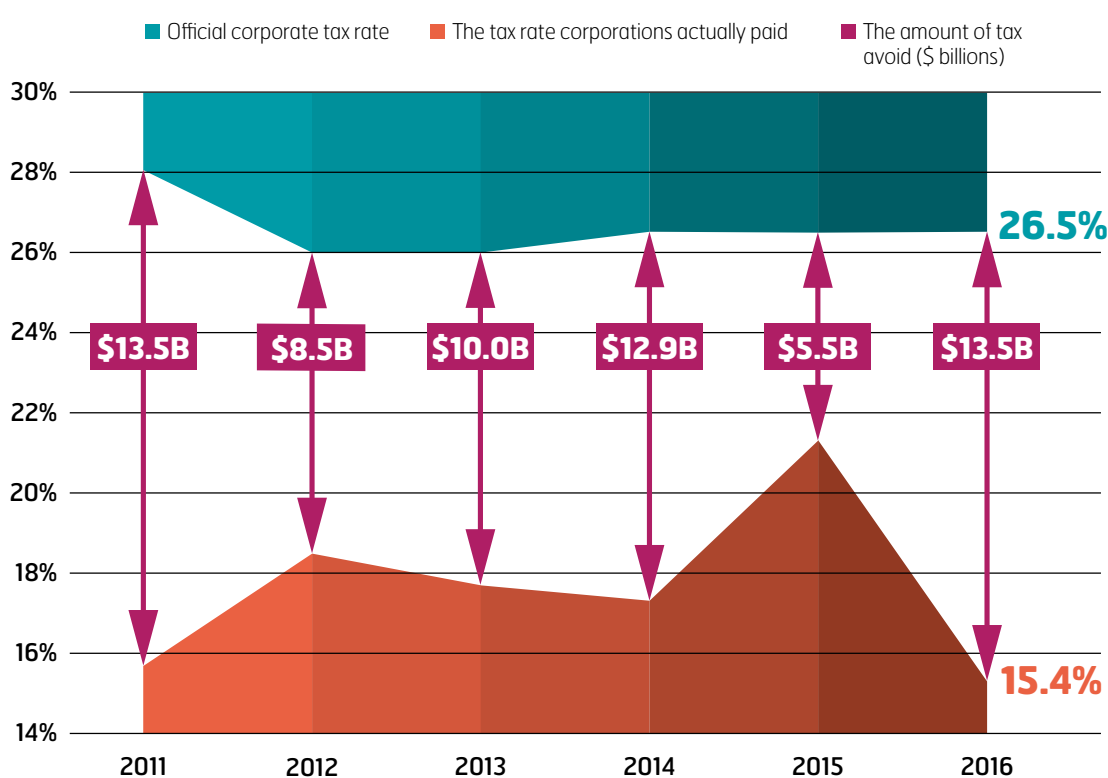
Every election we hear the same old story - it would be great if we could have high quality, universal public services, but how are we going to pay for it? So we end up getting some variation on corporate tax cuts and targeted personal tax cuts or credits “for the middle class.” A few people get a little bit of extra money back at tax time, but the rest of us get short-changed through cuts to services.

good-paying jobs for workers, create national universal pharmacare, build more affordable housing, and take the bold action needed to fight climate change.

Making services universal has several advantages – it means that everyone has a stake in the availability and quality of service, so it’s far harder for governments to make cuts. Also, targeted programs almost always create situations where someone has too much money to qualify for the public option, but not enough money to pay for the private option. This is the case for so many core services right now – access to subsidized medicines, dental care, mental health care, child care, public transit, and housing are only a few examples. Universality reduces the inequality of outcomes, and helps to build strong communities and social solidarity, as Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett showed in *The Spirit Level*.

You might not need health care, pharmacare or child care right now, but it’s good to know that help will be there when you do need it. Most of us get far more value from public services than we pay in taxes. Statistics Canada has quantified exactly how much value we receive from public spending on health care, education, and other government services like housing, recreation, and culture – in 2018, it was an average of \$12,500 per person. And these numbers hide the most important part of the story – that most of those services would

**HOW MUCH INCOME TAX LARGE CANADIAN CORPORATIONS PAID, 2011-2016**

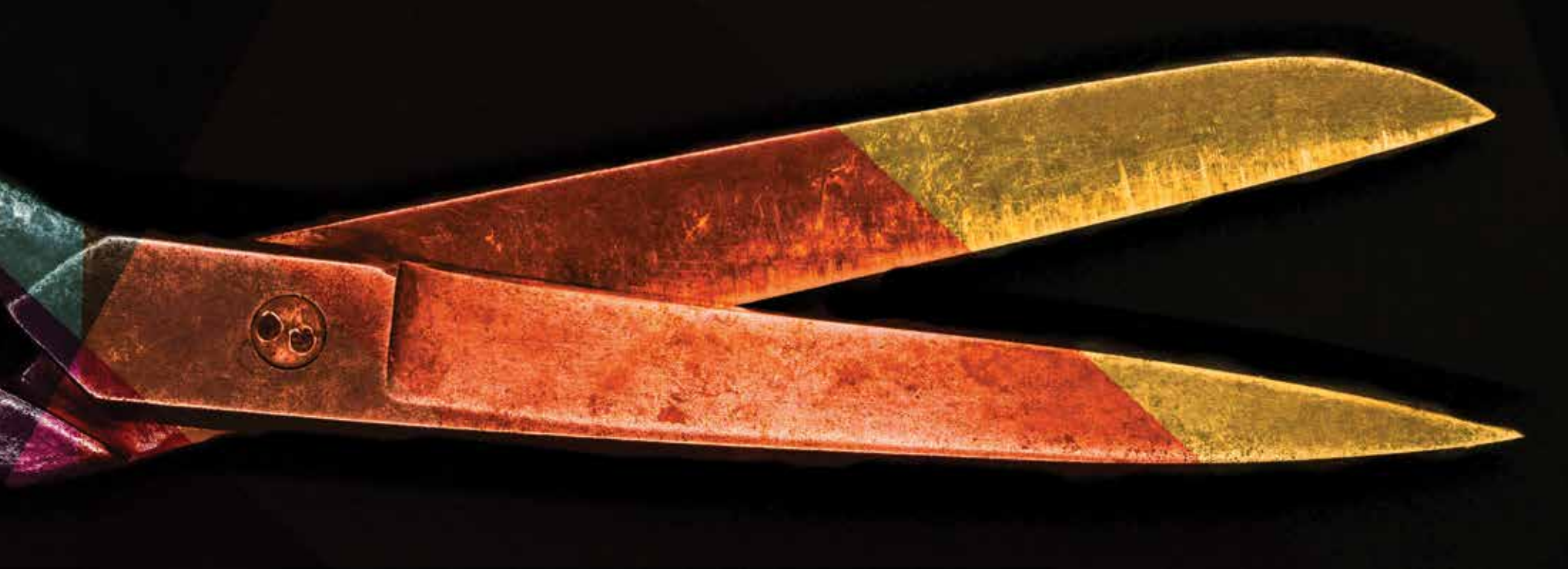


\* Data is for companies with >\$2 billion market capitalization  
Source: Bloomberg data for 102 largest Canadian companies

The good news is that it doesn’t have to be this way. Affordability isn’t just about “buck-a-beer” - we can think about affordability in terms of the savings we get from public services. For example, a single-payer universal pharmacare program could save families an average of \$500 per year. Quebec’s child care program saves families with young children thousands of dollars per year. The NDP plan to retrofit all buildings in Canada by 2050 would save families \$900 or more per year.

That’s why CUPE has been encouraging members and locals to get engaged in this election, and focus on issues that matter to working people. We have an opportunity to elect a government that will strengthen our public services and create





# Liberals build bank of privatization

CUPE has been raising concerns about the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) since the federal Liberal government first introduced it in 2017. The investor-driven bank was set up to help corporations profit from privatizing our public infrastructure.

The bank is involved in three transit projects, including a huge privatized light rail project in Montreal - the Réseau express métropolitain. Recently, the CIB has moved into the water sector, announcing plans to subsidize the privatization of the

Township of Mapleton's water and wastewater facilities.

The "innovation" in this project is that the CIB will lower the cost of borrowing for the private sector partner. What wasn't considered in this project was the possibility of the CIB offering the township a low-cost, long-term loan. Why should we risk putting our water services into private hands where there is an incentive to cut corners for profit, when public options haven't even been considered?

The NDP has promised that they would wind down the CIB, and that their proposed Climate Bank would offer public-public partnerships to help municipalities finance important projects.

Research and experience have shown that public services (like water and wastewater) are best delivered by the public sector. Our governments should be protecting public services, not delivering them to the private sector for profit!



cost far more if you had to replace them with a private sector option.

## How we pay for it – tax fairness

In the long run, high quality universal public services often pay for themselves – for example, economists have shown that subsidized child care in Quebec returned \$1.47 for every dollar spent by the government. But in the short term, we can pay for them by undoing some of the changes in the tax system that have unfairly put most of the burden on workers.

In 1980 the federal corporate tax rate was at 36 per cent. Since then the rate has been slashed by subsequent Liberal and

Conservative governments, and is now at an all-time low of 15 per cent. The justification for cutting corporate tax rates and introducing new loopholes is that corporations will often use the money to create jobs and invest in productivity-enhancing research. But as corporate taxes fell, business investment stayed more or less the same. What increased was corporate profits, executive payouts, and inequality.

Over time, this has resulted in a record amount of hoarding by corporations. Data from Finance Canada shows large corporations withheld about a third of the taxes owed to the Canada Revenue Agency,

which added up to \$10 billion. And earlier this year the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that up to \$25 billion is lost every year to legal loopholes and illegal tax evasion through tax havens.

Canadians for Tax Fairness, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Broadbent Institute have all identified tax reform as a key challenge for whoever forms the next government. The good news is that the research has been done on which are the biggest loopholes, and how to fix them. We just need a government that will restore balance to our tax system, by addressing both avoidance (using legal

loopholes to avoid paying taxes) and evasion (using illegal methods to reduce taxes owing), especially for large corporations.

Fortunately, the federal NDP has made broad-based tax fairness a central part of their election platform for 2019. Their plan includes some new proposals, and rolls back changes that have only benefited the super-rich. For example, the NDP has committed to restoring the corporate tax rate to 18 per cent, increasing the top marginal tax rate for individuals earning more than \$210,000, and introducing a wealth tax of one per cent on wealth over \$20 million. They also plan to reverse a huge tax cut

on capital gains introduced in 2000 by then-Finance Minister Paul Martin. Right now, when you sell an investment, only half of the increase in value counts as taxable income. The NDP proposes to restore this to 75 per cent.

So, the next time someone says we can't afford high-quality public services, tell them that public services make life more affordable and are the best deal for our communities. And if we worry less about balancing the budget at any cost, and instead make the tax system fairer for people than for corporations, we can fund these critical building blocks of a fair and equitable society.

■ Angella MacEwen





## Global Justice

# Global women's gathering leaves lasting local impact



Stacey Connor

In March, CUPE representatives joined 180 union women from over 42 countries to fight for the rights of women and girls at the 63rd annual session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in New York City.

It was a whirlwind week of meetings, briefings, lobbying, networking and rallies. Counterpoint caught up with two CUPE members to find out what the experience meant to them. Stacey Connor, president of CUPE 2073 (representing Canadian Hearing Society workers) and Gina McKay, recording secretary for CUPE 2348 (representing community, health, and social services workers in Manitoba) reflected on the lasting impact of their work at the UNCSW.



Gina McKay

### What do you feel you accomplished?

**Stacey Connor (SC):**

As a deaf woman, I experience barriers that limit my participation every day. It felt good to be at the UN speaking out about my experiences, and to be recognized by my union for my work as a woman who is deaf. I met people like me who face many barriers all over the world, including two deaf women - one from Sudan and one from Mongolia. It was an honour to take part in their workshop and learn from them.

**Gina McKay (GM):** My biggest accomplishment

was gaining a stronger sense of the need for international solidarity. I was humbled to hear women, trans women and non-binary women from all over the world share their experiences of working in the public sector. Their issues and oppressions are similar and familiar. So many of them are struggling because of unregulated corporate global capitalism and greed. Equity-seeking workers struggle in all parts of the world, and in

all unions. I brought my own experiences forward as an LGBTQ2+ union member, and I was able to find commonalities with our labour movement in recognizing that, as a movement, we are only as strong as our most silenced voices.

### Why is it important for unions to bring our voices to the UN Commission on the Status of Women?

**SC:** It is important for women who are deaf and hard of hearing to have a voice on the international stage to ensure that we are not neglected. Our role as union women with disabilities is to remind the United Nations and the world that we exist, and that we cannot be ignored. No one can speak on our behalf.

**GM:** Our local, regional, and national issues and challenges in Canada are also international challenges. Women and equity-seeking workers experience oppression and discrimination worldwide. Solidarity among workers is the only way to unite against the structures

and systems that keep us silenced. Our voices in the UN bring progressive approaches to human rights protections in the labour movement. With ever-increasing far-right opposition dominating the UN commissions, it is imperative for the labour movement to unite and mobilize to ensure that the diversity of workers' rights and issues are upheld globally. It's not enough to fight for strong protections in our own communities. All working people - both unionized and non-unionized - are vulnerable in a capitalist, neoliberal global economy.

### What action has being part of this delegation inspired you to take?

**SC:** It caused me to reflect on my own leadership and the opportunities for me to continue to fight for the rights of people who are deaf and hard of hearing, both within CUPE and in the broader community. I plan to voice these concerns during our convention and remind members that they need to be inclusive, advocate for others, and treat

everyone equally. Deaf and hard of hearing workers need a platform to communicate with other workers. Ensuring there is genuine space for people who are deaf and hard of hearing takes work. We need resources to ensure language support is in place so we can fully participate in discussions, and for information and education to be made available to union members and the community about their role in creating these spaces.

**GM:** I flew home with big ideas about how to increase our presence at the next UNCSW to create a stronger front against the rise of the far-right. I'm going to stay connected through the global online conversations about women's and LGBTQ2+ rights, and keep CUPE's work and voice active in that forum. The equity work that we are doing across CUPE can help make a difference on a global scale. Intersectional labour activism is so important, and diversity is one of the labour movement's greatest strengths.

### How did you feel at the end of the week?

**SC:** I was angry and frustrated by what I heard from women around the world who are deaf and hard of hearing. I was also very grateful to CUPE for the opportunity to make so many new connections. I fear a lot of commitments are made to support women like me, but will end up being talk with no action if we don't find a way to continue to create spaces for genuine inclusion, globally and locally.

**GM:** I felt energized to stay connected to the global activists we met and engaged with, and reflective because we still have so much farther to go. As advanced as some countries may be, there are still so many communities struggling for basic human rights. As a global labour community, we have to work together to ensure workers are not left behind in the struggle for human rights and freedoms.

**Interviews have been edited for brevity and clarity.**



# CUPE denounces “two-tiered service” resulting from contracting out at the Société de transport de Sherbrooke

The contracting out of one half of Société de transport de Sherbrooke (STS) bus routes is deeply concerning to CUPE, who has asked the municipality’s auditor general (AG) to investigate a \$26.7 million untendered contract awarded to Promenades de l’Estrie.

Last June, CUPE sent a letter to the AG while holding a day of action to mobilize against contracting out and the broader privatization of public services.

Dozens of bus drivers and other Sherbrooke CUPE members, supported by CUPE members working in the transit sector from Montreal, Trois-Rivières and Longueuil, took a range of actions to protest the situation. Most notably, they organized a “solidarity happy hour” to underscore member solidarity and marched to City Hall, where a delegation addressed Sherbrooke City Council.

CUPE pointed out that, in addition to exposing transit users to inconsistent service, the multi-million dollar contract raised serious concerns around ethics and sound management.

“Service has declined in quality with all the contracting out at STS,”

explained André Marsan, Vice-President of CUPE 3434, which represents Sherbrooke bus drivers.

He explained that the subcontractor’s vehicles are not well-adapted and -maintained, and do not operate effectively as a result. This “parallel” service is also operated by drivers with less training and oversight, and the subcontractor’s minibuses and microbuses do not meet universal accessibility criteria.

“As a result, this parallel system makes for a two-tiered service. It’s time for Sherbrooke to go back to being a bona fide transit company that delivers a high level of quality and efficiency,” said Marsan.

Maintaining public

services benefits Sherbrooke taxpayers, as seen by the city’s move to bring waste and compost collection back in-house in 2012, which generated savings of nearly \$1 million per year. A ranking of municipalities in 2016-2017 showed that Sherbrooke’s garbage collection expenses were among the lowest of similar-sized cities.

“That was a huge success - however, the same study also showed that Sherbrooke spent the most on recycling collection, which is currently outsourced,” indicated Benoît Labonville, President of CUPE 2729, which represents blue-collar workers in Sherbrooke.

■ Sébastien Goulet and Dominique LaHaye



CUPE members in the transit sector from Montreal, Trois-Rivières and Longueuil added their voices to those of the unionized bus drivers and blue-collar workers in Sherbrooke at a special day of action against contracting out and privatization of public services in front of Sherbrooke City Hall last June 17.



## CUPE 1761 reaches deal after seven-week strike

Municipal employees in the Town of Placentia, NL - members of CUPE 1761 - walked off the job July 16 after more than 14 months of stalled contract negotiations. After a seven-week strike, CUPE 1761 members are returning to work with a four-year collective agreement that includes wage increases and other improvements.

The employer hired outside consultants to do its bargaining - people who did not understand the work of the bargaining unit. Eleven proposals were exchanged, and many meetings were postponed, much to the frustration of the disrespected members.

On March 20 of this year, talks reached an impasse, and the union asked the conciliation officer to file his report.

On April 17, the local voted unanimously in favour of a strike. By mid-July, with no bargaining meetings scheduled, the members had reached their limit, and were forced to withdraw services.

“The decision to withdraw services was not made lightly,” says CUPE 1761 President Gerry Quilty, “But the members were completely frustrated with the bargaining process, which saw delay after delay and a total lack of commitment on the part of the employer to reach an agreement.”

On Aug. 6, CUPE National President Mark Hancock, along with CUPE NL President Sherry Hillier, showed up to support the picket line outside Town Hall. The members received widespread community support for their courage in standing up to the mayor and the Town, and are glad to see the longest round of bargaining in the local’s history come to a close.

■ Gaëlle McNeil

### NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY

## Tapping into our greatest asset

Usually, I take this space to share a message about CUPE’s financial health, and how we’re using our resources. I’m proud of our union’s strength. We have what it takes to back members up financially, no matter what challenges they face.

But with the federal election just around the corner, I’m thinking about CUPE’s biggest assets: our members.

At 680,000 strong, engaged CUPE members are a powerful force across the country. One in every 55 Canadians is a CUPE member. One in every 24 Canadian workers is one of us. We’re in communities big and small from coast to coast. And we can make a difference if each and every one of us gets involved.

To make that difference, we need to organize and mobilize our members to get out and support the NDP, the only party that stands with Canadian workers.

Imagine the impact we’ll have if we work together. We can elect a government committed to protecting and expanding public services, including a national

pharmacare program. We can vote for the party that will keep workers and communities at the heart of a plan to tackle the climate crisis. And we can choose a government that will work to make life more affordable by investing in services like public transit and affordable housing.

Over the summer, I’ve been talking with everyone I meet about what’s at stake in this election. I’m sure many of you have as well. With voting day just weeks away, it’s time to take the next steps.

Here’s what we can all do between now and October 21.

Keep talking to members, family and friends about why this election matters. You can find out more about the issues and how to get involved at [cupe.ca/cupe-votes](http://cupe.ca/cupe-votes), CUPE’s election resource centre.

If you haven’t already, make sure you and everyone you know is registered to vote – and follow through by casting your ballot.

Volunteer on a local campaign and sign up to get out the vote on election day. Every single vote counts, as we saw recently in Newfoundland and Labrador, where an NDP candidate won their seat by just two votes.

This election is about our jobs and public services, the well-being of our communities, and the future of our planet. Let’s make sure that people like us help decide this election, by mobilizing to support NDP candidates in ridings across Canada.

CHARLES FLEURY ONLINE [twitter.com/CUPENatSec](https://twitter.com/CUPENatSec)





## Bargaining mental health protections for Emergency and Security Services (ESS) workers

**M**any CUPE members, including paramedics and emergency dispatchers, work as first responders. These ESS occupations frequently require workers to put their lives at risk to protect others. They often experience a variety of traumatic or critical incidents which put them at higher risk of critical stress injuries. When these stress reactions are left untreated, they can lead to post-traumatic stress injuries (PTSI), including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety disorders.

PTSI can be disabling and lead to substance abuse and even suicide. Sadly, the number of PTIs, suicidal ideation, and death by suicide are higher among workers in these occupations than in the general population. About 45 per cent of ESS workers show clinical symptoms of PTIs.

Although frequent expo-

sure to potentially traumatic events is part of the job, this does not mean that workers and unions can't respond. Unions can address the effects of these hazards through information, training and organizational procedures that ensure early intervention after traumatic exposures. And they can bargain better peer support programs, professional care, and follow-ups. Beyond training and employer policies, appropriate supports can and should be bargained into benefit packages and employee assistance programs (EAPs).

Many workplaces offer programs to help first responders manage the critical stressors they experience. Some of those are crisis-focused, and others try to build resiliency through training before, during, and after critical incidents. Experts have highlighted the need to evaluate the effectiveness

of these programs and expand their use. From our experience, some programs and supports are managed only by the employer, while others - such as professional counselling - can be included in EAPs.

CUPE's position is that exposure to trauma should be recognized as an occupational hazard by ESS organizations. Protocols, including special training and ongoing measures to protect workers' mental health as they cope with work related trauma, should be required by law and/or included in collective agreements. These should be designed and evaluated based on scientific evidence, and unions should be included in their implementation and monitoring.

Here's an example of contract language from CUPE's airline sector:

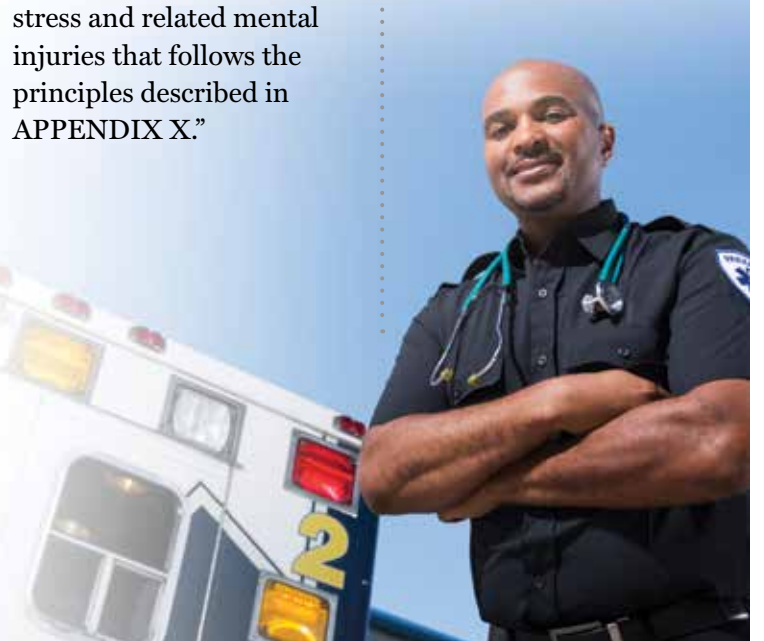
"Critical incident is a term used to describe an abnormal, shocking,

or traumatic event.

The company shall, in consultation with the Health and Safety policy committee, develop a critical incident stress policy that states "critical incidents and critical incident stress are health and safety hazards, and that all steps reasonable should be taken to prevent further injury from their occurrence." This policy shall include a procedure to prevent critical incident stress and related mental injuries that follows the principles described in APPENDIX X."

"Committee members who regularly perform defusing and debriefing shall be provided with resources to prevent mental injuries from this type of work, they shall be provided with all required EAP services. The cap for such services may be extended if required. External expert resources will be provided through the existing Employee Assistance Program."

■ **Leonor Cedillo**



## New model health and safety language for BC health care workers

Members of the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) have something to celebrate - new model health and safety language in their collective agreement that workers across the country can take inspiration from.

HEU is the health care service division of CUPE in BC, representing most of CUPE's health care workers in the province, with almost 50,000 members. The Facilities Bargaining Association (FBA) covers most hospital and seniors' care facilities in the province.

It's been a tough haul for BC health care workers - successive BC Liberal governments over 16 years pushed a hard right-wing

agenda that consistently attacked workers and public services.

But after two years of a BC NDP government, HEU has bargained substantial improvements in many areas of health care delivery in BC. Their new collective agreement has some particularly inspiring health and safety victories for workers in all sectors.

The union has negotiated the creation of a future provincial occupational health and safety organization for health care workers. This is vital, as workers in this sector experience some of the highest injury rates in Canada. Having a government agency dedicated to

addressing unsafe work is a major step forward

This \$8.5 million government-funded agency will develop effective safety practices to reduce and prevent injuries in health care workplaces.

BC workers covered by the FBA collective agreement now also have up to 17 weeks of unpaid leave for reasons related to sexual or domestic violence, and up to three days of special leave for absences if an employee (or an employee's dependent child) experiences domestic or sexual violence.

Employers will also be required to implement the National Standard of Canada for Psychological

Health and Safety to prevent psychological harm to workers.

Other health and safety elements in the new agreement include:

- A \$1 million investment in musculoskeletal injury prevention projects
- A \$600,000 fund for pilot projects focused on injury prevention, involving OH&S stewards
- Mandatory work station risk assessments for ergonomic safety
- More critical incident debriefing and more

regional violence prevention committees

- More sharing of Code White emergency situation records with JOHS committees
- More regional workload tools and committees, and better responsiveness to workload demands

And with Alberta and Ontario joining other provinces in pursuing regressive agendas, people should take what inspiration they can from BC's NDP government.

■ **Stephen Elliott-Buckley**



**BC health care workers celebrate better working conditions under an NDP government.**