

COUNTERPOINT

FALL 2024

CUPE'S NATIONAL PUBLICATION



FOCUS

Privatizing public electricity services: a poor economic decision



Health & Safety

CUPE leads the way in global occupational health and safety



Tabletalk

Three locals, one goal: How coordination transformed their bargaining strategy



Profile

MARCELA QUINONEZ
National Racial Justice
Committee member



Reconciliation

Star Blanket a call for truth and reconciliation



TOGETHER WE RISE

Inspired by global struggles,
united for change in Canada

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 President's Message**
We all have a role to play in the fight for human rights
- 4 Secretary-Treasurer's Message**
Our movement needs strength and solidarity right now more than ever
- 5 Health & Safety**
CUPE leads the way in global occupational health and safety
- 8 Tabletalk**
Three locals, one goal: How coordination transformed their bargaining strategy
- 12 Global Justice**
CUPE's partners around the globe
- 22 Profile**
MARCELA QUINONEZ
Working for social justice with patience and dedication
- 26 Focus**
Privatizing public electricity services: A poor economic decision
- 31 Economy**
Pierre Poilievre will take a wrecking ball to your pension
- 33 Reconciliation**
Star Blanket a call for truth and reconciliation

ISSN print 1920-2857
ISSN online 1920-2865

Counterpoint is published by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Address all letters to the editor to: comm@cupe.ca

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40005741

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

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A MILITANT LABOUR MOVEMENT FOR A BETTER FUTURE

By **Mark Hancock** – CUPE's National President

As union members, unity is our strength. And we need that strength today more than ever as we fight for a better life for our members, and as we fight the division and the hate the far-right is trying to sow.

From one corner of the country to the next, we are up against right-wing governments who want to dismantle our public services and sell off our public health.

We are up against premiers like Scott Moe and Blaine Higgs who are demonizing trans kids to distract from their own awful records in office. We are up against Conservative leaders who are blaming newcomers and temporary foreign workers for low wages and the housing crisis, instead of the speculative investors who are being allowed to gamble with housing while our members struggle to make ends meet.

The right-wing in Canada knows they lose the debate when the debate is about issues and substance. So instead, they're doing absolutely everything they can to distract from the real challenges that we're facing, and to create fake crises to stall real action. They'll do anything they can to stop real progress for workers and our communities.

That is precisely why we need a strong, and militant, and unified labour movement in this country and around the world.

We need to make sure our members – all 750,000 of us across Canada – know exactly what is at stake in the next federal election. We are going to be Pierre Poilievre's worst nightmare.

Just because he is playing footsy with workers doesn't mean he understands or cares about what workers are going through. He would be the most anti-worker prime minister of all time if he's ever elected.

He voted against anti-scab legislation not once, not twice, but 8 times between 2004 and 2016. He will raise the retirement age to 67 just like Stephen Harper. And he'll take a wrecking ball to our pensions to put all the risk on workers while letting employers off the hook. He'll undo all the progress we've made on fighting climate change. He will cancel pharmacare. He will cancel dental care.

He has dedicated his career to tearing down our social safety net and attacking workers' rights. The fact is, Pierre and the Conservatives don't fight for working people – and they never will. They don't fight corporate greed – they enable it.

And their job is so much easier when folks are scapegoating newcomers and vulnerable minorities.

Working people across this country are angry. We all know how hard it is to pay rent and buy groceries right now. We are all gripping the steering wheel a little too tight thinking about how we're going to provide for our kids, or how we are going to look after our parents.

People are right to be angry. It's not supposed to be this way.

It is our job as union members to capture the fire of peoples' anger and bring people together. And we have seen, time and time again, what we can do when we stand together, united and strong, and show just how powerful worker solidarity truly is!

So my friends, let us be inspired by each other. Let us take courage from one another, from our struggles, and our victories, and meet our challenges head on.



FIGHT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH CARE: THE POLITICAL BATTLE AHEAD

By **Candace Rennick** – CUPE's National Secretary-Treasurer

Canada is in the midst of a public health care crisis. Patients are facing ER closures, long waits for surgery, and a doctor shortage. Health care workers are struggling with fewer resources, heavier workloads and risks to their health and safety.

After decades of cuts, our health care system needs public investment more than ever. But rather than directing health care dollars to build up the public system, governments are instead funnelling money into private, for-profit clinics that charge high user fees and cater to wealthier patients.

This trend is at its worst in provinces with conservative governments. Patients in Quebec who can afford it can pay out-of-pocket for shorter wait times at private clinics. In Ontario, Doug Ford is expanding the list of surgeries that can be delivered in private clinics. Danielle Smith has a plan to turn public administration of some hospitals over to private third parties in Alberta.

Dozens of new health facilities in the Atlantic provinces will be public-private partnerships (P3), where private companies invest in and operate health services for profit while receiving public funding. This is despite the fact that P3 hospitals in Vancouver, Brampton, Montreal, among others, have come in billions of dollars over-budget and failed to meet community needs.

On the federal Liberals' watch, health care is being privatized at a faster and faster rate. Under new bi-lateral agreements, federal funds make up as little as 21% of provincial health care budgets. What's more, only 60% of the funding must be spent on public health care, leaving provinces the option to funnel the rest into for-profit care.

But as dire as it is now, things could get worse. A federal election is on the horizon and Pierre Poilievre is leading in opinion polls. If that support holds, we could see a conservative sweep right across the country.

Poilievre calls himself a champion of the working class, but it's a lie. In his twenty years as a politician, he has voted against the interests of working people at every opportunity.

Although public health care has struggled in the wake of the pandemic, there have been some rays of light. Under the Supply and Confidence Agreement, the federal NDP succeeded in securing prescription drug and dental care, the most meaningful expansion of public Medicare in a generation.

Pierre Poilievre will not say whether he will ax the new programs if elected. But his voting record in the House of Commons shows that he is loyal to big business, not the working class, and we risk losing these vital programs if the Conservatives take power.

If we value our universal public health care system, we are going to have to fight to protect it. We are going to have to talk to our family, friends and neighbours about Poilievre's track record and where his reckless policies will lead us.

In a minority parliament, an election can be called at any moment. When the time comes, I encourage you to volunteer for your local NDP candidate's campaign and to attend candidates' meetings. Let all the parties know that you will be voting to protect health care and all our vital public services.



**SIGN UP FOR CUPE'S POLITICAL
ACTION CAMPAIGN WITH THE
QR CODE TO GET INVOLVED.**



CUPE LEADS THE WAY IN GLOBAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY





CUPE IS CELEBRATING A SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT IN OUR ONGOING COMMITMENT TO WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Troy Winters, CUPE's senior health and safety officer, has been appointed as the convener of the working group for ISO 45001, the global standard for occupational health and safety management systems. This role places CUPE at the forefront of global efforts to enhance workplace health and safety standards.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is an independent, non-governmental international organization that develops and publishes standards to ensure quality, safety and efficiency across various industries. The standards are currently used in over 160 countries, impacting millions of workers worldwide.

One of these standards, ISO 45001, provides a framework for managing health and safety risks in the workplace to protect workers from injuries, illness and death. The ISO 45001 working group is tasked with updating and further developing this standard.

Winters's appointment as convener, or chair, of the ISO 45001 working group is a testament to CUPE's expertise and leadership in occupational health and safety. As the first person from the labour movement to be appointed

to this position, Winters's new role marks a historic milestone.

"This appointment is a recognition of the critical insights that labour brings to the table," he says. "It's an honour to be able to influence global standards that protect workers everywhere."

This is not just a personal accomplishment. It also opens the door for feedback from CUPE locals to set international standards. "Our involvement guarantees that diversity and inclusion are considered in global health and safety standards," Winters emphasizes. He is particularly committed to making sure issues such as pregnancy, gender and age are addressed in these discussions.

CUPE's participation in the ISO 45001 working group showcases our union's dedication to improving workplace health and safety on a global scale.





“Health and safety practices should be informed by the people who are most affected by them,” Winters notes, highlighting the importance of real-world experiences and worker needs in shaping standards. “This is about making tangible improvements in the lives of workers.”

In October 2024, the working group will hold its first in-person meeting in El Salvador. Winters is eagerly anticipating this event. “Meeting face-to-face with experts from around the world is exciting,” he shares. “However, most of our work will be done online, which is both effective and necessary. The hybrid model allows more people to contribute, centring a global perspective.”

The working group expects to refine the ISO 45001 standard over the next three years, with results expected in 2027.

CUPE’s involvement in this international effort will help protect workers and promote safe and healthy work environments. CUPE members can feel confident knowing that their union is at the cutting edge of making workplaces safer for all and proud that our collective voice will have a meaningful impact on workers in and outside Canada.

ABOUT TROY WINTERS

Troy Winters is a senior officer, Health and Safety at CUPE’s national office in Ottawa. He supports local unions with health and safety, he represents CUPE members on government committees, and contributes to developing national and international standards in areas such as occupational health and safety management, infectious disease control and ergonomics. A Certified Registered Safety Professional (CRSP), he also holds certifications in harassment investigation, and in workplace safety auditing, mediation and critical incident stress management.





THREE LOCALS, ONE GOAL: HOW COORDINATION TRANSFORMED THEIR BARGAINING STRATEGY

Just before midnight on March 4, 2024, Luke Daccord, Eriks Bredovskis and about 25 members of their bargaining committees were on the verge of a strike. Unfazed by the possibility of taking over 8,000 workers off the job, the presidents of CUPE 3261 and CUPE 3902 and their teams were calm. There were no frantic last-minute bargaining or sidebar conversations trying to cut a deal. They were simply waiting for a response to the joint proposal that they left with the employer earlier that day.

With minutes to spare, they heard the University of Toronto's response – the wholesale acceptance of the unions' proposal, as-is.

Daccord, a sport facility operator at U of T and president of CUPE 3261, would describe this moment as “by far the most powerful I've ever felt as a union member.”



A week later, CUPE 1230, another U of T local, wrapped up their round of bargaining. Together, the three locals - representing trades and maintenance, academic, and library workers - had negotiated significant gains, coordinated language that level the playing field between the locals, and demonstrated to the university, and to themselves, that three seemingly unrelated groups of workers could unite to improve working conditions for everyone.

Rewind to a few months earlier. CUPE 3261 was preparing for a meeting with the employer and wanted all three of their bargaining units at the meeting. “We explained to them that we have the same managers, the same departments, we should just meet together,” recounts Daccord. “But the employer said ‘No, it’s not going to

happen. Your local is historically divided and you chose to organize yourselves this way. So, we’ll do everything separately.”

With the employer firm in its position, CUPE 3261 decided to control what they could. They prepared their servicing representative, unit representative and president to go in and have the exact same meeting, with the exact same prepared remarks, back to back to back.

With so many different unions at U of T, the administration would set a pattern with one union and use that to bargain similar contracts for the rest. Individually, each of these CUPE locals would have major components of their collective agreements established by patterns set with other unions.

So how did U of T move from refusing to even meet with multiple bargaining units of the same local to accepting a single offer from multiple locals? The CUPE locals at U of T decided that they would ignore the pattern and control their own bargaining. They were tired of letting the employer drive the process. They were tired of letting what other unions negotiated determine their contract. They were tired of leaving bargaining to chance. They focused on organizing their members, coordinating between the locals and banking on open communication.

“Our members wanted a remedy for the years under Bill 124,” says Eriks Bredovskis, president of CUPE 3902, referring to the Conservative government’s wage restraint legislation that capped negotiated wage increases to 1% per year in Ontario.

“We really tried to build majority participation in the local, building up our stewards network and recruiting leaders,” says Eriks Bredovskis, president of CUPE 3902.





And it was through increasing member participation that people started to ask, “Why are we separated? In our local, 20% of unit 5 are also part of unit 1 - it’s literally the same people at the same institution doing the same work.”

To increase member participation the locals looked beyond the standard bargaining strategy. “We had been thinking about the ritual of bargaining,” says Alex Jung, president of CUPE 1230, “which is that some people go into a room to negotiate, but there is this taboo about discussing the bargaining table with our members.” To ensure that the university couldn’t play one local off the other, there needed to be a commitment to transparency with members about bargaining.

“It cannot be overstated,” Daccord echoes, “how crucial transparency was in improving engagement and trust in the bargaining process.” Member communication about what was being discussed at the bargaining

table increased. Joint communications between the three locals kept the discussions focused on what CUPE, not what individual locals, were negotiating with the university.

Moreover, a bargaining conference was held where members of all three CUPE locals got together to discuss their shared cause. “It was about realizing that we are not alone in the workplace,” Bredovskis recalls. “We all have the same workplace, CUPE 3261 members clean CUPE 3902 members’ classrooms, and we all use services provided by CUPE 1230 members.”

Prior to the bargaining conference, the CUPE locals had never really considered themselves to be the biggest union on campus. “I think there was a lot of what I would call consciousness raising,” Daccord says of the bargaining conference. “Just the realization that we can unite and actually act like the biggest union on campus was uplifting.” This meant no

longer feeling like they should take a back seat and have the pattern for bargaining established outside of their control.

The next step was getting the employer to realize that this was not going to be bargaining as usual.

When U of T tried to delay bargaining, the locals filed for no-boards. Instead of taking strike votes early in the bargaining process when key issues hadn’t emerged, the locals waited and conducted their strike votes in the immediate lead up to their strike deadline. This caught the administration off-guard and kicked off a 17-day countdown to a strike for two of the three locals. CUPE 1230 was a week behind to allow for more organizing and discussion before their strike vote. The employer now had to negotiate with the locals together.

“We had a tracker on our website where you could see every single



proposal that all three units had in the latest counteroffers from the university,” Daccord recalls. So, when members voted to strike, they were not just giving a blanket endorsement for the possibility of a strike, they knew exactly what the stakes were. They were indicating to the employer that they were ready to go on strike over a set of specific issues.

By this time, there was very little need for discussion with the employer. The university knew that members were informed about the issues and ready to strike over them. The usual tactics of trying to create a division between the bargaining team and the members would not work. Therefore, the locals focused on preparing their picket lines, and the university had a ticking clock counting down to the strike deadline.

On the eve of the strike deadline, there was little negotiation. The bargaining committees delivered their final proposal in the afternoon, the employer met to review the proposal, accepting it as-is just before midnight.

With a historic deal in place, the members of CUPE 1230, CUPE 3902 and CUPE 3261 learned a valuable lesson about how they can impact the bargaining table. “We don’t just get this deal because the employer just decides to have a change of heart,” Alex Jung says, of the discussion he had with his members prior to their vote. “We’re getting this deal because you organized for it, you’re part of the momentum, so this is the only reason that a deal like this was on the table.”





MEET FIVE LEADERS FROM CUPE PARTNER UNIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE WHO TALK ABOUT THEIR ORGANIZING EFFORTS TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS, LAND, AND PUBLIC SERVICES, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN THEIR WORK.



ARISLEYDIS HIDALGO LEYVA:

Solidarity is about mutual respect

When Arisleydis Hidalgo Leyva talks about international solidarity, she makes it clear that Cuba is the model. Leyva is the secretary-general for the provincial division of Cuba's National Union of Public Administration Workers (SNTAP). She joined CUPE delegates at the National Convention 2023 to share the message that worker solidarity across borders is needed more than ever.

The challenges for workers in Cuba have only grown in the face of the ongoing U.S. blockade and embargo. The U.S. has further tightened restrictions by listing Cuba as a state that sponsors terrorism. It is impossible for the country to import critical raw materials since very few countries have trade agreements with Cuba.

"Since 1961, it has been perhaps the cruellest blockade that has been imposed on any country in history. A blockade that has had not only an economic impact on Cuba, which is its main intention, but that has also become a social blockade, because the economic limitations impose a very difficult social and political dynamic," says Leyva. "It has prevented us from advancing the way we would have liked. And it has had a very strong impact on the labour movement and on workers." Cuban workers are experiencing important drawbacks in an economy without credit, without financing, without raw materials, and with limited means of protection, restricted food sources and a poor quality of life.

But workers are finding creative ways to survive and thrive despite the obstacles, while also continuing to mobilize, organize, and build international solidarity. "Cuba is not going to surrender, it has never surrendered, and the labour movement even less so. The workers have their constitutional recognition, and we will keep resisting stoically," Leyva says.





SNTAP, a big tent union made up of a range of public sector workers, “is the first union founded by Fidel Castro and labour leader Lázaro Peña with the triumph of the revolution,” Leyva explains. The union keeps the example of Cuba’s long history in mind – a history of supporting resistance movements around the world as well as sending Cuban doctors or teachers to countries in need.

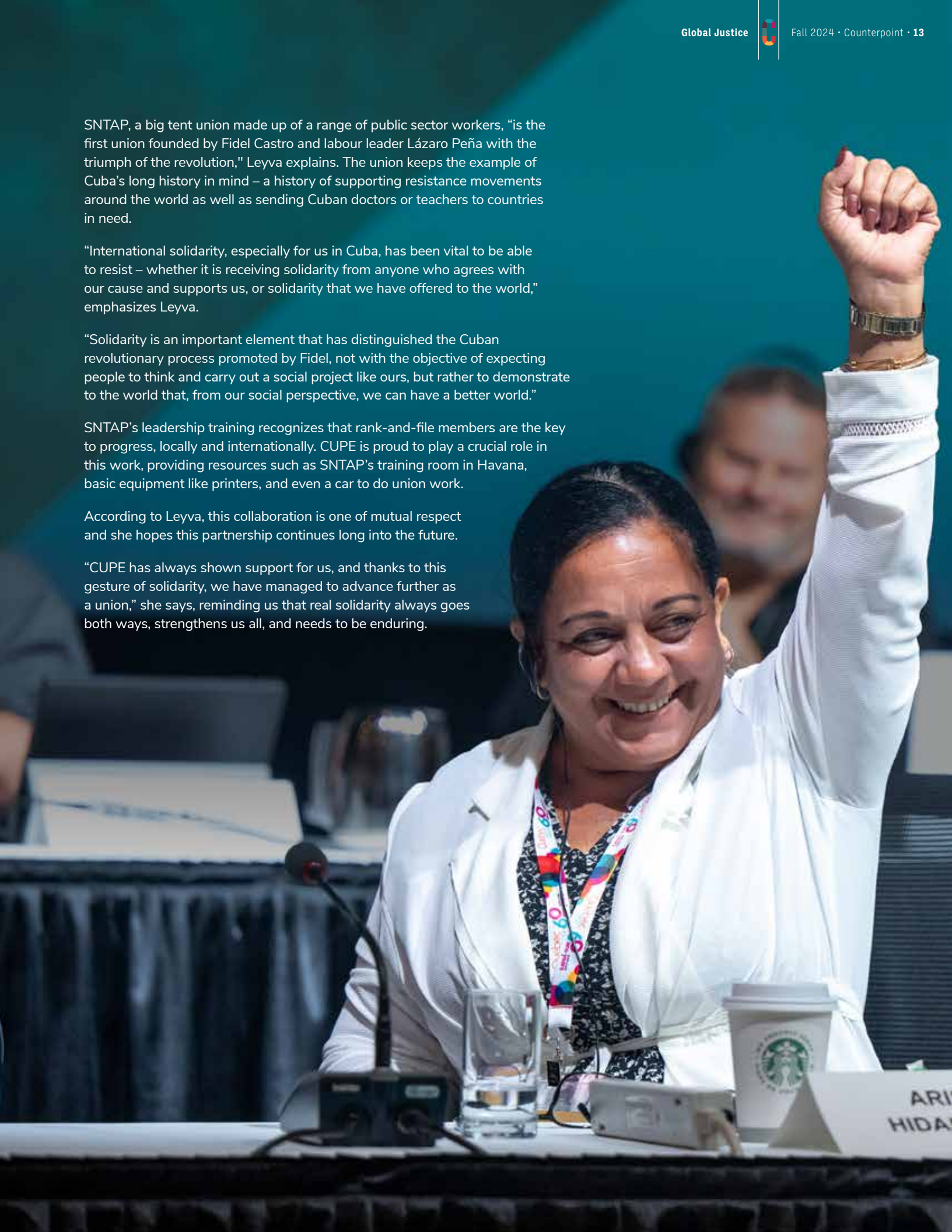
“International solidarity, especially for us in Cuba, has been vital to be able to resist – whether it is receiving solidarity from anyone who agrees with our cause and supports us, or solidarity that we have offered to the world,” emphasizes Leyva.

“Solidarity is an important element that has distinguished the Cuban revolutionary process promoted by Fidel, not with the objective of expecting people to think and carry out a social project like ours, but rather to demonstrate to the world that, from our social perspective, we can have a better world.”

SNTAP’s leadership training recognizes that rank-and-file members are the key to progress, locally and internationally. CUPE is proud to play a crucial role in this work, providing resources such as SNTAP’s training room in Havana, basic equipment like printers, and even a car to do union work.

According to Leyva, this collaboration is one of mutual respect and she hopes this partnership continues long into the future.

“CUPE has always shown support for us, and thanks to this gesture of solidarity, we have managed to advance further as a union,” she says, reminding us that real solidarity always goes both ways, strengthens us all, and needs to be enduring.





LEOCADIO JURACÁN SALOMÉ:

A story union activists must care about

There has been significant political and social change in Guatemala over the past year, with renewed hopes that human rights will be upheld, reaching levels last seen during the 1996 peace accords. The unexpected election in 2023 of Bernardo Arévalo, an anti-corruption reformist president, marks a crucial breakthrough in the country's history.

Leocadio Juracán Salomé is the agrarian reform coordinator and a driving force behind CUPE's partner in Guatemala, the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA), a social justice movement active in over 70 communities. They have seen progress in negotiations on land issues with the new minority government, though its scope of action is limited as the judicial system remains controlled by corrupt officials.

Following Arévalo's election, Guatemala saw mass mobilizations to defend the democratic process – the largest since the 1944 revolution. Juracán joined the crowds rallying against right-wing attempts to overturn Arévalo's victory.

"It is the people who came out because they are tired of it all, tired of decades of corruption and oppression," he says. Many protestors were workers and residents of marginalized urban communities whose struggles are intertwined with their Indigenous identities.

"The CCDA fights against repression and the intimidation tactics of companies and right-wing politicians. Our struggle is for the dignity and rights of farmers and Indigenous peoples," Juracán explains. "But the cost of our fight is steep." The CCDA has lost 12 leaders to assassinations, and many more face imprisonment or threats. More than 1,060 CCDA members have capture orders against them.

Juracán is Kaqchikel Maya with a long history of activism. Abducted by the Guatemalan military during the civil war in the 1990s, his journey is an inspiring example of resilience. "We urge Canadians to scrutinize the information war waged by corrupt governments and the oligarchy. Diplomatic pressure is crucial to protect activists and defend democracy," he emphasizes.

Juracán fondly recalls the humble beginnings of Café Justicia, a fair-trade coffee grown by farmers on co-ops and processed by the CCDA. "In 1982, with the support of a church, we acquired our first coffee farm. What started with Canadian students from Vancouver helping us distribute

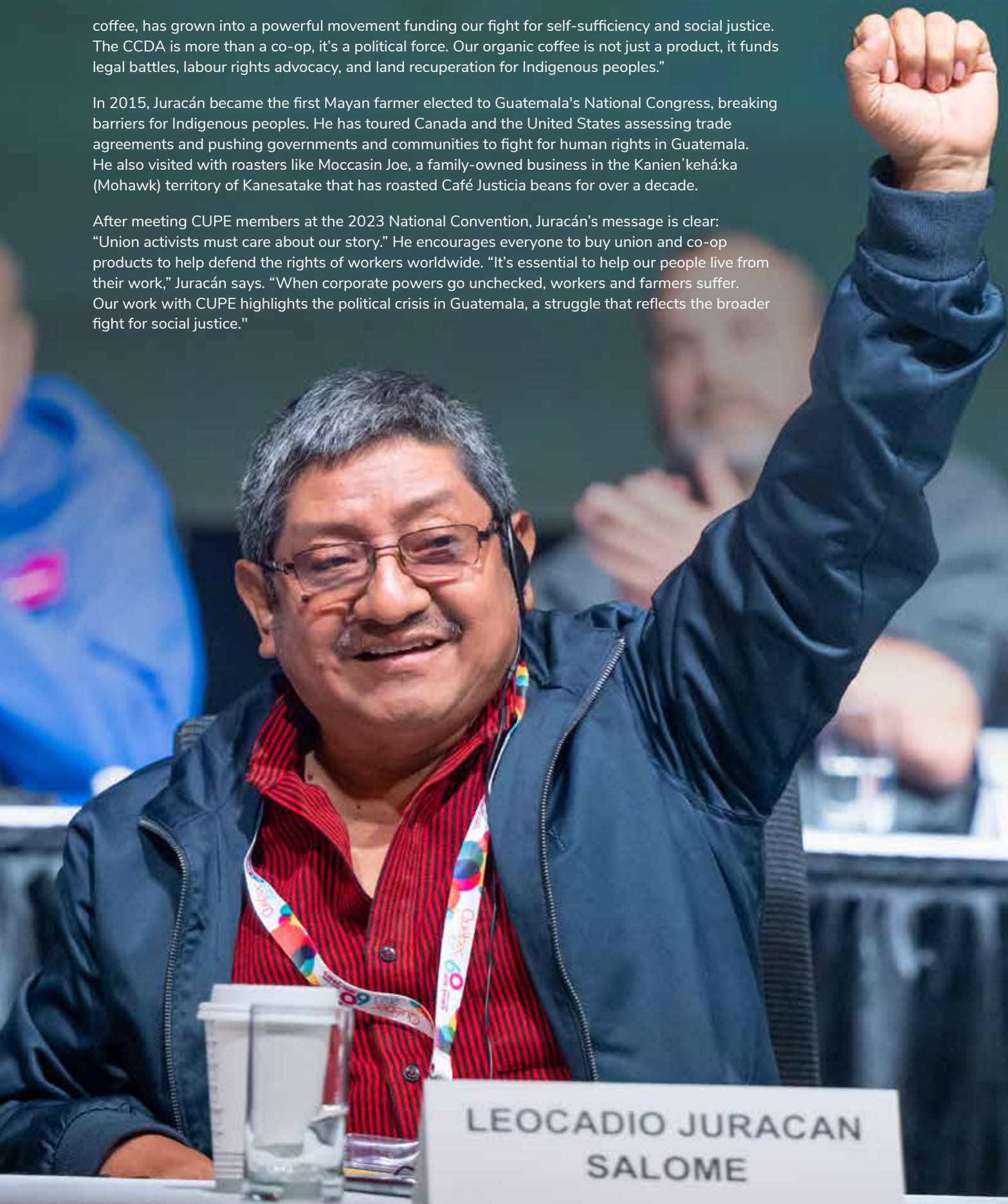




coffee, has grown into a powerful movement funding our fight for self-sufficiency and social justice. The CCDA is more than a co-op, it's a political force. Our organic coffee is not just a product, it funds legal battles, labour rights advocacy, and land recuperation for Indigenous peoples."

In 2015, Juracán became the first Mayan farmer elected to Guatemala's National Congress, breaking barriers for Indigenous peoples. He has toured Canada and the United States assessing trade agreements and pushing governments and communities to fight for human rights in Guatemala. He also visited with roasters like Moccasin Joe, a family-owned business in the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) territory of Kanesatake that has roasted Café Justicia beans for over a decade.

After meeting CUPE members at the 2023 National Convention, Juracán's message is clear: "Union activists must care about our story." He encourages everyone to buy union and co-op products to help defend the rights of workers worldwide. "It's essential to help our people live from their work," Juracán says. "When corporate powers go unchecked, workers and farmers suffer. Our work with CUPE highlights the political crisis in Guatemala, a struggle that reflects the broader fight for social justice."





RAYMOND BASILIO: Trade unionists must always be on guard

For Raymond Basilio, union organizing is a question of life and death. As the secretary-general of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) - Philippines, Basilio draws courage from the 240,000 educators he represents. Extra-judicial killings, forced disappearances, arrests, and detention of unionists are a reality in his country.

ACT was founded in the 1980s during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. “From our inception, we recognized the importance of education in empowering individuals and communities, and have worked to ensure this power is harnessed for the greater good,” Basilio recalls.

Basilio spoke at CUPE’s 2019 National Convention while facing death threats. He addressed CUPE delegates again at the 2023 National Convention, this time without private security and largely free of safety concerns back in the Philippines.

The Philippines remains in the top 10 worst countries for workers, according to the International Trade Union Confederation’s 2024 Global Rights Index. Violations of workers’ rights keep piling up while government policies and right-wing lobbies are making it difficult for unions to negotiate on behalf of their members.

“In response to workers’ continuing calls for labour rights, respect, better wages and working conditions, the government has implemented repressive policies that directly curtail academic freedom, our rights to association and to collective bargaining,” says Basilio. “Leaders and legitimate unions are red-tagged and called terrorists. Local leaders in my union face harassment and intimidation.”

He sees many connections between the struggles of Canadian and Filipino education workers fighting for a better life and for equitable access to quality education.

“The education sector plays a pivotal role in shaping the future, both in the Philippines and around the world. The challenges we face in an overworked, undersupported, underpaid and under attack system must be addressed through collective action,” says Basilio.

“Solidarity across borders allows us to tackle common issues like wage disparities and the protection of workers’ rights with a united front. The lessons learned can create a ripple effect, improving conditions for workers around the world.”



His faith in organizing despite all obstacles comes from his country's history of opposing colonization and toppling dictators. That history holds a key lesson for us all: right-wing governments are on the rise, and gains that feel secure to union members are vulnerable.

"Right-wing governments are organizing and sharing ideas on how to repress us. As workers, we must organize and share ideas on how to fight back together to create a better and just society for workers and for all people," says Basilio. "Trade unionists must always be on guard. Progress isn't guaranteed."

Basilio sees the power of international solidarity as our greatest asset. Solidarity allows us to share experiences and strategies to protect our hard-won gains, and to face the challenges that connect us across borders. ACT is collaborating with other unions and community organizations to keep mobilizing for justice and fairness for workers in the Philippines and worldwide. Basilio is grateful for CUPE members' continuing support.

"When we are under attack, CUPE never fails to be our voice overseas. When our schools for Indigenous peoples were closed down, you echoed our resistance. Whenever we cannot speak, CUPE along with other unions speaks for us. Thank you CUPE for your strong solidarity!"





JEAN BONALD GOLINSKY FATAL:

There is no democracy without unions

As the Haitian people continue to weather ongoing political and economic instability, the need for Haitian-led solutions – not foreign intervention – is clear. The president of Haiti’s Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers, Jean Bonald Golinsky Fatal, is helping build a labour-community coalition that is organizing for desperately-needed change.

Fatal shared some of Haiti’s history and struggles in a speech to CUPE’s 2023 National Convention, thanking our members for decades of unwavering solidarity with the Haitian labour movement.

Haitian slaves rose up in 1791 and fought a revolution that won their freedom and independence from French colonial rule. France and other colonial powers retaliated with a punishing embargo, ultimately forcing Haiti to pay the present-day equivalent of nearly US\$40 billion to France in “reparations” to slave owners.

“This ransom paid to France was, and continues to be, a burden for us,” says Fatal. “Since then, everything has been done to destabilize my country. Leaders, policies and programs have been imposed with the complicity of foreign countries, including Canada, and a right-wing elite in Haiti.”

Fatal is passionate about the importance of public services, especially in developing countries. “The next generations can have a promising future if public services like education, health care, public transit and electricity stay public. A country’s standard of living is measured by looking at its public services. There is no acceptable and dignified standard of living without high-quality public services that are accessible to all.”

He describes the painful experiences of countries in the South, including Haiti, where the International Monetary Fund led the privatization of public services. He shares the example of Haiti’s cement plant, once a state-owned company. Today, the country imports cement and the plant workers are unemployed. It’s a similar story for other former state-owned companies that have been privatized in areas like telecommunications and sugar production.

“We were self-sufficient. Now, we import goods and workers face unemployment and poverty. These workers’ children have nothing to do except join gangs. When public services are attacked, this is the result,” says Fatal.





Fatal believes everyone has the duty and the obligation to join the fight for public services because privatization worsens the attacks on all our rights. “It’s important to fight any privatization of public services because privatizing them will create even more poverty while building up a small group of wealthy people,” he says. “These experiences show you don’t have to wage war to destroy a country, all you have to do is attack public services to reduce the population to indignity, suffering and poverty.”

He also stresses that unions are “the engine of democracy” and workers are the first line of defense for human rights. “There is no democracy without unions!” Fatal adds.

He warns us not to be fooled by the “right-wing machine that is constantly attacking unions with its destructive rhetoric, spreading lies about unions being useless and having no role. A country without unions, or where unions are weak, is a country where people can’t have a dignified life.” Thus, when CUPE members make decisions that enhance the working and living conditions of over 750,000 workers across Canada, their positive impact extends beyond Canadian society and future generations, reaching countries like Haiti.



BERENICE CELEITA ALAYON:

Keep fighting for transformation

When it comes to fighting the Colombian government to improve working people's rights, defend communities, and stop the killing of human rights defenders, there's no better champion than human rights activist Berenice Celeita Alayon.

For decades, this fiercely courageous leader stared down right-wing regimes opposed to her very existence — governments that not only refused to meet with her, but also left her exposed to assassination threats.

However, since the 2022 election of Gustavo Petro as president and Francia Márquez as vice-president, Celeita has faced a new challenge: convincing a more progressive government to fast-track the major reforms that Colombia and its people so desperately need after years of violent exploitation.

Celeita is the leader of the Association for Research and Social Action (Nomadesc). During her visit to CUPE's 2023 National Convention, she urged CUPE members to keep their international solidarity alive to defend communities and save lives.

The election of a progressive government drew unprecedented participation from Black, Indigenous and rural communities. "This open participation, especially in Bogotá, is historic. For the first time in 212 years, the Plaza de Bolívar and everywhere around were flooded with rural residents from different parts of the country," says Celeita.

Since then, the new government has been willing to meet with trade unions. Encouraging as that is, change has been slow and structural reform elusive.

"Inequity in Colombia is deep and persistent," says Celeita. "The fact that the vast majority of workers don't even earn the minimum wage is a very big challenge, further complicated by the fact that the right continues to attack the social justice movement."

Nomadesc's staff is regularly followed, their office has been monitored and their phones tapped. They continue to receive death threats, even after the election. Safety and security remain a top concern because the police, army and state security agencies have not yet been reformed.





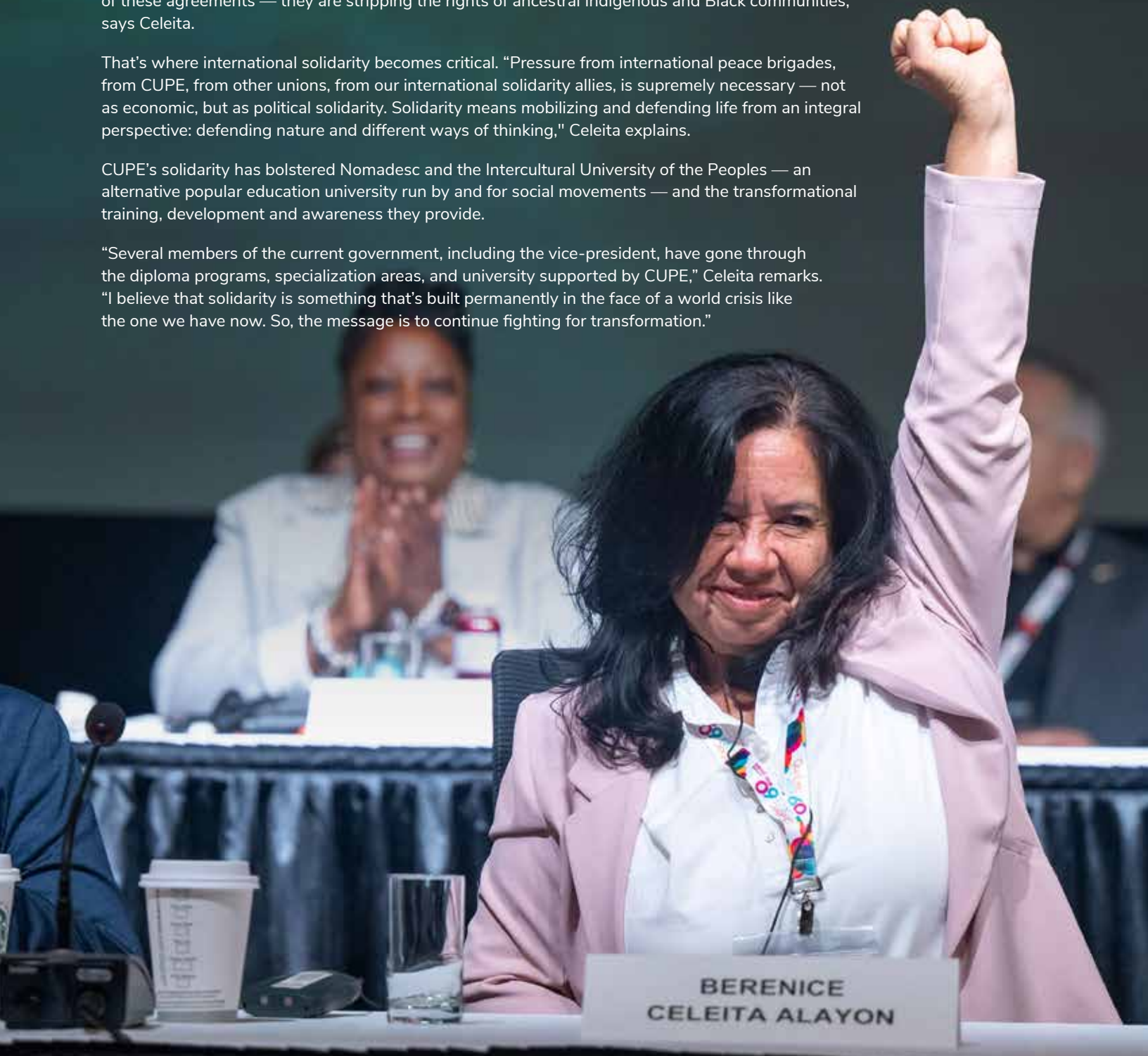
The power of global capital is another major obstacle to systemic change. Colombia is a party to 17 free trade agreements that require the exploitation of natural resources in targeted communities.

There is widespread public opposition to extractivism — the unchecked extraction of natural resources — especially mining, where Canadian companies have long been present. But it is hard to hold these companies to account because they keep changing their names to avoid litigation while continuing their operations in Colombia. “It’s not only our natural resources that suffer because of these agreements — they are stripping the rights of ancestral Indigenous and Black communities,” says Celeita.

That’s where international solidarity becomes critical. “Pressure from international peace brigades, from CUPE, from other unions, from our international solidarity allies, is supremely necessary — not as economic, but as political solidarity. Solidarity means mobilizing and defending life from an integral perspective: defending nature and different ways of thinking,” Celeita explains.

CUPE’s solidarity has bolstered Nomadesc and the Intercultural University of the Peoples — an alternative popular education university run by and for social movements — and the transformational training, development and awareness they provide.

“Several members of the current government, including the vice-president, have gone through the diploma programs, specialization areas, and university supported by CUPE,” Celeita remarks. “I believe that solidarity is something that’s built permanently in the face of a world crisis like the one we have now. So, the message is to continue fighting for transformation.”







PROFILE MARCELA QUINONEZ

WORKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE WITH PATIENCE AND DEDICATION

Marcela Quinonez grew up in Colombia, and today, she works as a contract manager at Hydro-Québec. Alongside her career, she has been a passionate advocate for social justice, dedicating herself since childhood to initiatives that support vulnerable communities.

Marcela embodies resilience, solidarity, and perseverance. She is living proof that no matter how many obstacles you encounter, it is always possible to keep moving forward – even if it's just one small step at a time. She shares her journey, her beliefs, and her involvement in CUPE, while shedding light on the challenges she has faced as an immigrant.

Question 1

You grew up in Colombia in a family very involved in social causes. How did your upbringing shape your journey?

In Colombia, my parents instilled in me a deep love for social engagement. We were a middle-class family, but we lived in the countryside where I grew up surrounded by farms. There was a lot of injustice, inequality, and poverty around us. Every year, my parents would save some money, and we would go to the grocery store to buy rice, vegetables, coffee, and even candy for children. We would then distribute these bags of food in the poorest neighborhoods. That act of solidarity had a huge impact on me and gave me a strong desire to help others, especially the most vulnerable.

As I got older, I got involved in various initiatives in Colombia, particularly helping women in rural areas. This desire to help others followed me to Quebec, where I continue to be involved in different ways.

Question 2

You immigrated to Canada 15 years ago. What was your integration like, especially in terms of language and employment?

Integration wasn't easy. When I arrived in Quebec, I didn't speak French. I couldn't even say "hello." My mother tongue is Spanish, and I spoke English, but French was a whole new challenge. Not everyone had access to French language classes. My first teachers were my kids, who were just 4 and 7 years old. They were learning French in school and had the huge responsibility of teaching it to their mom! It feels like sometimes, our choices as parents make our kids grow up a little bit faster. I also started volunteering to have more opportunities to practice the language — and to help others!

Like many immigrants, I had to start at the bottom. I cleaned toilets and worked in warehouses, having to prove myself despite already having a bachelor's degree. Now, I work at Hydro-Québec, managing contracts with engineering and architecture firms for our various facilities. I'm proud of my journey, but the obstacles are real



for minority women, especially when you don't speak the language and don't have a network. It's hard to break through all those glass ceilings. I was lucky, but not everyone has that same luck.

Question 3

What challenges have you encountered in the workplace? Do you think most immigrants face similar challenges?

As an immigrant, a woman, and a racialized person, I found myself at the intersection of many challenges. I faced discrimination, racism, sexual harassment, and bullying. One of the hardest things is that you often feel alone. When I went through these experiences, I couldn't find anyone I could trust or talk to, there was no one who looked like me. It felt very heavy.

That's when I decided to become that person that others can trust. I wanted to be the one who represents women and racialized people, who encourages them to speak up without fear of losing their job or stability.

We need to bring up the reality of immigrants more often within our union. We need to talk about job insecurity, immigration statuses that are often misunderstood, racism, and the importance of being able to express themselves in their native language.

Question 4

Have you witnessed any changes in terms of openness, inclusion, and representation since you arrived?

In Canada, I was often made to feel like I was different. In Colombia, I was like everyone else. When you're subtly made to feel like you don't belong here, it creates anger. That anger is legitimate, but it can become harmful if you don't know how to direct it.

That's why I encourage union members to turn that anger into a positive force. I often tell them: "Let's use that anger as a strategic and intelligent tool, to channel it into the right actions." It's important to find constructive ways to move things forward, and that's what I try to do every day, both at work and through my social commitments.

But yes, I do think we're making progress. I've seen improvements in my union and my local: there is more representation of minorities, more women, and a better understanding of issues related to discrimination. Things are moving forward, slowly but steadily.

What I'd like to say to my colleagues working in social justice is that we need to develop our sense of patience. That's what keeps our hope alive because if everyone loses hope, there will be no one left to defend our rights and freedoms.

Question 5

What motivates you to stay engaged within CUPE, and how important is your work, and the union's work for immigrants and racialized people?

CUPE plays an essential role. As a member of the National Racial Justice Committee, I've seen how important it is to have safe spaces where we can talk openly about racism, discrimination, and sexism. Thanks to my union, I was able to organize workshops for workers from ethnocultural communities at Hydro-Québec. These workshops allow us to discuss the issues that affect us without having to hold back.

CUPE has implemented an anti-racism strategy, which is a big step forward. It's a very comprehensive document that provides us with guidelines and recommendations. But the strategy is just a lever. It's up to us to take action and move things forward on the ground.

I would also like to invite people to be more curious, to give themselves the privilege to speak with someone they wouldn't normally be acquainted with. It takes openness and empathy to break down unconscious bias.



Question 6

You are also very involved as a volunteer, particularly with women victims of domestic violence and temporary foreign workers. Why is it important for you to continue this work?

I was shaken by domestic violence and oppression. I don't see myself as a victim, but as a survivor. This is an issue that affects many people in our society, and it deserves more attention. We must talk about it, raise awareness, and show that it's important to stop living in fear because there is a way out.

It's also crucial for me not to treat people who live and work here, like seasonal or migrant workers, as if they were invisible. They are essential and contribute to our economy.

I live in the Laurentians, where there are a lot of temporary agricultural workers. They go to the grocery store, and often no one talks to them, as if they don't exist. In most cases, they don't have access to French language classes, and without communication, they can't build social connections. I'm lucky to speak Spanish, so I approach them, talk to them, help them at the checkout, and I am rewarded with their smile. It's a simple way of showing them that they are seen, that they exist. Their resilience is inspiring. It's important to give them that legitimacy and acknowledge them as human beings who belong in our communities.

My social involvement has always been driven by a desire to hear what others have to say, to make a difference in their lives and ensure no one is left in the shadows. It's not just a matter of having access to housing, education, and health care – there are so many other factors that need to be considered. Everyone deserves to find a place where they feel good. I deeply believe that everyone deserves to be seen, heard, and recognized.



PRIVATIZING PUBLIC ELECTRICITY SERVICES: A POOR ECONOMIC DECISION



In June 2024, the Quebec government introduced a major piece of legislation outlining its vision for the future of electricity services in the province. Bill 69 has raised concerns, particularly because it paves the way for private projects in electricity production and transmission, challenging the Quebec model that has been in place since 1963. CUPE is actively participating in the parliamentary hearings on Bill 69.

At the beginning of the year, CUPE locals at Hydro-Québec launched a public campaign warning against any plans to privatize the crown corporation and public electricity services. The large-scale campaign was featured on television, online, and on giant billboards throughout Montreal and Quebec City.



“Public electricity services are a major driver of socioeconomic development. They allow us to control electricity prices while also having a say on regional economic development. In addition, Hydro-Québec contributes significantly to our communities, helping to fund health care and education,” says Patrick Gloutney, CUPE’s general vice-president for Quebec.

CUPE members are concerned that the bill, introduced by former Minister of Economy, Innovation and Energy Pierre Fitzgibbon, will harm Quebec society. They point out that the government was not elected to dismantle the Quebec model.

“Our collective asset is being squandered bit by bit. Hydro-Québec’s mission has been distorted by the reintegration of private interests into the energy sector, and Quebecers will not emerge from this unscathed,” warns Patrick Gloutney. “All around the world, privatization of electricity services, whether in production or distribution, has led to higher residential rates, inequitable distribution of private company profits, and diminished access to electricity. Electricity produced by private companies will cost Hydro-Québec more, which will be passed directly to customers, all of us Quebecers.”

A symposium and a petition

Faced with the Quebec government’s determination to open more of the energy sector to private interests, CUPE Quebec organized a symposium on March 14, 2024, attended by hundreds of members. Several experts spoke about the potential consequences of the government’s priorities. It was also an opportunity to present new data and research in support of maintaining public electricity services.



“In short, the experts confirm that the government is selling off our energy capacity at bargain prices without having made any serious plans for the sector. The ideological fixation of the Legault government on benefiting private sector players is draining money from public resources that are crucial for our public services,” explains Pierre-Guy Sylvestre, an economist at CUPE Quebec.

There is no evidence to suggest that the private sector is more economically efficient than the public sector when it comes to providing public services. Whether it is water management, electricity services, or even waste collection, privatization has not been shown to lower costs or improve service quality. In fact, the opposite is often true. In water management, privatizing water services has led to decreased quality because companies have little incentive to invest in infrastructure, which also drives up costs. For electricity services, price hikes have been observed following privatization in the industry.

History of Electricity Services in Quebec

1879

Thomas Edison, an American inventor and entrepreneur, invents and commercializes the electric lightbulb.

1882

The Pearl Street Station in New York is commissioned by the Edison Illuminating Company, founded in 1880, marking an important step in the development of the emerging electricity production and distribution industry.

1897

A steam power station on Rue De La Montagne is commissioned by the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Company.

1898

The Shawinigan Water and Power Company is founded, becoming Quebec's largest producer, transmitter, and distributor of electricity for more than half a century.

1902

The Shawinigan-1 hydroelectric station is commissioned. The Northern Aluminium Company (now known as Alcan) is also established.

1902 to 1944

Regional monopolies dominate Montreal and other parts of Quebec, primarily controlled by the Montreal Heat and Power Company and the Shawinigan Water and Power Company. Other key players include Quebec Power, Southern Canada Power, Saint-Maurice Power, Gatineau Power, Compagnie de pouvoir du Bas-Saint-Laurent, Compagnie électrique du Saguenay, Northern Quebec Power, Compagnie électrique de Mont-Laurier, Compagnie électrique de Ferme-Neuve and Compagnie de pouvoir de La Sarre. Along with The Northern Aluminium Company (later renamed to Alcan) and the Belgo-Canadian Pulp and Paper Company (later called Abitibi-Consolidated).



Hydro-Québec workers are urging the public concerned by Quebec government decisions to send a letter to elected officials and oppose the push to privatize public electricity services.

“We need to take a stand against a bill that does nothing to advance the energy transition. Instead, it allows private companies to seize control of Quebec’s exceptional economic potential in wind and hydroelectric power. The cost of letting private companies profit from business opportunities derived from our natural resources is enormous, and it would be irresponsible to let the current government continue down this path of economic and political decisions, which will benefit only a few at the expense of millions of people,” says Pierre-Guy Sylvestre.



April 14, 1944

Adélard Godbout’s Liberal government passes Bill 17, establishing the publicly owned **Hydro-Québec**. Montreal Heat and Power, Montreal Island Power and Beauharnois Light, Heat and Power Company are nationalized. This economic policy aimed to stabilize the networks, expand hydroelectric production and distribution, provide service to rural areas, and reduce unfair and inflated electricity rates.

August 8, 1944

The Union Nationale, led by Maurice Duplessis, wins the election. The new crown corporation continues the rural electrification mandate.

1959

Jean Lesage’s Liberal party wins the election.

1962

The Commission of Inquiry on Natural Resources and Industrial Development in Quebec, chaired by engineer Robert A. Tanguay, recommends the nationalization of electricity services in Quebec.

1963

The Régie de l’énergie is established.

April 14, 1963

The Act respecting the Régie de l’énergie (Bill 16) is passed, transitioning electricity production and distribution to public management. From this point onward, electricity services are publicly controlled.

The two phases of electricity nationalization enabled Hydro-Québec to become one of the largest electricity producers in North America.



Privatization a major barrier to racial justice

The growing push by governments and corporations to privatize public services is harming Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities. CUPE's research report entitled *The Colour of Privatization* shows how for-profit services worsen racial and economic inequity for groups who are already disadvantaged because of past and ongoing injustices.

The *Colour of Privatization* shares the stories of Indigenous, Black and racialized CUPE members working in public services such as the energy sector. Corporations and their shareholders profit when public services are privatized. The report shows how these profits come at the direct expense of Black, Indigenous and racialized workers who work in contracted-out services, or who depend on these services.

The *Colour of Privatization* shows that privatization drives down wages, erodes working conditions and shreds quality public services. The report calls on governments at all levels to walk their talk about racial and gender equity by protecting workers and their communities from the consequences of privatization.

Read *The Colour of Privatization* report or order printed copies: cupe.ca/privatization-major-barrier-racial-justice-cupe-report

Use CUPE's collective bargaining guide that helps locals stop privatization in its tracks – *Protecting our work from privatization: How to fight contracting out at the bargaining table*: cupe.ca/new-bargaining-guide-helps-locals-fight-privatization





PIERRE POILIEVRE WILL TAKE A WRECKING BALL TO YOUR PENSION

Pierre Poilievre has been an MP for a long time — so long, in fact, he was only 31 when he qualified for his MP pension, worth an estimated \$120,000 per year.

Nevertheless, throughout his time in office, Pierre has never shied away from an opportunity to weaken pensions and retirement security for his fellow Canadians.

In 2012, **Pierre voted to increase the age of eligibility for Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) from 65 to 67** — a move that forced low-income seniors to work an additional two years past their expected retirement age in order to fund the Conservative government's corporate tax cuts.

Thanks to the relentless pressure by CUPE, labour, and the NDP, this draconian Harper policy was reversed in 2015. But business groups and right-wing think-tanks are clamoring

for it to be reinstated. Who do you think Pierre will listen to if he's elected?

Also in 2012, when it was clear that Canada desperately needed to expand its public pension system, **Pierre and his fellow ideologues in the Harper government created a for-profit plan run by banks and insurance companies.** Under the Pooled Registered Pension Plan (PRPP) employer participation and contributions are voluntary. It's no wonder Pierre loved the PRPP, a plan that was designed to enrich

the financial sector while doing little to help ordinary Canadians toward a stable retirement.

It's no wonder the model was a spectacular failure either. A decade later, the federal financial watchdog and documents obtained through the Access to Information Act say the model covers very few workers, and very few employers are contributing.

Later in 2012, **Pierre argued that corporate tax cuts would trickle down and strengthen pension plans.** The corporate tax cuts happened — but, unsurprisingly, workplace pension coverage has continued to decline.

In 2014, Pierre was part of an effort by the Harper government to push the target-benefit pension model and to adopt measures that allow employers to convert defined-benefit plans to target-benefit plans. These plans shift the risk from employers to workers and provide little stability for pension benefits during retirement. In other words, **Pierre promoted allowing employers to abandon the pension they promised to workers** — even for retirees and already-earned benefits.



In 2016, **Pierre voted against expansion of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), the most significant improvement to Canada's public pension system in 50 years.** Canada's financial industry has a long record of opposing CPP expansion — and when it really mattered, Pierre sided with the banks and profiteers against Canadian workers.

No thanks to Pierre and the Conservatives, CPP was expanded and workers are now earning CPP benefits that are at least 33% greater

than they would have been if Pierre was Prime Minister.

In 2021, **Pierre voted against a 10% increase to the Old Age Security pension for those aged 75 and above,** a measure that was passed despite his objection and that helped more than 3.5 million seniors across Canada that year alone.

Where will we be if Pierre's Conservatives are elected? Last time they were in power, they brought in the biggest cut to Canada's public pension system in history — a cut they never campaigned on. There's no reason to expect anything different next time around.

Pierre has already committed to replacing public sector pensions with defined contribution plans that favour employers and shortchange workers. If they had their way, we would all be retiring years later, with weaker CPP and OAS, and employers would be allowed to walk away from their pension promises to workers.

Any time Conservatives come to power, they take a wrecking ball to our pensions, and it takes years to fix their mistakes. There is no one in Canada's Parliament more dedicated to weakening workers' ability to retire with dignity than Pierre Poilievre.





STAR BLANKET

A call for
truth and
reconciliation

A beautiful Star Blanket in the lobby of CUPE's national office is a powerful reminder of CUPE's commitment to truth and reconciliation.

Debra Merrier, diversity vice-president for Indigenous workers presented the blanket to CUPE's national officers at a ceremony during the 2022 Sector Council Conference.

Merrier worked on the Star Blanket with National Executive Board members who helped her trace and cut the fabric while learning and sharing stories and laughter.

The blanket represents the seven Grandfather Teachings: Love, Honesty, Respect, Humility, Truth, Wisdom and Bravery.

The blanket colours are red representing Indigenous peoples, blue for sky and water, yellow for sun, brown for the land, green for the trees, beige representing togetherness and walking side by side, and orange for truth and reconciliation and reminding us of Orange Shirt Day and that Every Child Matters.



CUPE's national officers Candace Rennick and Mark Hancock with Debra Merrier, national diversity vice-president, and National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's Marion McKenzie, director of major and corporate gifts, Stephanie Scott, executive director, and Raymond Frogner, senior director of research/head of archives.





CUPE members at the 2022 National Sector Council Conference wrote more than 270 messages of reconciliation on the orange ribbons that fan out around the blanket.

We are all called to understand the truth about colonization and its legacies for Indigenous peoples, and

to act for meaningful reconciliation. Learn how you can build solidarity with Indigenous peoples with these two CUPE guides:

Walking the talk: A practical guide to reconciliation for CUPE locals:
cupe.ca/walking-talk-practical-guide-reconciliation-cupe-locals

Truth and reconciliation: CUPE taking action through collective bargaining:
cupe.ca/cupe-launches-truth-and-reconciliation-bargaining-guide





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