

Plan to Fight Concessions and Defend Free Collective Bargaining

CUPE has a long-standing policy and practice of resisting attacks on our collective agreement rights, and on free collective bargaining.

In the last several months, these attacks have intensified. In an unprecedented abuse of state power, the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador legislated away our right to strike and stripped away significant collective agreement provisions. Major contract concessions were also forced on our members at Air Canada, in this case as a result of court imposed negotiations brought on by bankruptcy protection proceedings.

At the heart of this assault against workers is the push by certain governments to weaken both the legal rights of unions and our bargaining power so that corporations can turn the public sector into a source of profit and maximize their earnings at the expense of Canadian workers and their families.

Our collective agreements and free collective bargaining stand in the way of this restructuring. Our demonstrated willingness to defend our negotiated rights through strike action when necessary is the reason more and more provincial governments are moving to use their legislative and state power against us. At our last national convention, we anticipated this renewed attack by adopting an ambitious strategic program to strengthen our collective strength and bargaining power.

The dramatic events that have taken place in BC, Newfoundland and Labrador, and at Air Canada since our national convention tell us that we must accelerate this program. We must acknowledge the setbacks of the past few months. We were forced into making unacceptable tradeoffs. We must acknowledge that we were not yet strong enough internally to beat back the contract concessions, especially when state power was used against us. We must acknowledge that we must do even more to build the inter-union and community solidarity. We say this not to criticize the members involved in the disputes, or the leadership of our bargaining committees and staff, or the role

of other unions. We say this because we want to acknowledge what we are up against and that the setbacks will be used against us in future bargaining. Our entire union must confront this reality so that we can take steps to reorganize ourselves to build the power needed to win.

Plan to defend collective bargaining and stop concessions

Building on the strategic plan adopted by our last national convention, the CUPE National Executive Board will take the following steps to strengthen our bargaining power and resist attacks on the collective agreement rights of CUPE members and other workers.

1. The National Officers will immediately reaffirm through public communications, and communications to all CUPE local unions and staff, our determination to protect our collective agreement rights, to resist any demands for concessions, and to defend our right to free collective bargaining, including our right to strike.
2. Fighting concessions and defending free collective bargaining rights will require that the staff and elected membership structures of CUPE work together closely, particularly at the provincial level. Regional Directors will work with the provincial division(s) in their respective regions to develop a comprehensive plan to prepare against contract concessions and attacks on our bargaining rights. This “fight concessions” plan will set out specific actions and timelines. It will address, among other things:
 - strengthening members’ resolve and preparedness to fight concessions;
 - putting in place an effective coordinated bargaining plan for each specific region, sector or the entire province (as appropriate) so that we can lead bargaining from a position of strength and are able to establish no-concession patterns;
 - building solidarity between CUPE local unions and between CUPE and other unions, particularly through solidarity pacts and strike support;
 - rapid and effective response mechanisms to deal with crisis bargaining.
3. The elected and staff leadership in each province will work closely together to put in place a process or structure that will allow for on-going joint monitoring of the plan’s implementation. The plan will be adapted where and when necessary to respond to new situations and conditions. The elected and staff leadership of each of our sectors will be connected to this ongoing planning and priorities structure.

4. Every Regional Director will be required to file their plan with the Managing Director of Organizing and Regional Services who will immediately notify the National Officers of any problems of implementation.
5. All national staff representatives will immediately alert the Regional Director or Assistant Regional Director, who in turn will alert the province's planning and priorities committee, the provincial division officers, the CUPE National regional and general vice-presidents for the region, and the Managing Director of Organizing and Regional Services, whenever any round of bargaining develops into an attack on negotiated collective agreement rights.
6. An immediate and coordinated response to difficult bargaining situations will be organized by the Regional and/or Assistant Director in full consultation with the provincial division and Managing Director of Organizing and Regional Services. The Managing Director of Organizing and Regional Services will alert the National Officers of any difficulty encountered in developing an emergency response initiative.
7. Whenever a local union encounters difficulty at the bargaining table with a serious threat of concessions, the staff (in consultation with the elected structures in the province) will call an emergency meeting of all local union presidents in the area as appropriate, to begin developing a regional strategy to fight the concessions. CUPE District Councils will be involved in these meetings, where such councils exist.
8. Implementation of the national convention decision to win membership support for solidarity pacts between CUPE locals will be accelerated in all provinces where solidarity pacts have not yet been adopted. The positive leadership of CUPE in New Brunswick in building support for a province-wide, CUPE-wide, and labour movement-wide solidarity pact will serve as an example of what can be accomplished.
9. The national convention decision to build solidarity pacts between CUPE and other unions in each sector will also be accelerated. To this end, the National Officers will actively seek the assistance of other national union leaders to organize meetings of heads of unions on a sectoral basis (where appropriate) to build a common front of unions to coordinate bargaining and to fight concessions and attacks on our bargaining rights. For example, the National Officers will urge the national leaders of all unions in the post-secondary education sector to join CUPE in calling a meeting of post-secondary sector unions at a provincial level to develop a common front approach to bargaining in the sector.

10. Following the lead of CUPE in B.C. (Democracy Day), SCFP Quebec (through the FTQ), and CUPE New Brunswick, we will move to fully prepare ourselves for any potential assault on our collective agreements by winning membership agreement to engage in political work stoppages when called upon to do so. In provinces where provincial governments are likely to take action against us, the Regional Director will work with their provincial divisions on a plan to win membership votes for such political action.
11. We will take coordinated direct political action to defeat any government that attacks collective agreement rights and removes existing rights to free collective bargaining.
12. We will support our fight against concessions and the attack on collective bargaining through our ongoing national campaign to rebuild strong communities. The objectives of this campaign include building political support for major public investment in the work and services performed by CUPE members; building membership pride in the work they do and in our union; mobilizing against every and all forms of privatization.
13. We will defend our legal rights to collective bargaining through the Canadian legal system, as appropriate, and by organizing international pressure to enforce compliance with international protections established by the International Labour Organization and United Nations.
14. The National Officers will provide the National Executive Board with regular reports on the progress of this plan to fight concessions and defend collective bargaining, and the plan will be reviewed at every meeting of the National Executive Board.