

**montréal2019**

**CUPE·SCFP**

# **Building our strength:**

Strategic Directions  
2019-2021



**ADOPTED AT THE  
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CONVENTION**

# Building our strength: Strategic Directions 2019-2021

It's been a tough two years for many CUPE members. Public services and unions have been under attack by a new wave of right-wing provincial governments focused on undoing a generation of progress for working people and privatizing public services. And Canada is about to go to the polls in a crucial federal election. Justin Trudeau will try to campaign from the left as he did four years ago, but his record speaks for itself. The Liberals broke their pledge for electoral reform, promoted privatization and trampled on workers' rights.

Our last Strategic Directions plan committed CUPE members to take action to build a stronger union and better workplaces, and to advance our fight for social and economic justice. And we've been able to move forward, despite many obstacles. But the sustained level of attacks on public services over the past two years demands urgent and bold action to protect and defend our members and the public services they provide.

Decades of underfunding have eroded vital public services. And while the economy's strong, workers aren't keeping up. Stagnant wages and ongoing austerity mean many of our members are worse off than before the economic crisis more than a decade ago.

Our members, along with all workers, are fighting to defend decent wages, pension plans, health and safety protections, and our rights to unionize and bargain freely, including our right to strike. We're in tough rounds of bargaining, pushing back against governments and employers who want to roll back the progress we've made on wages, pensions and benefits. CUPE remains committed to resisting concessionary bargaining in all forms, including two-tiering.

When governments attack CUPE members, they're also attacking public services. Public services are the building blocks of our country and the bedrock of our daily lives. They help fight poverty and inequality; and are crucial to a healthy economy. But austerity, the push to privatize and contract out more of our members' work and deep funding cuts are starving and degrading the services that make our communities healthy and safe.

In addition, our members' jobs in the public and private sectors are threatened by digitalization, which can lead to the outsourcing and offshoring of our work, as well as by the emergence of disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence, automation and 5G cellular networks. Without wanting to prevent progress, CUPE members are concerned about the trend of employers to use these new technologies to bypass the provisions of our collective agreements.

It doesn't have to be this way. We live in a country of wealth and plenty. If governments fairly tax corporations and the wealthiest individuals in our country, there is enough for everyone.

Right-wing movements are also targeting the very fabric of our communities. Racism, xenophobia and hate are on the rise in Canada and around the world, and we must name it and resist it wherever we see it. We are seeing a brazen rise in words and actions that are calculated to divide us, and to grow a movement based on fear and hatred.

It's our national shame that more progress hasn't been made on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. We must recognize the legacy of the residential school system, and the ongoing harm Canada's assimilationist policies and laws have on Indigenous peoples. And we must continue to call for respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples to their unceded territories.

We know there's still a great deal of work to do in our country, and our union, to root out racism and discrimination in all its forms. We must work together to stamp out white supremacy and hate wherever we encounter it. This work is the only way to move us all forward, and the only way to build our strength.

Right-wing governments and leaders thrive on disrespect, distrust and division. They're capitalizing on the inequality and insecurity their own policies have created to advance their agenda of greed and exclusion. We must step up our fight for equality and justice.

Solidarity is a powerful tool. Whether it's racism, sexism, homophobia or ableism, our commitment to each other in CUPE is to stand together and do what's right. In our workplaces, in our communities and in the streets, CUPE will stand strong in the fight for justice. Together, we are stronger than those who want to sow the seeds of division and hate.

We face urgent challenges on many fronts, starting with the fight to protect our planet. Climate change threatens us all. Corporate greed has hurt our planet and working people here and around the globe, many of them Indigenous and racialized, will be hit first and hardest. Public services and public sector workers need to be at the heart of the transition to a cleaner, green economy and society.

We must also face up to the mental health crisis in workplaces and our country. Mental illness and addiction are gripping our communities. Resources for people living with mental illness and addiction are too few, and too difficult to access. Many CUPE members are on the front lines of this crisis, doing jobs that take a toll on their mental health, while supporting people who are suffering. We must keep pushing for protection against workplace hazards to our mental health and safety. And it's time to recognize that mental illness and addiction are health care issues, and demand the resources it takes to provide mental health care, without judgement or shame.

Right wing governments from Newfoundland and Labrador to Alberta have intensified the threat to our members. Union rights are under attack in almost every province in Canada. And if the Conservatives manage to regain power federally, our rights as a union will be threatened like they were during the Harper years. Beating back these attacks can feel like an uphill battle. But when we pull together, we can move mountains. Two years ago, CUPE members helped elect a progressive government in British Columbia. After nearly two decades of a right-wing, anti-worker government, we're seeing what's possible when a government respects working people, and sees the value of public services in our communities. By working together, we have helped undo years of harm in the province, making progress for everyone.

Since our union was founded 56 years ago, CUPE members have stood together to fight for social and economic justice, sometimes against long odds. We've taken on governments, corporations and an economic system that's designed to work against us. Faced with employers and governments who are trying to condition our members to accept less, we will continue to do what we've always done: unite to win.

Our 2019-2021 Strategic Directions maps out the next steps in our collective work to move forward on the issues and priorities that matter to us all. It serves as our blueprint for progressive change.

CUPE has a proud history of activism. Our history is written in actions big and small that have changed our workplaces and made life better for people. Actions taken by CUPE members, united and determined. At the bargaining table, in the streets and in the halls of power, we know that together, we can make a difference. It's up to all of us – and we know we're up for the challenge.

## **Building our strength to face the challenges ahead**

Our union is a network of more than 2,000 locals, with a membership that reaches into countless communities in every corner of our country. We will continue to grow our power by strengthening our locals and their ability to connect and mobilize. Over the next two years, we will advance our work to build strong, inclusive union locals, and a strong, united labour movement. We'll also increase our bargaining and activist strength and work with other unions to face the new and growing challenges we face from the election of right-wing governments and growing austerity measures.

### **Expanding our power**

We will keep expanding our power through ongoing member engagement, communication and effective campaigning. We will build our member base by:

- Giving our local unions tools to better connect with members one-on-one, including the ability to access, build and use lists, and encouraging locals to mentor each other and share successful strategies, as part of a comprehensive member engagement program that supports an organizing and direct action approach to our day-to-day work.
- Ensuring all members can fully participate in CUPE by re-engaging our rank and file to become members in good standing.
- Exploring new data tools and digital organizing techniques to supplement our in-person organizing efforts and ensure these are incorporated into our campaign and communications strategies.
- Helping locals to become more inclusive and representative of their membership.
- Building bridges between new and experienced members. As trade unionists we commit to mentoring new activists and providing them space and opportunities to gain experience.

### **Increasing our bargaining strength**

CUPE's bargaining policy draws a clear line: we will not let governments or employers divide us. We won't accept concessions or two-tier contracts that sell out future generations of workers. Too many of our members earn less than \$18 an hour, and work two or more jobs just to get by. We will tap into the power of worker solidarity to increase our bargaining power by:

- Sharing tools and resources that support CUPE locals at all stages of the bargaining process, supporting successful strategies to protect public services and improve members' wages, benefits and working conditions.
- Working with locals to lift the incomes of our members through collective bargaining to achieve living wages that keep up with inflation.
- Bargaining benefits and pensions for part-time, casual and precarious workers where employers exclude them.

- Investing in coordinated and central bargaining, including solidarity pacts, coordinated job action, regional and sectoral strategies, and working with other unions, that increases our bargaining power in the face of increasingly hostile employers, backed by anti-union governments.

## **Organizing the unorganized**

Strong unions build strong communities. As precarious employment rises and governments continue to cut funding and privatize public services, unorganized workers are looking for solutions. They will find a home in CUPE. We will continue to strengthen and grow our union by:

- Exploring new methods of outreach and organizing, including community-based organizing.
- Reviewing and enforcing our existing certifications and organizing unorganized workers in our workplaces.
- Organizing the most vulnerable and most precarious workers in our communities.
- Staying focused on bringing our work back in house and resisting privatization. But where our jobs are privatized, and where contracts are flipped, we will follow our work and re-organize those workers.
- Showcasing and engaging members who represent the strength and diversity of CUPE in our organizing.
- Working with provincial divisions and federations of labour to make it easier for workers to join unions.

## **Defending our members**

Attacks on public services and public sector workers start with attacks on our labour rights, including our right to organize, bargain collectively and strike. They also include forced restructuring, amalgamations and mergers, and privatization. CUPE will continue to take a strong stand whenever workers' rights are under attack, and support locals facing restructuring, privatization and contracting out, ensuring members can continue to benefit from being members of Canada's biggest and best union, by:

- Advocating for labour legislation that supports organizing workers in all sectors and grows the strength of the labour movement.
- Taking legal and political action to oppose and reverse bills and legislation that attack our charter rights, including legislation that limits workers' right to strike or that imposes restrictions on free and fair collective bargaining.
- Dedicating resources to support locals facing restructuring votes.
- Mobilizing our members and supporting fightback campaigns to defend public services from cuts, privatization and restructuring, alongside community members and allied organizations.

## **Protecting and expanding our pensions**

Workplace pensions are our members' deferred wages. Many plans are under growing pressure from employers and some governments, including attacks on secure defined benefit pension plans. We will work to protect retirement security for all our members by:

- Continuing to support our members as they work to protect their pension plans.
- Campaigning to eliminate barriers to pension benefits that exclude precarious workers, who are disproportionately women and racialized workers.
- Promoting and defending defined benefit pension plans.
- Convening a pension summit to share strategies about how to improve access to pensions for workers. The focus of the summit will be negotiating pension coverage for precarious workers.

## **Fighting for safe workplaces**

CUPE will continue to fight for the mental and physical health of all workers. Our next steps in addressing workplace violence include taking on short staffing. Working short is making our workplaces more dangerous and fuelling frustration in people who rely on services. More and more workers are feeling the pressure to work harder and longer than is safe; many are working alone. Violence is never part of the job and CUPE will advocate for change by:

- Demanding adequate staffing levels, reasonable workloads and measures to retain and recruit workers.
- Ensuring members know their right to report violence and to refuse unsafe work, and fighting for legislation to strengthen the right to report and speak up about workplace violence without fear of reprisal.
- Holding employers accountable for preventing workplace violence, enforcing zero tolerance policies and pressing charges where warranted.
- Supporting legislation that amends the criminal code to make assault against our members at work a more serious offence, to create a climate where such assaults are eliminated because of tougher sentences, and supporting our locals to bargain provisions for domestic violence leave and other improvements.
- Advocating for and mobilizing allies to demand more resources and stronger federal and provincial legislation as part of the solution.

We will build our members' power to defend their health and safety rights. This includes working to remove the stigma and shame around "mental health" problems. We will ensure locals have the tools required to identify and address hazards to our mental health in the workplace, and to negotiate the workplace benefits that members need to take care of their mental health. We will also call for government action to ensure better mental health and safety protection for all workers, including:

- Pushing to specifically include protecting mental health as part of employers' duty to provide a healthy and safe workplace.

- Including the recognition of mental health hazards in health and safety legislation.
- Improving compensation systems to ensure timely recognition and treatment of occupational mental health injuries, and meaningful accommodation for workers.

## **Fighting for good jobs**

Too many of our members work in precarious, part-time, casual or seasonal jobs without decent benefits or pensions; many of them are women, racialized workers and young workers. The changing nature of work is also threatening stable and permanent public sector jobs. Automation, advances in artificial intelligence, and the growing reach of digital networks threatens our members' work and their privacy. CUPE will fight for decent jobs now and for the future by:

- Bargaining decent wages and benefits for part time and casual members and promoting the creation of more full-time positions and the conversion of precarious, part-time jobs into full-time work.
- Highlighting the parts of our work that require a human connection and can't be automated without harming the people who depend on us.
- Ensuring that automation is used to do work that is dangerous or difficult for humans, and no members lose their jobs as a direct result of automation.
- Monitoring new technologies and their impacts on public services and public sector jobs, to defend our members and the services they provide, including calling for better legislative protection.



## **Building a class base of power**

Our struggle for workers' rights is deeply connected with the struggles of people in our communities and around the globe who are being left behind. The growing gap between the rich and the rest of us makes it clear which side we're on, and that while there are many and diverse movements for economic, racial and social justice, we share common goals. When we recognize how human rights struggles are interconnected with workers' rights struggles, we broaden and deepen our capacity for community organizing.

Working in coalition and mobilizing in our communities is the only way to defeat privatization, resist union-busting and anti-worker tactics. It's also the best antidote to the racist politics of fear and division. We will keep pushing for changes that make life better for all workers and lift everyone out of poverty. And we will do that by inspiring our members to recognize and understand their role as part of the working class.

## **Tackling challenges in our communities**

Our communities are where we live, work and raise our families. They're also where we experience first-hand the impact of austerity and inequity. As CUPE members, we are deeply connected in our communities and are well-placed to lead grassroots mobilizations for change. We will continue to show leadership on issues that matter to all workers by:

- Fighting for living wages, successor rights, employment equity, pay equity and retirement security.
- Stepping up our fight for universal public services like health care, pharmacare, child care, seniors care and other services that help fight inequality and poverty.
- Deepening our connections with and support for community allies and social movements.
- Focusing on the consequences of inadequate and unaffordable housing and the urgent need for a national housing strategy.
- Building a stronger labour movement, encouraging our activists to participate in the work of their CUPE District Councils, labour councils and federations of labour.

The climate crisis is a working-class issue. Workers, especially from racialized and Indigenous communities, are being asked to bear the costs of climate denial and corporate greed. We are facing a climate emergency, and demand that governments recognize the urgency of this moment. CUPE will work to ensure this crisis isn't used as cover to privatize public sector jobs or further widen inequality, by:

- Advocating for a national strategy to reduce the carbon intensity of an economy that distributes the costs of these changes equitably and fairly.
- Pushing for renewed and expanded public services as part of a just transition to a clean, green economy and society, including expanded public transit.

Fighting for economic equality for all means recognizing the structural barriers that many of our members face in their workplaces. We will continue to amplify the voices of equity-seeking members expressing their concerns and resilience directly, in their own words.

Indigenous, women, racialized, young and LGBTQ2+ workers and workers with disabilities face significant barriers to jobs with good pay, pensions and benefits. We will work to advance the human rights of our members and all workers by:

- Prioritizing real wage gains at the bargaining table, that lift our members up and raise the bar for all workers, whether they are unionized or not.
- Providing members with the tools they need to recognize and fight against white supremacy and racism in all its forms.
- Supporting justice for Indigenous peoples by working with them to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action, and the 231 calls for justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and holding governments and public institutions to account.
- Continuing to promote the International Decade for People of African Descent.
- Defending access to safe drinking water for all, and supporting the movement to recognize this as a universal human right.
- Holding a National Human Rights Conference to give members and locals the knowledge and tools to bring about change and build power by advancing equality.

## **Funding public services**

Liberal and Conservative governments continue to push tax cuts for corporations and the rich. These same governments turn around and claim there's not enough revenue to pay for public services and public sector workers. This leads to privatization and contracting out of public services.

Full funding for public services means everyone needs to pay their fair share. CUPE will demand that governments invest in our communities by:

- Pushing for fair taxation that funds strong and universally accessible public services.
- Supporting fight-back campaigns to stop privatization and contracting out in all its forms.
- Supporting campaigns against corporations and the richest individuals avoiding and evading taxes.
- Lobbying for adequate federal funding for public services across the country, and fighting for increased federal health and social transfers.

## Using our political power

We will build our political power during and between elections, at all levels, so that we change the political climate in this country. We will do this by:

- Promoting and participating in campaigns that focus on good and secure jobs, decent wages and working conditions, safe and healthy workplaces, strong public services, and social justice and fairness, including electoral reform.
- Supporting the election of candidates who understand and share our values by training and supporting members to actively work on NDP campaigns, and run as NDP candidates.
- Encouraging members and locals to engage in all local government elections and politics, and supporting our members to run for office.
- Building and maintaining relationships with elected officials at all levels of government and holding them to account when required.
- Reaffirming our support for the New Democratic Party by continuing our affiliation with the party, and encouraging locals to do the same.
- Defending our rights as a union to participate in the political arena.

## Solidarity across borders

CUPE is deeply committed to international solidarity and global justice. Our international solidarity work is rooted in the reality that at home, in our workplace, and in our communities, our lives are affected by a global economic system that puts profit before people. We will work to build a better world by:

- Continuing to support labour leaders, human rights defenders and social movement organizations from around the world through our relationships with sister unions and through our affiliation with global union federations.
- Working with coalitions and allies to support migrants who arrive here looking for work and for a better life.
- Challenging the Canadian government when they export privatization to poorer nations through “blended financing” that promotes public-private partnerships, and sharing information with our members about this new form of privatization.
- Speaking up when our foreign policy and diplomacy undermine democracy in other countries, when our government countenances violations of international law, when Canada signs trade agreements without regard for human rights, and when the actions of Canadian corporations contribute to climate change, land loss and increasing poverty in other countries.

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