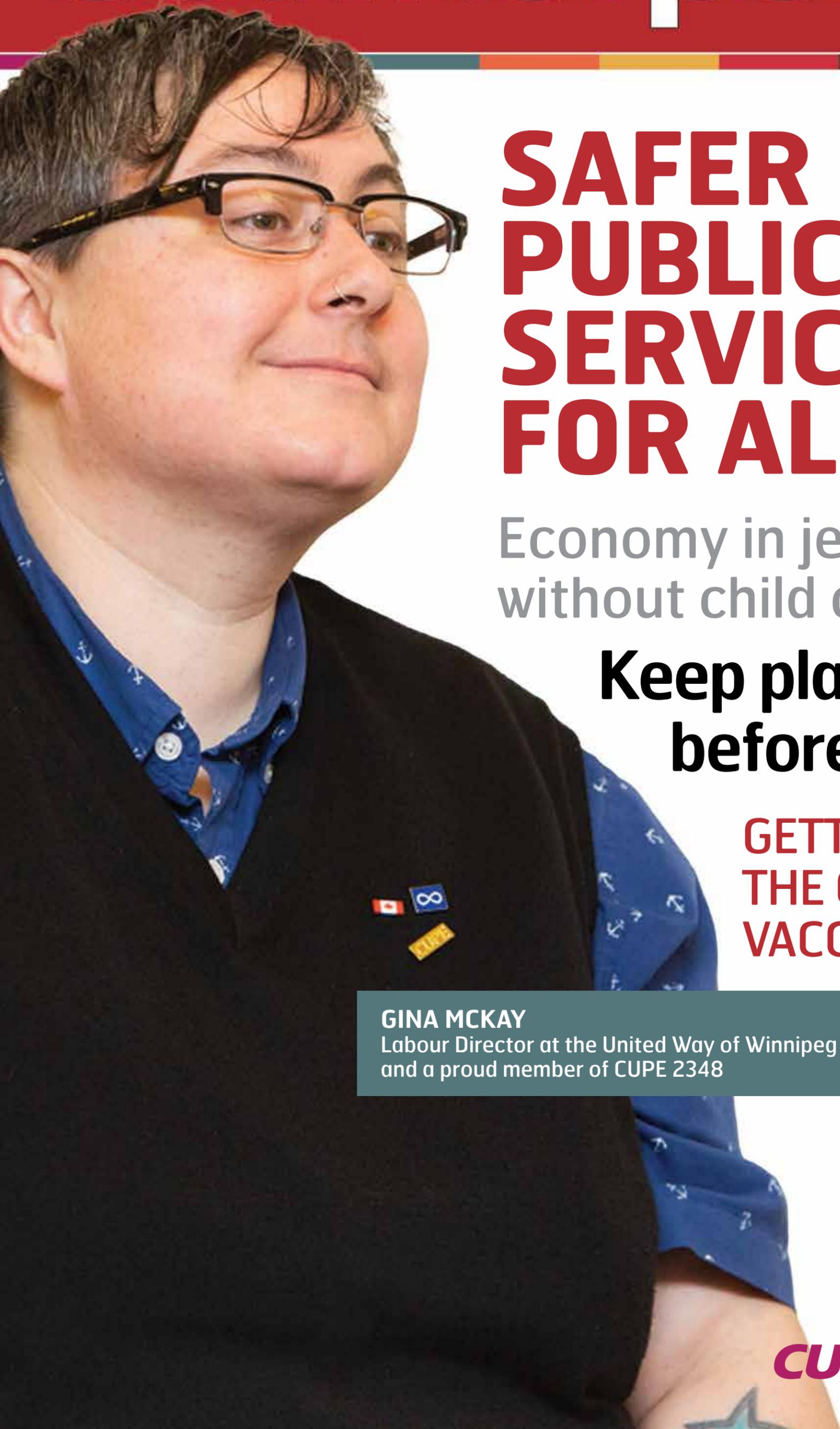


# Counterpoint



## SAFER PUBLIC SERVICES FOR ALL

Economy in jeopardy  
without child care

**Keep play  
before profit**

**GETTING  
THE COVID-19  
VACCINE**

**GINA MCKAY**

Labour Director at the United Way of Winnipeg  
and a proud member of CUPE 2348

# Roots 2 Power: Educating our members to take on the world



When your provincial government tries to destroy unions and restrict workers' ability to speak out on behalf of their members – unions push back. That's what's happening in Alberta, where the government of Jason Kenney passed Bill 32 – legislation that restricts the ability of unions to engage in 'political speech.'

Bill 32 is union busting. It ties unions up in regulations, keeps activists too busy collecting dues and filling out forms to fight for better wages and working conditions. And if that wasn't enough – the Kenney government is making deep cuts to health care, education, post-secondary institutions, and a wide range of other public services that

make Alberta a great place to live.

CUPE Alberta is developing new tools to address Bill 32 and the Kenney government. One of those is "Roots 2 Power", an educational series that gives CUPE Alberta members the tools they need to challenge conservatives like Jason Kenney. The series, which is free to any member in the

province who wants to attend, teaches basic political skills like organizing in a work site, social media activism, and basic campaign tactics. All of which are the very things politicians like Kenney fear the most from unions.

Two workshops have already taken place and plans are underway for a third.

CUPE 3550 member Janice Kube attended the first series and was impressed. "The members from our local who took this training are fired up and ready to organize. We need to fight back against Jason Kenney, and we need all our members to know how to talk to friends, neighbours and all Albertans about politics. Roots 2 Power is a great tool to train our people to do that."

■ Lou Arab



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

**Managing Editor**  
Catherine Louli

**Communications Director**  
Karine Fortin

**Graphic Designer** Jocelyn Renaud

**Editorial Assistants**  
Céline Carré • Valérie Ménard

**Contributors** Lou Arab • Adrienne Silnicki • Colleen Butler • Kelti Cameron • Hugh Pouliot • Stella Yeadon • Greg Taylor • Ronald Boisrond • Philippe Gagnon

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# The economy is in jeopardy without child care

“The major take-away from the pandemic, is that our economy cannot work without child care,” said Lee-Ann Lalli, CUPE National Child Care Working Group Co-Chair. “Any parent or guardian who has been at home trying to juggle work while providing for children can tell you it is an impossible task,” she said. Child care was one of very few sectors in our economy that did not close in many provinces and territories. It continues to operate either at near normal levels in BC, Alberta, and Quebec, or is made available to provide care to the children of other essential workers in Ontario and much of the East Coast.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our child care workers. These frontline essential workers are often unseen and undervalued by policy makers. The importance of their work is overlooked by government, and often society at large. Child care workers are some of the lowest paid full-time workers, and rarely do they

receive benefits or are part of a pension plan. Many start at \$17/hour, even though 95.5% of child care workers have post-secondary training. Due to the low wages and difficult working conditions, only 35.7% of those who have Early Childhood Educator (ECE) qualifications work in the sector, while 41% are employed elsewhere.

With poor remuneration, it is no surprise that Canada has a recruitment and retention problem for those

working in the ECE field. Many regions in CUPE are launching their own response to the lack of respect and low pay for these workers. There may also be a federal opportunity to access better wages if the Trudeau government makes good on a 50-year Liberal promise to bring in universal child care. “Any plan for universal care must include decent wages and good working conditions for child care workers, said

Margot Nickerson, CUPE’s National Child Care Working Group Co-Chair.

There is not enough child care available for every child. Currently, forty-four per cent of children in Canada live in a child care desert. “If we want to create a universal child care program, we’re going to have to ensure we have enough workers. One way

to attract and retain workers into early learning and child care is to offer them a decent wage, benefits, a pension and our respect, they surely deserve it all,” said Nickerson.

■ **Adrienne Silnicki**



## NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

### Post-pandemic recovery effort must centre around fixing long-term care

**F**or so many families, the past year has been an endurance race to a time when their most vulnerable loved ones in long-term care homes were protected against COVID-19. For the first time in a long time, they can see the finish line, as vaccines begin to offer a glimmer of hope.

But thousands of families have not been so lucky. Four out of five deaths due to COVID-19 in Canada were residents or workers in long-term care centres. This vital part of our health care system remains without national standards of care and as a result, leaves residents without the care they need, and it leaves workers overworked and underpaid. This is especially true in the for-profit long-term care sector, where neglect runs rampant and where research shows outbreaks were lengthier and much deadlier.

In January, we learned that Revera, Canada’s second-largest care home operator and site of some of the worst outbreaks and death tolls during the pandemic, is involved in aggressive international tax dodging. This toxic industry doesn’t just prey off vulnerable seniors. It entrusts the care of our loved ones to a network of international tax cheats.

**As a country, we simply cannot go on like this.**

It is long past time to get profit out of long-term care. The fact that we are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel in this pandemic doesn’t change that. In fact, it makes it even more urgent.

For years, CUPE has been calling for an end to profit-making in long-term care and advocating for national standards of care and a minimum of four hours of dedicated care per resident per day.

It’s a shame that it took a pandemic for it to happen, but it seems like politicians in Ottawa are finally starting to listen. In its September throne speech, the Liberal government announced a vague pledge to establish national standards of care but, in true Liberal form, we haven’t seen or heard of any progress in the seven months that have since passed.

On the other hand, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh’s new Care Guarantee responds to the crisis in long-term care and calls from CUPE and our allies for an end to profiteering in health care.

COVID-19 did not break our long-term care system. Any CUPE member who works in the sector could tell you it was broken long before.

What’s important now is that, with a federal election around the corner at any moment, we seize the opportunity to fix this part of our health care system once and for all.



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

# Safer public services for all

**It began as a conversation at CUPE's National Pink Triangle committee.** Across the country, LGBTQ2+ CUPE members were working on a variety of sexual and gender diversity initiatives, particularly around seniors' issues in healthcare.

**I**n BC, CUPE and HEU were collaborating with community partners on advocacy around LGBTQ2+ aging and care. Two committee members were serving on LGBTQ2+ advocacy group Egale's National Seniors Advisory Committee. Others were spearheading projects around safety for LGBTQ2+ workers in their locals and divisions.

## **The Pink Triangle Committee was where these interests came together.**

"We heard so many stories about people not feeling safe," says Donna Smith, a long-time member of the Pink Triangle Committee from CUPE 4828 in Saskatchewan and member of Egale's National Seniors Advisory Committee. "Sometimes the

clients feel they have to be in the closet and so do some of the staff."

Members noted that some seniors were looking for solutions through private initiatives. As public sector trade unionists, the Pink Triangle Committee felt compelled to act. "These should be safer public services for all," says Gina McKay, a Pink Triangle Committee member and Recording Secretary of CUPE 2348 in Manitoba. "Everyone should have the right to access services no matter how they identify."

The committee put forward resolutions at the 2017 and 2019 National Conventions to raise awareness on LGBTQ2+ seniors' issues, and to create safer spaces for LGBTQ2+ CUPE members and the people we serve. CUPE's new report on safer spaces

in public services for LGBTQ2+ workers and seniors, is the fruit of these resolutions.

The joint research project with Carleton University and LGBTQ2+ advocacy group Egale identifies several promising practices to create safer, more accessible services, including employment equity and safety standards tied to funding.

Released in March, the report concludes that working conditions for LGBTQ2+ workers are related to service conditions for LGBTQ2+ clients, and vice versa. It identifies several promising practices to help workers and clients. Among these are employment equity, cultural competency standards tied to funding, and increasing LGBTQ2+ representation on governance groups.

It also calls on policy makers to recognize the diversity within the

LGBTQ2+ community. To create safe spaces, policy makers must address the specific issues faced by marginalized groups within LGBTQ2+ communities.

Laura Tait is the Older Adult Coordinator at the Rainbow Resource Centre in Winnipeg. She is also a member of CUPE 2348. She welcomes the findings of the report. "When you're older and worried about going into assisted living or retirement homes, not knowing whether or not you're welcome there because of your sexuality or gender identity, is a really big concern," says Laura.

"All of our participants, especially our trans participants, have stories of being misgendered in medical care, of having people come in and leave because of who they are," they say. "It's doubled down

for people who are two spirit or who are facing multiple marginalizations through gender and race. Having accessibility to services that are explicit about inclusivity being part of their mission would be massive."

***"When you're older and worried about going into assisted living or retirement homes, not knowing whether or not you're welcome there because of your sexuality or gender identity, is a really big concern,"***

***Laura Tait, Older Adult Coordinator at the Rainbow Resource Centre in Winnipeg and member of CUPE 2348***

Gina McKay hopes the report leads to new initiatives from policy makers. “You need the data to be able to have the conversation,” says Gina. “But the real first step is actually making the change.”

Todd Hill, an educational assistant in New Brunswick, is Co-Chair of the Pink Triangle Committee and a Regional Vice-President for CUPE 2745. He believes that the report’s findings on diversity and governance can also help CUPE become more inclusive. “We need to encourage more leaders and actively seek out equity members to fill positions

and sit on our committees,” says Todd. “I can speak to what it’s like to be a gay man in the workforce. I can’t speak with authority about the oppression of an LGBTQ2+ worker who is further marginalized. But I can be an ally. Being on the Pink Triangle Committee and working as a member facilitator has been a privilege. I’ve learned so much from others. That’s my big takeaway in CUPE – I want to hear your lived experience.”

■ Colleen Butler

## PROFILE GINA MCKAY

# Creating inclusive spaces for workers

*Over a decade ago, community health worker Gina McKay noticed a problem in her workplace. “We were creating inclusive spaces for clients, but it wasn’t happening for workers,” says Gina.*

This experience prompted her to get involved in her local, CUPE 2348. She became a member facilitator shortly after and soon took on elected positions.

Today, Gina is the Labour Director at the United Way of Winnipeg and a proud member of CUPE 2348, where she serves as Recording Secretary. She remains passionate about creating safer spaces for equity-seeking workers.

As a queer Métis activist, Gina sees the labour movement as a natural fit for equity work. “The union is a way to get change to happen,” says Gina. Her local has made equity a bargaining priority. They have secured equity language in many of their agreements, including protections for gender expression, which is not covered by Manitoba provincial law.

Gina is dedicated to promoting equity in union spaces. “It’s about advancing rights,” she says. “Resolution writing, working within our own structures to create change – it provides an opportunity to lead the way through example.” Some of this work has focused on representation. Her local recently put forward a constitutional amendment to add a full slate of equity seats to the CUPE Manitoba executive board. The amendment passed unanimously at the last division convention.

She is especially proud of a project that emerged from her first encounter with the union, when she was advocating for respectful workplace practices in community healthcare. A few years back, Gina brought her provincial work on safer spaces to CUPE’s National Pink Triangle Committee. It complemented the work being done by other committee members on LGBTQ2+ healthcare and seniors’ issues.

Sensing a gap, the committee put forward resolutions to raise awareness on LGBTQ2+ seniors’ issues and to advocate for LGBTQ2+ competency in public services. Both were passed. CUPE’s new report on safer spaces in public services for LGBTQ2+ workers and seniors, released in March, emerged from this work.

Gina views the report, which features interviews with LGBTQ2+ CUPE members, as a perfect example of the collective power of the union to advance human rights. “The report is showcasing voices that aren’t at other tables,” says Gina. “What gives me the most hope is seeing that the experiences of members and stories from your own communities can make change.”

■ Colleen Butler





Global Justice

# The urgent need to vaccinate is global

Global pandemics are rare events. They do not happen often and are among few disasters that the entire world experiences simultaneously. It is astonishing to consider that 7.8 billion people have, in some way, been affected by COVID-19. We often hear ‘we’re all in this together’ and while we may be in this together, we are not all in the same boat. Some of us are in yachts while others are drowning – access to vaccines is one example of how we are living this pandemic differently.

To survive and to thrive in the future, we urgently need most of the global population vaccinated. Pandemic solutions must be based in solidarity, and vaccine distribution must be accessible and affordable. Wealthy nations, including Canada, are racing to secure solely their own supplies, instead of thinking and participating in a global plan. This race is driven by a handful of huge pharmaceutical corporations that control vaccine supply and stand to reap enormous profits from the pandemic.

Canada has secured the option to buy five times more vaccines than needed.

The US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union have bought more than twice what they need. Pharmaceutical giants Moderna and Pfizer are expected to earn respectively around \$10 billion and \$19 billion from vaccine sales in 2021. Poorer countries, which make up 84 per cent of the global population, have only secured 32 per cent of the world’s vaccine supply.

The World Health Organization (WHO) set up a global vaccine collaboration called COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access), to keep vaccine prices low and ensure global, equitable

access. The plan was for rich countries, including Canada, to pool funds and buy vaccines for themselves and poor countries. Distribution would have been collectively planned and equitably distributed, with all 190 nations enrolled getting enough affordable vaccines.

Tragically, rich countries are undermining COVAX by competing to access the

limited global vaccine supply controlled by pharmaceutical companies. Countries representing just 16 per cent of the global population currently hold 60 per cent of the vaccines. Our reflex has been to secure a national supply of vaccines.

India and South Africa, with the support of 99 other countries, mostly in the Global South, have proposed a waiver to the World Trade Organization (WTO) that would temporarily remove the monopoly rights of pharmaceutical corporations to COVID-19 vaccines. The control of vaccine production by big pharmaceutical corporations, is a barrier to scaled-up production and rapid access.

Shockingly, wealthy countries, including Canada, have opposed the waiver, choosing instead to protect the profits of multinational pharmaceutical corporations over the health of the world’s population. “Canada’s opposition to the adoption of the waiver is simply indefensible. It is contributing to deepening the global crises of inequality. This opposition is also “self-defeating,” said Sangeeta Shashikant of the Third World Network, in her

letter to the Prime Minister. CUPE signed an open letter, supported by over 40 Canadian civil society organizations, that stated Canada must be part of the global effort to save lives and not an obstacle. CUPE called on the Canadian government to support the waiver now.

Currently, public funds for vaccine research and development, as well as spending on the actual vaccines, are subsidizing record private profits for Pfizer and Moderna. Meanwhile, poor countries that can’t access vaccines are now turning to the World Bank and private banks for loans to buy vaccines, plunging them further into debt. The false logic of the market and for-profit solutions are driving government actions to the detriment of the most vulnerable.

Without public capacity to produce medicine and vaccines, we are beholden to corporate for-profit interests to ensure our survival. This is a dangerous game, and the rules are rigged.

In the short term, we must change the rules and heed the calls of the Global South to support the WTO waiver. In the long term, we must change the game altogether and ensure public funding is used to support public production and access to medicine and vaccines, prioritizing public health and the public interest over profit.

■ Kelti Cameron



## “Mayday!”: CUPE flight attendants call for federal action to save their jobs

CUPE’s flight attendant members took the fight to save their jobs into Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s back yard this winter.

After pleading with the federal government for action for nearly a year, CUPE’s Airline Division launched its “Mayday” campaign in February, which saw a wave of billboards erected in Justin Trudeau’s Montreal riding, and in the greater Toronto-area ridings of Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland and Transport Minister Omar Alghabra. The campaign also garnered more than six thousand signatures in an online

petition and featured a strong presence on social media.

Flight attendants are frustrated. Many have been unable to collect federal income supports because their airline denied them access, and they are worried that without federal intervention, there may not be an industry to return to once the pandemic is over.

“We’ve sacrificed a lot in this pandemic: our jobs, our health, our mental health, you name it,” said Wesley Lesosky, President of CUPE’s Airline Division. “We’ve done our part. We’re now asking Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau to do his.”

CUPE represents about 15,000 flight attendants at nine different airlines across Canada – the vast

majority were laid off when COVID-19 swept through Canada and grounded most flights. Most flight attendants are waiting and hoping for

a return to work.

Visit [MaydayJustinTrudeau.ca](https://www.maydayjustintrudeau.ca) to add your voice to the campaign today.

■ Hugh Pouliot



# From vaccine hesitant to amazing post-job feeling – why one long-term care worker chose to get the COVID-19 vaccine



There are two very telling photographs of Pam Hayer, a personal support worker at a Region of Peel public municipal long-term care home, rolling up her sleeve to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The second photo is the one she points to first. It shows Hayer helping the nurse with the needle, pinpointing the perfect spot on her arm. She's visibly smiling behind her mask, expressive eyes locked on the lens saying, 'there, look at me, I did it. You can too.'

The first photo, well that too is telling. Hands together, body stiff, Hayer's apprehension about getting the vaccine is evident in the way she sits, but mostly it's in her worried eyes.

Hayer's journey from

a vaccine hesitant PSW to feeling amazing about her decision post-job, is a common one among care home staff who, in the last few months, have increasingly rolled-up their sleeves to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

Across the country, there is a consensus that initially the vaccine uptake among long-term care staff could have been higher. Some provinces are doing better than others. Increasing vaccination rates hinges on the awareness about the efficacy, and education about the safety of the vaccine.

Hayer says that "yes, there is no denying that vaccine hesitancy is a thing among some staff I work with. I know that some of

my co-workers may still not want to get the vaccine. But more and more are getting it. At first, I wasn't sure either...I delayed and then I said yes, I want it. Now I tell everyone that I got my vaccine so that they too might change their minds."

Describing her journey, Hayer says that what she did was tune out all the other noise about the vaccines and just looked at the science.

"I am feeling amazing about my decision. It made me feel safer and relieved that I will not be the reason any of the residents I care for will get infected with COVID-19. It offers relief after so many months of anxiety and worry that one of the residents I care so much about would get infected and suffer."

Before the photos were taken in January 2021, Hayer and her co-workers worked non-stop from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 keeping outbreaks, resident deaths and worker infections to a minimum. Then in the summer when cases were lower, she and other staff at the nursing home began to talk about the COVID-19 vaccines that they knew were coming in the new year.

Some were hopeful the vaccines would be a big tool to end the spread of the virus while others were apprehensive and leery. With rampant vaccine misinformation online and on social media posts from anti-vaxers, to conspiracy theorists and pseudo-science bloggers gaining traction, Hayer decided it was time just to focus on serious studies. She quickly overcame her hesitation. On January 6, she received her

first dose of Pfizer vaccine. The second dose came on January 27.

In Ontario and in B.C. in particular, vaccination rates went up when barriers to getting the vaccine were removed. More workers got the vaccine when clinics were set up directly in the care homes, and long-term care staff didn't have to travel to a hospital clinic on their day off.

■ Stella Yeadon



## NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY

### Human rights: CUPE organizes for change

CUPE's human rights work remains extremely important during the pandemic, as we continue to organize for change. Unfortunately, in Canada and around the world, defending human rights is not on top of the public agenda. It is not a priority for our governments and employers, even though COVID has clearly a disproportionate impact on equity seeking groups like women, racialized and Indigenous workers, LGBTQ2+ workers and persons with disabilities.

By holding our virtual Human Rights Conference in early March, we kept the issue on the front burner, and continued to organize for change.

Thanks to the participants, speakers and panelists, the conference was a great success. The exchanges held, the

experiences shared, the concerns raised, and the strategies developed, will help us move justice and equity forward in and outside our union and create a more just post-pandemic world.

Locals from across the country will benefit from what their members learned and will have better tools to bargain for equity and build strong inclusive locals.

Comments received during the conference and the consultation process before that, have helped to update CUPE's anti-racism strategy. We will have a robust document to submit to delegates at our 2021 national convention. With this strategy, through organizing, bargaining, education and increased representation, we will be better equipped to fight racism on all fronts.

CUPE's is already deeply involved in the fight against racism and in the defense and promotion of human rights. But we still have a lot of work to do. The rest of the journey will not be easy, and I know that when we work together, we can do incredible things. And even though we have budget challenges with this pandemic, I guarantee you that our human rights work will remain a very important priority for CUPE.



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

# Keeping play before profit

Already hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, municipal workers in the Township of Langley are now facing off with another threat to the community's public recreation programs and services – privatization.

Spurred by recent discussion by the Township's Mayor and Council to explore contracting out fitness programs, CUPE 403 launched a campaign to protect the community's public recreation centres, gyms, arenas, and pools.

"It's been very frustrating for recreation workers. After months of closures and uncertainty during the pandemic, it's really disheartening to hear talk about contracting out," says Sara Manchester, a recreation worker for the

Township and President of CUPE 403. "We are proud to serve our community by delivering the very best recreation and fitness programs. We haven't weathered the challenges of this pandemic to just sit back now."

The campaign, Keep Play Before Profits, is raising the alarm on the threat to the community. It features transit shelter ads across the Township, and an action website that lets community members send messages to the Mayor and Council in support of public recreation programs and services.

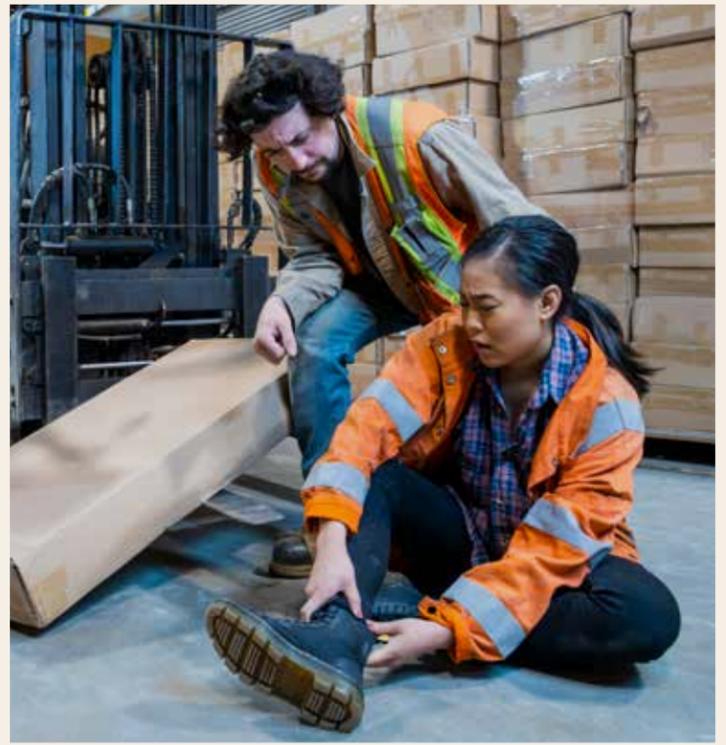
"We are asking our friends and neighbours to send a clear message to the Mayor and Council – recreation should be for everyone, not just those in

our community who can pay more for private, for-profit services," says Manchester.

Many of the fitness programs being targeted are delivered by the newest members of CUPE 403, a group of recreation and cultural workers that voted to join the union in June 2020. The new unit has yet to reach a first collective agreement.

"The Mayor and Council are playing dirty with the future of these programs and jobs. We won't be quiet and let them use the pandemic as an excuse. CUPE 403 members won't stand for it, and we are sure the community won't either," adds Manchester.

■ Greg Taylor



## Quebec's occupational health and safety regime under threat!

The Quebec union movement has unanimously denounced Bill 59 tabled by the Government of Quebec. This bill is intended to modernize the occupational health and safety regime consisting of its two fundamental pieces of legislation, i.e., the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* and the *Act respecting industrial accidents and occupational diseases*.

These two pieces of legislation adopted in 1979 and 1985 respectively, made up the backbone of Quebec's occupational health and safety regime, which was the most cutting edge in North America at the time. It dealt with workplace prevention and compensation of victims of industrial accidents or occupational diseases.

Bill 59 does not reflect these two objectives in any way. Instead, it calls into question several pillars of the occupational health and safety regime, particularly by having the opinion of the employer's physician override that of the attending physician.

"In its current format, the bill transfers full control of the application of preventive measures to employers by removing employees from the process of identifying risk factors in their workplace. This significantly curtails the opportunities union representatives have to do actual preventive work as they are allotted fewer hours for this purpose," said Benoit Bouchard, President of CUPE Quebec.

Many amendments have been made to the *Act respecting industrial accidents and occupational diseases*, and none benefit the employees in any way.

During parliamentary consultations last January, the Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL) and its affiliates demanded that the government make major amendments to the bill or rewrite it entirely. The opposition parties, researchers, private citizens and other groups have demanded that many amendments be made to the bill.

The QFL and its affiliates have just launched a large-scale media campaign to make the public and elected officials aware of how much ground employees stand to lose if this bill is not substantially amended.

Between 2015 and 2019, 485,038 workers in Quebec were involved in an industrial accident or developed an occupational disease, 1059 of whom eventually passed away.

■ Ronald Boisrond

