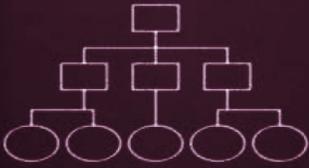


COUNTERPOINT

SPRING 2026

CUPE'S NATIONAL PUBLICATION



FOCUS

Organizing lessons from the front lines

Tabletalk

How the workers at SickKids Hospital in Toronto won a fair pension plan

Economy

Cut here, pay there: How federal budget cuts end up on your credit card bill

Global Justice

CUPE at COP30: "We're overwhelmed" as climate change accelerates

Reconciliation

More than a holiday: Preparing for June 21 and September 30 with purpose

Equity

Celebrating Black History Month 2026: Honouring Carol Wall



CUPE

A union that fights, grows and wins

CUPE / Canadian Union of Public Employees

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RENEWING AND STRENGTHENING OUR MOVEMENT IN 2026 AND BEYOND

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

Over the past decade, one thing has become abundantly clear to me: workers want a union that fights, grows, and wins. And across this country, they're choosing CUPE.

When I was first elected national president in 2015, CUPE stood just over 630,000 members strong. Just recently, our union passed an extraordinary milestone: more than 800,000 members from coast to coast to coast.

That growth didn't happen by accident. It's the result of sustained organizing, deep member engagement, and a union that reflects the diversity, courage, and determination of working people in Canada.

In recent years, CUPE has worked tirelessly to organize tens of thousands of new workers – education workers in Alberta, health care workers in Ontario, flight attendants in the Yukon, firefighters in Quebec, and so many more – who had never before had the protection of a strong union. In every sector, we've shown that when workers are facing privatization and precarity, and where they are fighting for better pay and respect, CUPE is ready to stand with them and fight alongside them.

Growing our membership matters because it strengthens everything we do. It gives us more power at the bargaining table, giving us leverage to fight for better wages and working conditions, and to push back against austerity and contracting out. It also gives us

the political strength to win real change – like anti-scab legislation, affordable child care, and new health care programs that benefit millions of people.

As we know, building our strength as a union doesn't end when we leave the worksite. It extends into our communities and into our politics as well.

Right now, the federal NDP is finding itself in a moment of rebuilding and renewal after a difficult election. That renewal is essential, and CUPE has a responsibility to be part of it – not from the sidelines, but on the ground.

A strong labour movement needs a strong workers' party. And a renewed NDP – focused squarely on affordability, public services, and workers' rights – needs an engaged, growing labour movement behind it.

These two projects are inseparable. Every new worker we organize strengthens CUPE. Strengthening our locals and our national union strengthens our political voice too. And every step we take to renew the NDP as a party rooted in working-class struggles strengthens the future for all of us.

Building CUPE's organizational power and renewing the NDP as a workers' party go hand in hand. Together, they are how we turn solidarity into lasting change – for our members, our communities, and for the generations to come.



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NO TIME TO WAIT: DEFENDING PUBLIC SERVICES STARTS WITH US

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

By almost any measure, the world is in a state of chaos right now. But we cannot lose hope. Around the world, we are seeing ordinary people rise up and demand better. I am urging CUPE members to join them.

Together we must fight for good jobs, social protections, human rights, and access to strong public services. We must build a mass movement to demand the Canada we want and need.

CUPE members know how to step up. We know how to lead. And that's exactly what we have to do. There is no other way forward and no time to wait.

Mark Carney's Liberals are taking a sharp turn to the right. The \$82 billion allocated in the budget for new military commitments over the next five years comes at the expense of public services and good paying jobs. To help finance this, Carney is cutting \$57 billion in federal program spending and will eliminate 40,000 federal jobs.

Unless we mobilize our members to fight back, these cuts will mean reduced services, longer wait times, and less government oversight. They threaten public safety and health, the administration of justice, the environment, and the protection of human rights.

Carney's plan to strengthen Canada's economy relies almost entirely on the private sector. Most of his \$10 billion nation-building initiatives are in corporate hands. At a time when our country needs a strong

social safety net, he is backing away from much-needed investment in social infrastructure, like child care, pharmacare and the dental plan. Canada Health transfers are being scaled back, and billions of dollars for various health programs are set to expire.

For CUPE members who work in sectors dependent on federal funding, this will mean tougher collective bargaining in the years ahead. And for the communities we serve, it means less access, long wait times, and declining quality of life.

But there is another side to this story: CUPE members are on the front line to defend these services and the people who rely on them. These challenges do not signal defeat. They are a call to action.

We need to build a strong and powerful movement to turn things around. We must organize within our locals and rally community support. We must build a popular front strong enough to stop this agenda of cuts.

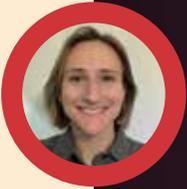
We must demand tax policies that force corporations and the wealthy to pay their share, and federal spending that creates jobs, expands services, raises workers' income, and addresses the worsening problems of poverty, climate change and inequity.

We have a lot of work ahead of us. But we also have an enormous advantage: we have the experience, we have the knowledge, we have the resources and we have 800,000 members who refuse to stand by quietly.



Organizing lessons from the front lines

By Pierre Ducasse



Tina Rothchild

A volunteer at first, Tina became a member-organizer on contract during an organizing drive at the University of British Columbia. The goal was to bring graduate research assistants (GRA) into CUPE 2278, the existing local for student workers at UBC, which includes teaching assistants among others. UBC objected to these workers' right to unionize and won the first round at the Labour Board, but CUPE intends to continue fighting.



Trista Sornberger

As a member-organizer, Trista helped recruit 1,200 clerical workers at Trillium Health Partners, in Ontario. She is a registered practical nurse and a member of CUPE 5180. She was booked off for part of the time she worked on the organizing drive and also helped out on a fee for service basis. The new local, CUPE 5596, just recently signed their first collective agreement.



Sarah Seal

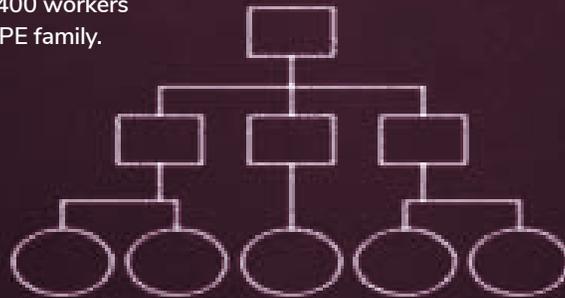
Sarah was an inside-organizer for the drive at Porter Airlines. She got involved with the team right after coming back from maternity leave. The campaign began in 2023 and it wasn't CUPE's first organizing drive at Porter. The flight attendants' union was successfully certified in 2025. Sarah is now president of CUPE 4061.



Wendy Harman

Wendy helped bring more than 400 workers of her school district into the CUPE family.

This group was already part of a pseudo-union called CAAMSE (Central Alberta Association of Municipal and School Employees). Wendy led the transition to a major labour union, and 97% of workers voted to join CUPE in January 2024. She is now president of CUPE 5543.



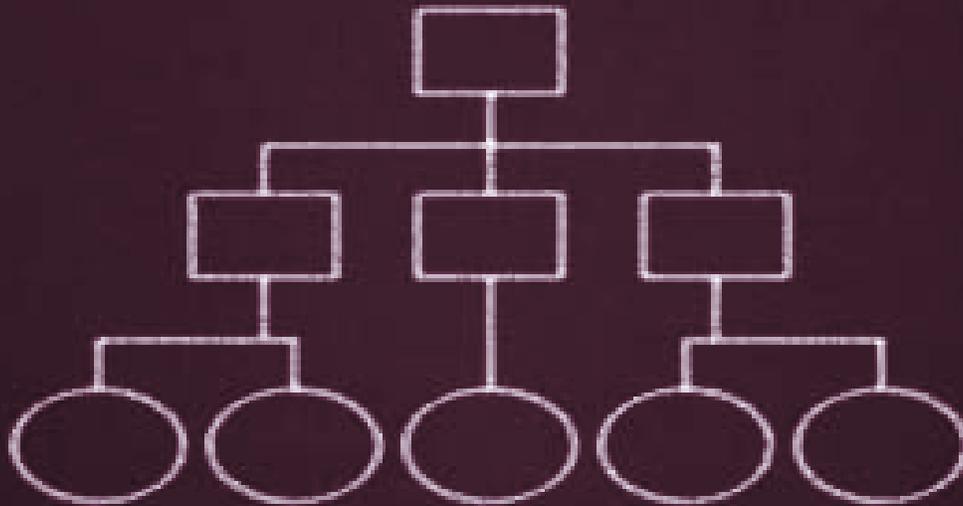


CUPE now represents 800,000 members, and that growth is due in large part to its organizing efforts. Recruiting new members is a core function of any union, which is why we need to continually reflect on the principles and practices of union organizing.

At CUPE, we believe workers deserve the advantages that come with being unionized: better wages and working conditions, protections against arbitrary employer decisions, stronger workers' rights, and solidarity. The point of organizing is simple: to improve workers' lives and strengthen our collective voice. Unions are democratic organizations that give workers real influence and a say in decisions that affect them.

So how do we build that power and what does it take to do it well? What does effective organizing look like today? Have the fundamentals changed over time, or do they largely stay the same? How much have new technologies shifted our strategies? What major obstacles remain?

We discussed these questions with activists involved in recent CUPE campaigns and asked them what they see as the basic principles of organizing. Four themes came up consistently.





THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ORGANIZING

MAPPING

A successful organizing drive starts with clearly identifying every worksite and where potential members actually are. In some cases, that's straightforward. In others, it takes real digging. This "mapping" matters because we need to know who we are trying to reach and how to reach them.

Trista

"In our case, there were three major worksites, and also many smaller sites. It made it difficult to reach some of the workers, especially in the satellite sites (like specialized clinics). With some detective work, we figured out there were many more potential members than originally thought. At the beginning, we thought the number would be around 500 and later realized it was closer to 1,200. That's why having an overall view is so important."

Wendy

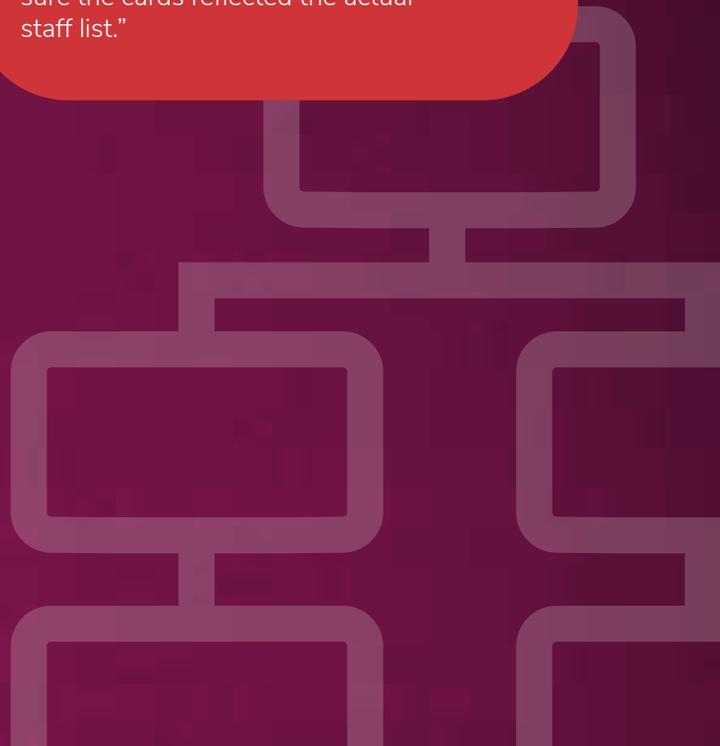
"In our case, our members are educational assistants, secretaries and other support staff. We're one school board that covers 26 schools. We had potential members at each site, between 7 and 30."

Tina

"We were attempting to organize over 3,000 workers at the University of British Columbia, which is a huge group of people. But those numbers fluctuated during the campaign, as there is also a certain level of turnover amongst the workers, so we had to constantly make sure the cards reflected the actual staff list."

Sarah

"As flight attendants, we live and work all over the place. It can be a challenge. At the same time, the employer kept hiring – around 50 new people a month. It was a challenge to keep up, because every new hire meant a new person to meet and a card to get signed. But you have to stay on top of everything if you want to unionize."





BUILDING A TEAM

Another essential part of organizing is building a strong team, dividing up the work clearly, and keeping organizers motivated over the long haul.

Trista

“A big part of organizing is identifying leaders. They will help recruit more members into the union. Other people might be interested in organizing but simply don’t realize they can help. It’s our job to recruit these people.”

Tina

“We divided the work by department. For my part, I was focusing on one or two departments, a few hundred people. Because departments were funded and functioned differently, working conditions varied widely. For instance, some research assistants were paid much better than others. To get people on board, we had to adapt the message and strategy to take those differences into account.”

Sarah

“You start by talking to the people around you, and then you find other leaders, people with a lot of contacts. When you’re looking for people to help with organizing, interpersonal skills are more important than anything. And it’s just as important to keep your organizing group motivated. The organizing group needs to listen to what people care about and try to address those concerns. It’s a lot of work, including evenings. Keeping people motivated for the long haul can be difficult, but it’s a key to success.”

COMMUNICATION AND DIRECT CONTACT

Good communication is another constant in organizing. The tools and trends evolve – some methods are new, others are tried and true – but the need to communicate stays the same. And it has to be a two-way conversation: organizing isn’t only about speaking, it’s also about listening.

Tina

“The bread and butter of our campaign was those one-to-one conversations. We formed unit committees, usually one per department, and these committees organized the one-to-one conversations. You talk to your colleagues, to the people around you... And then you reach out to the ones you haven’t reached yet.”

Trista

“We used texts and emails to contact potential members and help set up a meeting. But it’s in those face-to-face conversations that the magic happens. We asked potential members what was the one thing they would change in their working conditions if they could. Their answers gave us valuable information on changes people wanted to see. We could then agitate and mobilize them around those issues.”

FOLLOWING-UP

Consistent follow-up after initial contact is essential. A strong organizing plan must include the time and capacity to check back in, answer questions, and keep the momentum going.

Sarah

“There are some people who won’t sign a card right away, and you will have to talk to them more than once. Maybe some are uninterested at first but will be ready to sign a card two months later, especially when negative changes continue to come from the employer. You plant seeds.”

Tina

“It’s very important to follow up. This is something that organizers sometimes forget. If you’ve already had a one-on-one contact, then your follow-ups can be as simple as a text or email. Some groups of potential members are more open to unionizing than others. And people move at different paces. Some members signed union cards so early that they expired and needed to be re-signed after six months in time to file. When you are organizing, you need to accept that not everything will go by your timeline. You have to adapt.”

To better understand how organizing campaigns reach people, we asked organizers about the communication tools they used – from personal contact and printed materials to digital platforms. We also wanted to gauge how much new technology is shaping organizing work today.



THE TOOLS THAT ENGAGE WORKERS

ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

Everyone emphasized the importance of one-on-one conversations, connecting with people individually.

Wendy

“We had a lot of individual discussions quietly, behind the scenes. We counted on word-of-mouth, and we were available to answer questions when they arose.”

**Trista**

“First, we started by talking to the people we know. That’s the key to get things rolling. And then they talk to the people they know. Interpersonal relationships make the difference. It works. The CUPE lead organizers provided us with training and a script to use as a guideline for our conversations with potential members.”

Sarah

“One-on-one conversations are where the magic happens – 100%! Not on a website or a leaflet. You have to remain open, and you want people to feel open to come to you. You have to meet them where they’re at. You can’t get frustrated if they’re not perfectly aligned right then with your ideas or values.”

Tina

“There was a lot of informal outreach done by member-organizers and volunteers. They would reach out to the people they knew – some used Messenger or Instagram. But nothing can replace one-on-one conversations. Old-school works well!”

DATABASES

To keep track of potential members and lessons learned along the way, organizers need to be systematic and keep solid records. The right tool depends on the campaign: it can be simple or more advanced, as long as we know who we’ve spoken to, what we heard, and what comes next.

Tina

“Obviously, with a large group, you have to track who you’ve spoken to and who you haven’t. You have to do things in a systematic way. We used the platform Action Builder, and it suited our needs well.”

Trista

“We did use the online tool called Action Builder. You can add members, include notes, connections...”

Sarah

“We simply used an Excel sheet. We had someone on the team who was very gifted with it.”



CARD-SIGNING

Getting union membership cards signed is a key step in any organizing drive. Depending on the workplace, campaigns may use paper cards, an online form, or a mix of both.

Sarah

“Some may think that if we’re better at emailing or social media or electronic sign-up cards, everything will be easier. That’s not necessarily true. Technology can be a tool, but it’s just a tool. People could sign electronically – we carried QR codes around with us. We also went old-school. You can’t see who has signed an online card, so paper can make it clearer and easier to track your progress. It takes 20 seconds and you’re done.”

Trista

“We had physical cards that people could sign, and we could have a chat at the same time. We also had online cards. It made it easier for some of the workers.”

Tina

“We did have a digital card to sign. That was nice and made things easy. We had some paper cards but almost didn’t use them at all as we had a QR code with a link to the digital card with us at all times. This strategy worked well for our group.”

ON-THE-GROUND ACTIONS

On-the-ground actions are where an organizing drive becomes real. They create opportunities for face-to-face conversations, shared experiences and updates, and practical follow-up. That makes it easier to talk about the union, answer questions and mobilize.

Trista

“We set up tables at different sites, so we could give information, promote the union, and answer questions from potential members. We managed to convince management to let us do it. We were present in the main sites for 12 hours a day for 8 days in a row.”

Sarah

“Travel was sometimes good for recruiting the flight attendants you fly with. And you find yourself with different people, because the crews change. Other times, others and I would simply go to airports to talk to people.”

Wendy

“We went to meet people. Since we couldn’t recruit on school property, our team met workers just outside school grounds. We had ‘car park’ discussions in a parking lot near the school. We had flyers. We had cards to sign. For a while, our campaign was mostly quiet, but there was a time to be more out in the open. We held an in-person town hall to answer questions for a larger group at once. More than 200 people came. It was a success!”

Tina

“We organized ‘snack’tions’ – a combination of ‘snacks’ and ‘action’ – where we would take a rolling coffee cart through buildings and knock on doors, offering snacks and coffee to the workers. This gave us a chance to talk to potential members one-on-one about the union. If asked by management, we simply said we were doing a worker appreciation event.”



EMAILS AND APPS

Messaging apps and email can make it easier to coordinate organizers, share information, and stay responsive, especially when people are spread out or when discretion matters.

Trista

“We used chat groups for organizers to share information and answer questions, mostly WhatsApp. When contacting members, I used text messages a lot. They’re better, in my opinion, than email. With texts, I know for sure if the messages have been read.”

Tina

“Digital tools can be really useful. We held meetings over digital platforms so we could meet discreetly. For us, meeting online meant people from all over campus could join easily. We did use email too, but it’s less effective than one-on-one conversations. It’s OK to share information, but not so much to persuade or mobilize.”

Wendy

“We did use email. We had many email addresses from previous lists and from a petition we had done.”

Sarah

“There were already pre-existing group chats that cabin crew had set up to discuss things or get support. It was easy to go there and answer questions about unionizing.”

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is part of everyday life – and for many workers, it’s where conversations already happen. But is it a useful tool for organizing and building support?

Wendy

“We had a Facebook group. We needed to control who was admitted or not. We shared information and the dates of our events, like our town hall meeting. But social media can be a double-edged sword. Campaign information can leak.”

Sarah

“There was a Facebook group with hundreds of people. By the comments, we saw immediately who got it and was favourable to the union. We could post content, we could also answer questions. We developed rules and guidelines, and we asked people to stay appropriate. You have to be careful and respectful: someone can always take a screenshot and share with management.”

Tina

“In another campaign, we tried using digital ads through social media. But, to be frank, it’s very difficult to target the right audience.”

In every organizing drive, obstacles show up: misinformation, pressure, fear, and the feeling that speaking up might come with consequences. Part of the work is naming those barriers and addressing them directly in our strategy. Of course, it also means reminding people what being part of a union actually offers: protection, stronger workers' rights, and real gains that come from collective power.



THE UNION ADVANTAGE

Trista

"One of the main challenges of an organizing drive is overcoming misinformation. Sometimes it spreads fast. Some employers will use scare tactics or warn workers about unions, calling them a 'third-party entity'. Some workers thought that speaking to us would get them fired. So we worked hard to make sure as many people as possible knew they have the legal right to unionize. We reminded them that they are the union – it's not an outside organization. And we also pointed to everything CUPE has won for workers in the past: wage increases, better benefits, seniority, and more. Most importantly, there's strength in numbers."

Tina

"When you're organizing, you're also doing education. You have to talk to people about their rights, including the confidentiality around card signing."

Wendy

"In our case, the fear campaign was led by the 'association', a pseudo-union that was there before CUPE. They were telling people they could get disciplined by the employer, and the employer wasn't innocent in all this either. But we were able to convince workers they couldn't be disciplined for discussing the union. If you accept to be silenced, you're giving others much power over you. At the same time, this was a campaign of positivity. We took the time to explain everything. Yes, dues would be higher, but we explained the additional benefits of joining CUPE. We also had to educate about what a real union does, because many people had a bad experience in the past."



Sarah

“Sometimes, employers will say, ‘Don’t form a union. We’re a family!’ But when you’re in an employer-employee relationship, you’re not family. There were instances where many of us – including myself – felt targeted and that created fear and frustration. It was an eye-opener, and it helped convince potential members to join for the safety net a union represents. For example, the employer introduced a two-tier pay scale that lasted for 5 years before it was rescinded during our drive. They wanted to go from 12 hours on-call to 24 hours on-call with no pay increase for those added hours of work! They also wanted to stop paying for our breakfasts at hotels. When you make the equivalent of minimum wage, that makes a difference. Those were the kinds of things we used to mobilize workers. And the benefits of a union are both individual and collective: some people respond most to solidarity and collective action, while others join because of personal needs or grievances. That’s reality.”

Organizing takes patience and a long-term approach. That is how campaigns build the momentum they need to win. And even when a union drive doesn’t succeed at first, we keep going. Patience and perseverance keep the work moving forward, because the goal is bigger than a single campaign: improving workers’ lives and strengthening their voice.

Another essential principle is adaptability. Conditions on the ground vary widely, and our approach has to reflect that reality. It’s worth trying new ideas and experimenting with new tools, as long as they fit the workplace and the people involved.

So, has organizing fundamentally changed in the last few years? In some ways, yes – and in others, not really. The basics don’t change: identify potential members, build support, and mobilize. What does change is the toolkit – technology and the ways we share information. The lesson running through our conversations with Trista, Tina, Wendy and Sarah is that effective organizing starts by grounding our approach in workers’ realities, and still depends on real, one-on-one conversations. Everything else should support that work.

We are grateful to everyone who shared their time and experience for this article.



Grounded in solidarity

The airline industry is constantly evolving, and CUPE members are on the front lines of that change.

Whether it's difficult collective bargaining, precarious working conditions, in-flight safety or other workplace health and safety concerns, CUPE's Airline Division remains united and mobilized.

CUPE has made many important gains in recent years, but there is still a lot at stake for its 20,000 members across 11 Canadian airlines.

A new era at Porter Airlines

Last August, the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) approved CUPE's application for certification to represent some 1,200 flight attendants at Porter Airlines.

In the fall, elections were held to choose the executive of CUPE 4061.

"I'm so proud of my colleagues who have spent countless hours organizing for this win," said Sarah Seal, president of the local representing Porter Airlines' cabin crew. "This is an exciting new chapter for all of us, and we look forward to improving our working conditions and wages as Porter continues to grow and succeed."

Newly elected, the representatives have already taken part in several CUPE training sessions and are now preparing for a historic next step: negotiating their very first collective agreement.



A busy fall at WestJet

Last fall was a busy one for the 5,000 members of CUPE 8125, the local representing WestJet flight attendants. After taking part in a powerful mobilization on Parliament Hill to denounce unpaid work, the local executive began bargaining a new collective agreement to replace the one that expired on December 31, 2025.

At the same time, a new campaign was launched to shine a light on WestJet cabin crew working conditions. Titled *UltraExtraBasic*, the campaign encourages the public to remind WestJet what CUPE's Airline Division members have been repeating for years: unpaid work is simply unacceptable.

"WestJet flight attendants go above and beyond to keep passengers safe and comfortable, yet they aren't being fairly compensated for their time," said Alia Hussain, president of CUPE 8125. "This campaign is about respect, fairness and restoring dignity to our people and our profession."

Support the campaign: ultraextrabasic.ca





Strike at Pascan Aviation

On October 28, CUPE 5490, representing 21 flight attendants at Pascan Aviation, went on strike. The collective agreement with the airline, which operates in Quebec and Canada's Eastern provinces, expired on July 18, 2025. Key issues include wages, off-base accommodations, work assignments and crew scheduling.

On the second day of the strike, the union learned that Pascan Aviation had never intended to bargain in good faith. As early as April 2025, the airline is alleged to have approached individuals to replace flight attendants in the event of a strike.

Since the beginning of the strike, pilots and administrative staff have been operating flights in place of cabin crew after just two days of training — rather than the full flight attendant training program, which takes several weeks and is required to master various complex emergency procedures. This practice is not only dangerous for workers and passengers but is also prohibited under new federal anti-scab legislation.

"We find it deplorable that the company had no interest in giving negotiations a chance," said Jessé Vigneault, president of CUPE 5490. "While we were working on bargaining, and before we even submitted our list of demands, the company was already looking for people to replace us."

Layoffs at Canadian North

In November 2025, Canadian North management announced the layoff of 13 cabin crew members. CUPE 8111, which represents the airline's 196 flight attendants, had already put forward several solutions — including reduced schedules and enhanced retirement programs — to avoid job losses ahead of the holiday season.

Despite these constructive proposals, management chose to turn a deaf ear, walking away from options that would have protected jobs while still meeting the airline's operational needs.

Canadian North serves 24 Northern communities in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories via Ottawa and Edmonton, and also operates charter flights in northern Alberta and British Columbia.

"Our flight attendants are deeply passionate about their work, the North and the passengers they serve," said Isabelle Paquette, president of CUPE 8111. "Losing the strong personal connections our members have built with the communities and travellers they support makes the impact of these potential job losses especially profound."



Air Canada: a campaign for cabin air quality

After their historic strike, members of CUPE's Air Canada Component launched a campaign on cabin air quality in November 2025. Toxic fume events on board are a serious issue for flight crews.

When an aircraft flies above 8,000 feet (2,438 metres), the cabin must be pressurized so that people on board can breathe normally. In jet aircraft (with the exception of Boeing 787), cabin pressurization is achieved by injecting a small amount of highly pressurized air from the engines into the cabin air supply system.

Under normal conditions, this is fresh air drawn from the engine compressor, not mixed with fuel or exhaust gases. Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

For more than 60 years, it has been known that engine malfunctions can allow chemicals to enter the cabin and lead to significant exposure to toxic fumes on board.

Because of their work, cabin crew are at high risk of exposure to these incidents, and risks are often not taken seriously by airlines.

With the campaign *Would you like some fumes with that?*, the Air Canada Component and CUPE are reaffirming their commitment to put cabin crew health and safety first, and to build resources for responding to toxic fumes exposure.

The past year has shown just how essential solidarity and mobilization remain to improving working conditions across the airline sector. By raising their voices together, CUPE flight attendants share a common goal: ensuring their work is recognized at its true value and maintaining a safe flying environment for everyone on board. Members are bringing that same determination into 2026, standing shoulder to shoulder to rise to the new challenges facing their industry.

How the workers at SickKids Hospital in Toronto won a fair pension plan

By Zee Noorsumar

In 2025, CUPE members at SickKids Hospital in Toronto won a major victory – one that benefited not only CUPE members, but all workers across the hospital – securing the same pension plan as other hospital staff across the province.

This had been a longstanding demand for CUPE 2816, as SickKids was one of the few Ontario hospitals with its own pension plan – and by 2024, it was the only one. Other hospital workers were part of the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan (HOOPP), which provided superior benefits compared to



The CUPE-led coalition of unions achieved a major breakthrough at SickKids Hospital, where workers had been deprived of the same pension as other hospital staff in Ontario.

the meagre offerings of SickKids' in-house pension plan.

The plan's inadequacy was partly due to the hospital taking a "pension holiday" in all but two years since 1997, meaning workers were essentially the only real contributors to the plan.

Frustrated, the union knew the only way to ensure justice was to get into HOOPP, where major health care unions, including CUPE, have representation on the board.

Difference in annual retirement benefits for workers earning \$45,000 with 30 years of service:

HOOPP: \$25,560 (indexed to CPI)

SickKids Pension: \$17,550 (only covers 75% of annual increases in CPI)

Joining HOOPP had been on the union's agenda for more than a decade. In conversations with CUPE 2816 leaders, hospital management had been noncommittal about joining HOOPP. CUPE began campaigning in 2019, but the pandemic brought that work to a halt.

In 2024, a resurgent CUPE campaign was supported by its allies: the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA), the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU).

As a result, all SickKids employees – more than 9,000 workers – are now part of HOOPP, including the approximately 700 workers represented by CUPE. Here we outline how this victory was achieved.

Rallies at the hospital gates

Between April and December 2024, CUPE held four vibrant rallies outside the premises of SickKids Hospital on University Avenue in downtown Toronto. The events were organized by CUPE's Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU-CUPE) and led by Leonora Foster, president of CUPE 2816.

Foster, a patient service aide at the hospital (equivalent to a personal support worker), was an excellent spokesperson. She took a principled yet no-holds-barred approach, mincing no words as she held her employer accountable for the precarity facing her and her members in their sunset years.

Often flanked by her colleagues during media interviews, the 37-year veteran at SickKids pointed to the hypocrisy of an institution



A defiant Leonora Foster (c), president of CUPE 2816, led the successful campaign at SickKids.

that had built a reputation for world-class care on the backs of precarious workers.

The message, delivered through emphatic speeches, chants and even dancing, played well in front of the cameras as Foster and her largely racialized, predominantly female group of co-workers made a strong case for HOOPP. The presence of labour leaders including Fred Hahn (CUPE Ontario president), Erin Ariss (ONA president), JP Hornick (OPSEU president) and Michael Hurley (OCHU-CUPE president) only added to the recurring spectacle on University Avenue.

SickKids = workers facing poverty in retirement

In 2024, the SickKids Foundation spent \$47.5 million on marketing to craft its reputation and attract

donations – funds that supplement provincial government support for operational expenses. The scale of that investment revealed an institution willing to spend heavily on its public image, even as the workers who keep the hospital running faced the prospect of retiring in poverty.

But CUPE 2816 ran a smart campaign: operating with a fraction of those resources, it used cost-effective social media ads, spots on subway display screens at stations near the hospital, and a large billboard space at Yonge-Dundas

Square in downtown Toronto for a few weeks that summer. The message associating the “world-renowned” SickKids with “poverty” likely soured a few faces in the hospital’s marketing department.

The rallies and ad campaign worked in unison to keep the issue alive – not just among CUPE members but also for other SickKids staff. Over the course of 2024, staff throughout the hospital – unionized or not – began inquiring, “Why are we receiving an inferior plan?”



This ad was visible to thousands of people at Yonge-Dundas Square in downtown Toronto in the summer of 2024.



Leonora Foster was a courageous and outspoken spokesperson throughout the campaign.

Town halls and pressure from within

In the summer of 2024, hospital management was forced to confront the pension issue, holding a staff town hall in a packed auditorium. Any attempt to defuse the workers' anger was quickly dispelled, thanks to Foster, who was first on the mic during the Q&A.

"I said to them, 'You want to tell me that SickKids, you're one of the world's best hospitals, and your workers are retiring in poverty? How can you do that?'" Foster recounts. "And then I looked at one of the vice-presidents, and said, 'You should be ashamed of yourselves.'"

The crowd broke out in applause.

Soon after, the hospital released an FAQ about the pension, attempting to wrestle control of the narrative.

CUPE promptly responded with a flyer rebutting the hospital's claims and reiterating its position: the inadequacy of retirement payments was a choice – because nothing was preventing SickKids from improving its plan.

"We were freezing while handing out flyers"

The news coverage of the rallies, the town hall meeting, and the splashy advertising can all make for a glamorous account of the campaign, but other parts required hard, painstaking work.

Foster and the CUPE 2816 executive board spent a lot of time reaching out to their colleagues and urging them to participate. As the campaign grew, CUPE 2816's organizing sparked broader support across SickKids, with other unions increasingly stepping into the

fight. A union petition directed at management helped create dialogue, even as some members hesitated to sign – mainly out of fear of employer retaliation.

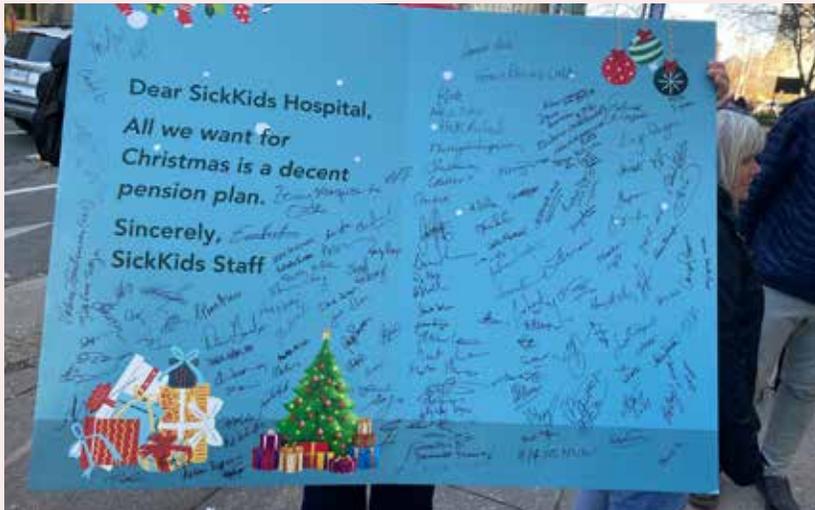
Local members also engaged in public outreach, standing outside the hospital early in the morning to hand out flyers to co-workers, patients and visitors – and even hospital managers – as they braved frigid temperatures to get the word out.

"Some people would come back to get more flyers for their co-workers," says Gus Giftakopoulos, a CUPE 2816 steward. "I would leave them in the washroom sometimes," he says, before adding with a chuckle, "by accident."

Responses varied: some workers would turn around to grab a copy when they realized their pension was at stake, while others simply walked by in a hurry. But the tactic



Erin Ariss, president of ONA, rallies the crowd.



Christmas card from SickKids staff to their employer.

worked. It sparked conversations and even hurt the hospital's fundraising efforts, with some people pledging not to donate to SickKids until the issue was addressed.

According to Antonella Hall, CUPE 2816's recording secretary, workers were also beginning to grasp what the fight meant for their own futures as the ever-expanding campaign seeped into their consciousness.

Persistence pays off

The last major campaign action came in December 2024. CUPE, ONA, OPSEU and CBTU jointly organized a rally outside the hospital featuring a blown-up Christmas card signed by SickKids staff, cheekily calling on the employer to grant their sole wish: HOOPP.

The confidence of the SickKids workers was palpable as they half-sang, half-chanted, "We want HOOPP" in front of television

cameras, surely precipitating more headaches inside management offices. The labour coalition was strong and ready to escalate its efforts in the new year. But by this point, SickKids had had enough.

Shortly after, management signalled to the union that they would be joining HOOPP, a process that was formalized in June 2025.

The triumph of this campaign belonged to the workers, who were unrelenting in their pursuit of a just outcome.

"They were unstoppable," says Sharon Richer, secretary-treasurer of OCHU-CUPE and CUPE's



OCHU-CUPE Secretary-Treasurer Sharon Richer (left) and OCHU-CUPE President Michael Hurley (right) played a key role in supporting the campaign.

representative on the HOOPP board. "Frustrated by SickKids, this world-renowned children's hospital, treating them unfairly compared to other Ontario hospitals over their pension plan, they chose to stand up for their rights – proving their resilience and courage time and again."

Michael Hurley, president of OCHU-CUPE, credits the relentlessness of SickKids workers, who stayed brave and outspoken, wearing their employer down.

"They never let up. Particularly damaging to the hospital was the union's assertion that this group of largely racialized women were doomed to retire in poverty by this 'world class' institution. This campaign is a model for all of us in how to fight back," he says.

When Foster first learned of SickKids' decision to finally join HOOPP – after years of militancy – she found the news hard to believe.

"Part of me was screaming, 'Yes! SickKids finally did it!' And I just thought about what we achieved because it was so tough to make SickKids do something they really had no interest in. I thought, 'What did I do? Just what did we do here?'"





CUT HERE, PAY THERE: How federal budget cuts end up on your credit card bill

For over 30 years politicians have been telling us that government spending needs to be reined in to address one economic challenge after another. Whether it is a recession, high inflation or the instability caused by Trump's tariffs, the solution is always to strive for a "balanced budget" — even when the problem isn't government overspending.

— By Zoë Abernathy





So it's no surprise the federal deficit became a major focal point during the lead up to the 2025 federal budget. Prime Minister Mark Carney announced his plans to “balance the operating budget” by 2029, by slashing most departmental budgets by 15% over four years and imposing mass layoffs across the federal public service.

After the budget was tabled in parliament, Conservative opposition leader Pierre Poilievre raised the alarm about the projected 2025-26 deficit being \$78 billion.

But what no politicians are raising an alarm about is the massive amount of household debt that people in Canada have accumulated over three decades of government funding cuts.

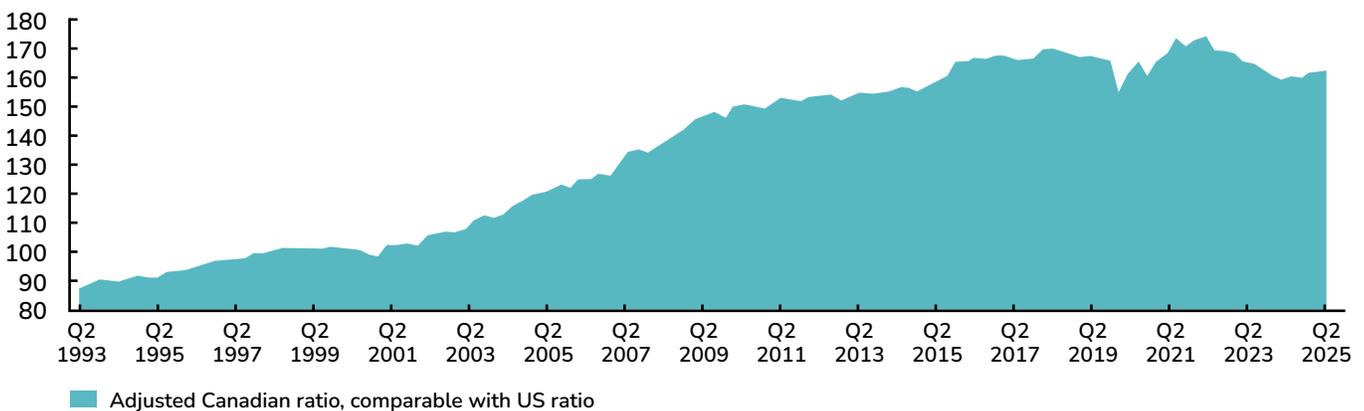
In fall 2025, it was reported that the total amount of household debt held by people in Canada had reached **\$3.2 trillion**. On average, for every dollar workers in Canada take home, they owe around \$1.76 in debt.

Mark Carney has repeatedly mentioned that Canada, as a nation, has one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios in the G7. But what he doesn't mention is that Canadian households have the highest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Canada also has **the highest household debt-to-income ratio** in the G7, approximately 176% as of late 2025.

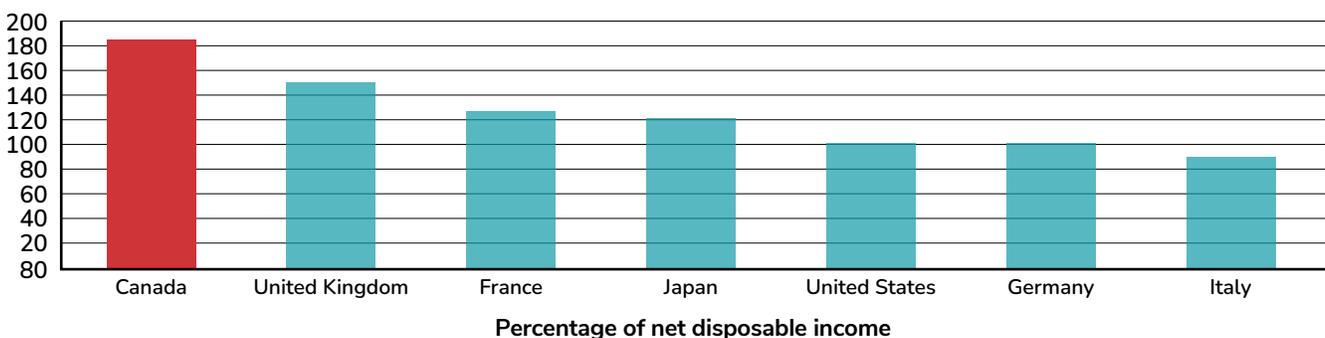
When politicians and the media stoke fear around government debt, it hits home because many of us have firsthand experience with debt. Common sense tells us that going into large amounts of debt, with no clear plan to pay it off, is a bad idea. Despite this, the total amount of debt held by Canadians continues to rise.

Debt is a major source of stress in many people's lives, and unfortunately, a growing number of us must rely on borrowing to make ends meet. While Canada's highest earners have increased their household savings significantly over the past few years, the lowest earners have gone deeper and deeper in debt and are unable to save at all.

Household credit market debt to disposable income, % (Source: Statistics Canada)



Total household debt, G7 countries, 2021 (Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)





For ordinary people, debt is a stressful burden that we are often forced to take on in order to survive. But for governments, deficits are simply a normal part of operations, despite politicians' claims to the contrary.

It's important to remember that government and household debt are not the same thing.

These two kinds of debt are linked, though, in that efforts to reduce public debt can lead to increased household debt.

For over 30 years, governments tried to reduce public debt primarily by cutting services. As a result, far too many people in Canada are struggling to make ends meet. When governments cut public services, the need for them doesn't just disappear. Instead, the costs of programs are passed down to individuals, often to those who need them the most. It is not a coincidence that income inequality is reaching record highs, and that low-income households are accumulating a crushing amount of debt.

A 2025 national survey conducted by Nanos Research revealed that one in five people in Canada have skipped a bill payment in order to afford groceries over the past year, and Statistics Canada reported in October 2025 that over one in four (27.7%) were struggling to afford basic necessities like transportation, food, and clothing.

Meanwhile, food and accommodation costs continue to rise faster than overall inflation, and wealth disparities are becoming increasingly pronounced. We urgently need government action that will meaningfully address this widespread economic insecurity.

Our increasingly harsh economic reality is the direct result of decades of austerity policies that prioritize the creation and accumulation of wealth over the well-being of working people and their communities. But things don't have to be this way.

Governments can and should invest public dollars to create a more equal society where people can live in dignity and comfort. Investments in public services and programs put money back in workers' pockets and can help prevent further reliance on debt for survival.

Instead of focusing on big business, tax breaks, and short-sighted deficit reduction efforts, the Liberals should be expanding programs like pharmacare, dental care and \$10-a-day child care. These are the true priorities of Canadian households, and will make a real difference in the lives of workers and their families.



CUPE AT COP30: “WE’RE OVERWHELMED” AS CLIMATE CHANGE ACCELERATES



Indigenous activists from across the Amazon protest outside the COP30 venue in Belém, demanding Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva protect their territories from growing corporate threats. Photo: Sami Dellah

At the last United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil, CUPE 403 member Konrad Beston described how climate change is reshaping his work as a stormwater worker for the Township of Langley, B.C.

“My job involves replacing infrastructure that is undersized and cannot handle the current conditions of climate change,” he said. “We’re overwhelmed. We need more workers to come in – and workers need to have a say in how the infrastructure is built.”

The impact of climate change on workers and vulnerable communities, and our aspiration for a just and equitable transition to a sustainable planet, are what brought the global labour movement, Indigenous communities, feminist and climate justice organizations to the COP30 in November 2025. CUPE attended with a delegation led by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).



Activists call for a Belém Action Mechanism for a Global Just Transition (BAM) at COP30, in November 2025. Photo: Sami Dellah

Communities across Canada and around the world are experiencing more droughts and floods. Forest fires are increasing in number and ferocity. Countries affected by hurricanes and typhoons are seeing them more often and reporting them to be much stronger and more destructive than in the past. Some island nations fear they will soon disappear entirely.

Climate change has also become a major driver of migration, as people are forced to leave their homes in search of work and safety in other countries.

The gap between promises and reality

Brazil hosted the summit in Belém, in the state of Pará – a city living the contradictions of climate politics up close. The annual UN climate talks are supposed to bring together government representatives from around the world to discuss and negotiate concrete solutions to the climate crisis. But the



Feminist activists march in the streets at COP30 in November 2025, in Belém, Brazil, demanding gender justice as a basis for climate justice. Photo: Sami Dellah

COP30 outcomes fell far short of what is needed to prevent further warming, adapt to the current climate reality, and support communities as they recover from the loss and damage caused by climate disasters. There was also no clarity on funding this essential work.

We know women, especially Indigenous women and those in the Global South, are hardest hit by climate disasters, climate displacement, and climate-driven migration. Women face multiple forms of discrimination, are often primary caregivers for children, and often struggle to access the health and social services needed when a climate emergency hits, particularly in rural communities. Food and income insecurity leave women more vulnerable to gender-based violence and lead to forced migration in search of work.

But we will all suffer if we do not reverse the damage that has been done. Ensuring that the voices of the most affected communities are heard has always been crucial, and often a struggle – this COP was no different. The Government of Brazil was criticized after reports that only 14% (about 360) of the roughly 2,500 Indigenous Brazilian representatives expected to attend were granted access to the official negotiations. In total, the official United Nations negotiation space (the Blue Zone) included 42,582 participants from delegations representing 195 countries.

The Heart of the Amazon

Belém sits at the mouth of the Amazon, in a region known as the Heart of the Amazon Reserve. The Amazon is home to hundreds of Indigenous communities, and the region holds an estimated 10% of all known plant and animal species on Earth. The significance of the location was not lost on anyone. The Amazon rainforest is sustaining life on the planet by storing carbon and releasing water, stabilizing global temperatures and water cycles.

Through the lens of profit, the Amazon rainforest is a target for illegal logging, cattle ranching, and mineral extraction by large corporations. The need to protect it from deforestation and fires is urgent, and we cannot address climate change without protecting the Amazon. Indigenous peoples, drawing on thousands of years of knowledge and stewardship, raised their voices inside and outside the COP to defend these lands as they face escalating threats.

Toward a just and equitable solution

Addressing our overreliance on fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas is often identified as the path forward. This is what governments agreed to in Paris in 2015, when they committed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions so the global temperature does not rise more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.



The global labour movement has long called for a just transition, initially focused on transitioning predominantly male workers in fossil fuel industries to other jobs, including in renewable energy manufacturing and generation. Over time, a broader understanding of a just transition has emerged: one that also challenges the gendered division of labour and recognizes the value of women's work and feminized sectors, such as care.

Health care and social care work are low-carbon. While a just transition is often associated with shifting high-carbon sectors like energy or transportation toward low-carbon alternatives, it also includes creating climate-friendly care jobs, including public investment and expansion in health and social care work, and strengthening universal access to quality public services. Demand for care workers continues to grow and these jobs can be critical to climate mitigation and adaptation.

The call for a just transition has strong and broad support. It has evolved into a multi-sector demand from environmental and climate justice groups, women's and gender rights organizations, youth, and Indigenous peoples, for the Belém Action Mechanism for a Global Just Transition, or BAM as it was called at COP30. The labour movement created BAM to recognize that workers' participation, labour rights, social protection, and decent work are essential for ambitious and fair climate action.

CUPE and many others are clear that a just transition must tackle the root causes of the climate crisis. That means a public-led energy transition focused on public ownership, democratic control, and an end to the current "energy for profit" model.



CUPE member Konrad Beston marching in the streets of Belém, Brazil, with Antônio Lisboa, deputy president of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and international relations secretary of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT-Brazil). Photo: Kelti Cameron

Konrad Beston is also a member of the CUPE BC Indigenous Committee and a former member of CUPE's National Indigenous Council. "Close to my heart are the Seven Generations teachings," he says – a reminder that our union's fight for a just and equitable response to the climate crisis is about what we leave behind. The choices we make today to protect workers, strengthen public services and safeguard vital ecosystems, including the Amazon, will shape our communities for generations to come.





MORE THAN A HOLIDAY: PREPARING FOR JUNE 21 AND SEPTEMBER 30 WITH PURPOSE

It can be easy to mix up June 21 and September 30, but they aren't interchangeable. Both are important Indigenous observances that go beyond a day off, and each comes with its own purpose and meaning. Here is a simple guide to what each day is for – and how CUPE members can show up in a good way and carry that commitment into the rest of the year.



June 21: A celebration

June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day, is a day of celebration – a time to celebrate the vibrant traditions and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and their outstanding contributions to our communities.

It is also a moment to recognize the ongoing, fierce advocacy of Indigenous CUPE members and Indigenous communities across Canada. It is a reminder of our responsibility to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples on ceded and unceded territories, and to protect their cultures and languages.

CUPE's national diversity vice-president representing Indigenous workers, Debra Merrier, says June 21 is also deeply personal. It is a time to spend with family and community, to connect with Elders, and to celebrate traditions by getting “deep into our spirituality and our culture.”

“There are many different events that take place from coast to coast to coast on June 21. It's also the longest day of the year – it's a time for us to connect and it brings a sense of renewal and ‘new beginnings,’” she says, explaining the significance many people attach to the solstice.

One important truth that often gets lost: there isn't one single Indigenous culture, and there isn't one single way

to celebrate. First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples include many distinct nations and communities across the country, with different languages, teachings, histories, and ways of gathering. That diversity matters, and it means celebration can look different depending on the region, the people gathering, and the relationships.

There are many ways to recognize Indigenous peoples in CUPE events, conferences and conventions, but National Indigenous Peoples Day isn't a day when Indigenous members should be expected to organize cultural programming or performances.

“I always say June 21 is a time for us,” Merrier points out. “It's not a time for

us, as Indigenous peoples, to organize big events and invite people, because it's our time. It's a time to be with our families, to spend time on the land. Sometimes we hold ceremonies, sometimes we feast. Our events are more relationship-based, they're about the people around us. That's what June 21 is about.”

Across the country, Indigenous communities hold many different ceremonies and gatherings that mark different parts of the year, not just June 21. Some gatherings, like powwows, are more widely known, but there are many others too. Traditions can look different from region to region as people reconnect with culture and carry teachings with them as they move.

How to mark the day in a meaningful way

- Learn about the Indigenous nations on whose territory you live and work.
- Join public events you're invited to and be a good guest: listen, learn, and share.
- Support Indigenous-led initiatives and the organizers, educators, and creators behind them.
- Don't ask Indigenous colleagues or community members to create content or plan events for your workplace.
- Read the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report* and consider how you can support the 94 Calls to Action.
- Use CUPE's *Truth and Reconciliation bargaining guide* to bargain language supporting Indigenous workers into collective agreements.
- Acknowledge Indigenous territory at meetings with intention, not as a scripted formality.
- Reach out and build relationships with local Indigenous communities and organizations and amplify Indigenous voices.
- Keep pressure on the federal government to implement their action plan to address the findings of the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action* and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.



September 30: A memorial day

September 30 is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. It is not a celebration day. It is a day for remembrance, truth, and responsibility. Inspired by the story of residential school survivor Phyllis (Jack) Webstad from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation, communities across Canada have commemorated September 30 as Orange Shirt Day since 2013 – a day to learn and reflect on the truth about residential schools and turn that learning into action.

As a six-year-old girl, Phyllis was given a new orange shirt by her grandmother before being taken to a B.C. residential school. The shirt was confiscated and destroyed on the first day of class, and that act has come to symbolize the colonial goal of residential schools: forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples.

Debra Merrier stresses that symbols like wearing an orange shirt on that day matter most when they lead us back to the truth. "People need to know what the truth is. A big part of Orange Shirt Day is the residential schools. It's a memorial day to honour the children who never returned home, honour the survivors of the residential schools, and honour their families and community who are still hurting today," she says. "It's not a time to celebrate, it's a time to reflect, to educate, and to acknowledge what we have lost: thousands of years of history."

While records and recognition aren't always complete, and some sites and experiences haven't been consistently documented or acknowledged, the truth is that residential schools operated for more than a century in Canada. The first church-run school opened in 1831 in Ontario, and the last federally run school closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan. Merrier adds that 139 residential schools are

Resolution 108 adopted: CUPE's commitment against residential school denial

Resolution No. 108 submitted by the Hospital Employees' Union (B.C.) also covering Resolution No. 106 submitted by CUPE Vancouver Island District Council (B.C.) and Local 951 (B.C.) was unanimously adopted at CUPE's 2025 National Convention.

CUPE WILL:

1. Commit to combating anti-Indigenous racism and the denial of residential schools through education, advocacy, and solidarity with Indigenous communities;
2. Develop and promote educational materials to help members recognize and challenge false narratives that deny the realities of residential schools;
3. Work with Indigenous organizations and knowledge keepers to support truth-telling initiatives and amplify Indigenous voices;
4. Advocate for stronger policies and public education initiatives that counteract residential school denialism and promote reconciliation efforts;
5. Ensure its communications and training programs reflect accurate, respectful, and truth-based narratives about Indigenous history and rights.

BECAUSE:

- Indigenous communities continue to face systemic racism and discrimination, including the rise of narratives that deny the existence and impacts of residential schools;
- The denial of residential schools and their harms perpetuates historical injustices, undermines reconciliation efforts, and fosters racism against Indigenous peoples;
- Truth and education are vital in combating racism and ensuring that historical and contemporary injustices are acknowledged and addressed.

formally recognized under the IRSSA and were operated by the government and churches, while also stressing that not all schools “on the land” were fully documented or acknowledged.

More than 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children attended residential schools, and the full truth is still being uncovered. At the 2025 CUPE National Convention, delegates adopted a resolution committing to fight anti-Indigenous racism and the denial of residential schools. “The public, the people, the community,

have to remember residential schools have impacted so many,” Merrier says, noting how personal this day is for many families, including her own. “I’m the daughter of a residential school survivor. My mom was in a residential school for 14 years – she wasn’t able to come home during that time.”

Merrier remembers the scale of the system and the cruelty behind it: schools with hundreds of children, strict separation between boys and girls, and an education designed to erase language, culture and identity.

September 30 shouldn’t be treated like a generic awareness day. Truth and reconciliation can’t be rushed and reduced to a script, or stop at symbolism. It is also connected to our fight against ongoing systemic injustices and environmental racism. It calls on us to act differently because of what we now understand – what Merrier calls “reconcili-action”: moving from learning to changes we can implement in our workplaces, locals and communities.

How to mark the day in a meaningful way

- Don’t treat the day like a celebration. Create a space for reflection.
- Choose one credible resource and learn something specific, instead of raising “general awareness”. Use the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action as starting points.
- Connect learning to one concrete commitment your local or workplace will take on after the day.
- Host a learning session with an Indigenous speaker at your next virtual or in-person meeting.
- Learn more about truth and reconciliation by taking CUPE’s Indigenous awareness workshop and human rights courses.
- Download CUPE’s guide on bargaining language for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to find out how you can observe the day and support reconciliation efforts.
- Take the steps outlined in *Walking the talk: A practical guide to reconciliation for CUPE locals* to better include Indigenous members in our union.
- Use CUPE’s guide *Truth and reconciliation: CUPE taking action through collective bargaining* and negotiate language to train members on Indigenous issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, intercultural competency, and anti-racism.
- Advocate for all Indigenous peoples to have fair and equal access to public services and infrastructure, both on- and off-reserve and in urban centres.
- Order an Orange Shirt Day t-shirt through the official suppliers (part of the proceeds will go to the Orange Shirt Society).

Celebration matters, and so does truth. That is why June 21 and September 30 ask different things of all of us. As part of our ongoing efforts to foster reconciliation in our workplaces and communities, we encourage all CUPE members to take part in these days respectfully, and to take time to learn and reflect on the ongoing harms of colonialism and Canada’s treatment of Indigenous peoples.

Debra Merrier’s message is also clear: **“As Indigenous peoples, why is it constantly our job to tell others, ‘Here are some things to do?’”** We all have a responsibility to do the

learning, engage with existing guidance and resources, and take action that goes beyond a single day or a single symbolic gesture.

So what can you do – and what can your local, your division or your district council do? Start by choosing one concrete step and follow it through. Offer educational materials to your members. Read the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action*, particularly Actions 7, 43, 44 and 65. Have the conversations. Make space to hear the stories and learn from them, and carry all that learning into decisions we can point to in our workplaces and in our union.

And there are reasons to be hopeful.

“I hope each division is doing something – getting CUPE locals involved, building community and relationships with Indigenous peoples. These are slow but positive steps,” Merrier says.





Photo: Wall family

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY

MONTH 2026

*Honouring
Carol Wall*

Black History Month is a time to celebrate and highlight Black History and culture, and to honour the ancestors and leaders of Black communities, their accomplishments and their continued fight for liberation. Every year CUPE honours a Black ancestor, or someone who is making history today. In past years, we've recognized activists like Nell Toussaint, Bromley Armstrong, and Marjorie Villefranche. This year we're honouring Carol Wall.

Carol Wall was a fearless Black feminist, trade unionist and anti-racist activist. Her leadership helped transform the Canadian labour movement and had a profound impact on our union.

From her early days at the Toronto Star, where she spent years organizing and advocating through the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild, to her later national roles, Carol's commitment to equality and workers' rights never wavered.

Breaking ground on pay equity

Carol was a founding member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and one of the first Black women activists in Ontario to challenge race-based wage discrimination.

Carol insisted we could expose racism in pay structures simply by looking at the people doing the lowest-paid jobs in our workplaces, often Black and racialized workers.

She worked with CUPE and the Ontario Federation of Labour to challenge job evaluation systems. At the time, these systems undervalued work typically done by racialized women and painted the low pay as "market realities," masking institutional racism. Her decades of advocacy contributed to race-based discrimination being recognized in a landmark federal pay equity report in 2004.

Leaving her mark on CUPE

Carol had a profound impact on our union. As a consultant, she helped develop CUPE Ontario's Anti-Racism Organizational Action Plan aimed at breaking down barriers and building a stronger, more inclusive union.

A seasoned labour educator, Carol was also deeply involved in launching *Women in Leadership Development (WILD)*. This transformative program supports Indigenous, Black, and racialized CUPE women to be, as Carol put it, "the creative and courageous leaders the movement needs."

Inspiring the next generation

As the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union's first human rights director, Carol worked to unite equity-deserving members and strengthen human rights across the labour movement.

Her leadership continued at the Canadian Labour Congress, where she advanced women's rights and was a member of the CLC's Human Rights Committee. In 2002 she was elected to the CLC Executive Council as a vice-president representing workers of colour.

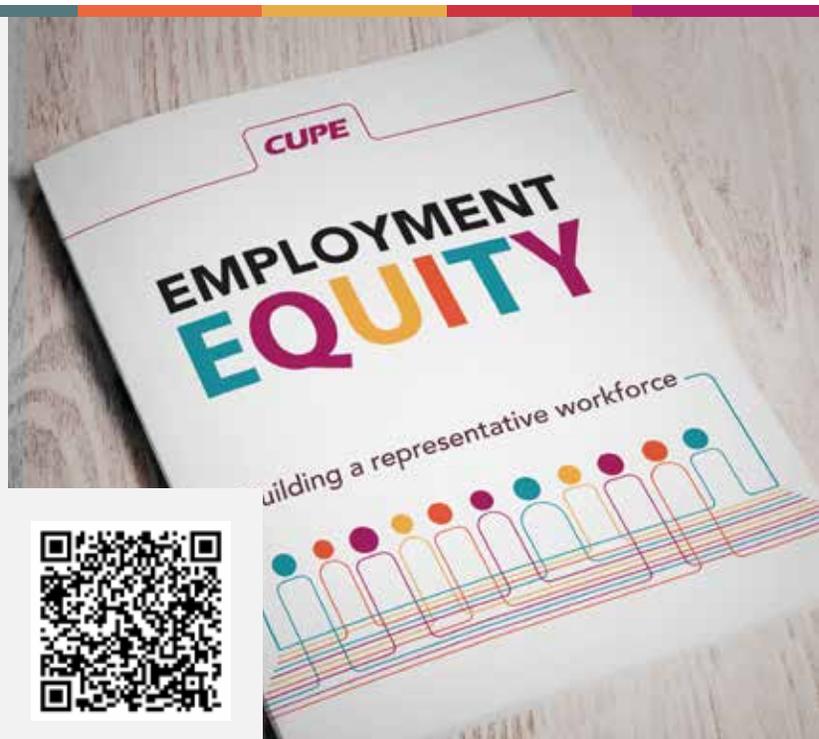
Carol's historic 2005 campaign for CLC president inspired a new generation of activists demanding a bold, inclusive, and militant labour movement.

Carol later worked as a negotiator with the Public Service Alliance of Canada before joining the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, where she became the first Black woman to serve as Ontario director.

Sadly, Carol passed away in April 2023. She is survived by her husband, her three children, and her grandchildren, all of whom loved her dearly. Carol's legacy lives on in our ongoing fights for justice.

As CUPE members, employment equity is an essential part of our work. CUPE's bargaining guide *Employment equity: Building a representative workforce* is for CUPE bargaining teams, local executives, equity committee members, and every CUPE member working to advance human rights.

It includes information on discrimination and employment equity, sample collective agreement language to bargain, and checklists to keep your work on track. **Sign up now to receive a digital copy of the guide.**





CUPE'S YEAR OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

At CUPE's National Convention in October 2025, members adopted a resolution declaring 2026 the Year of Health and Safety.

One focus of the Year of Health and Safety is strengthening health and safety committees. These committees play an important role in preventing injuries and protecting workers. They identify hazards, address risks and help ensure workers get home safe at the end of the day.

To support new and developing health and safety committees, CUPE has created a **Health and Safety Committee Self-Evaluation Checklist**. This tool helps worker representatives review core committee functions and identify areas for improvement. For established committees, CUPE has developed a new **Health and Safety Committee Audit** to assess health and safety programs in more detail.

CUPE has also released a **new, plain-language booklet on health and safety committee basics** for all members. The booklet outlines the role of health and safety committees, the role of the union and how members can get involved in this important work.

Throughout 2026, CUPE will host **health and safety conferences across Canada**. We will also be developing **new ways for health and safety activists to connect, share updates and stay engaged**.

Access our new health and safety resources and learn more at cupe.ca





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