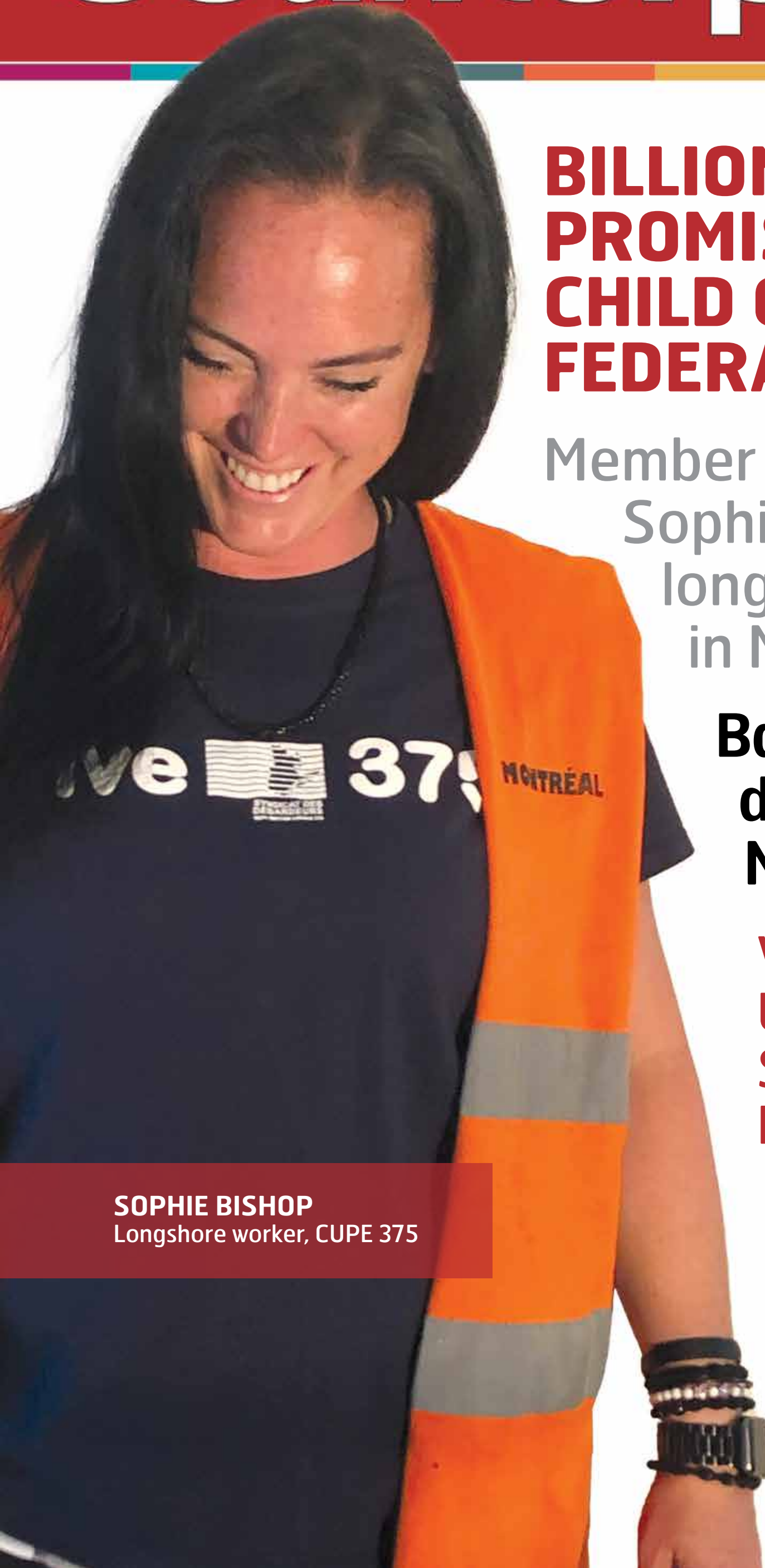


Counterpoint



BILLIONS PROMISED FOR CHILD CARE IN FEDERAL BUDGET

Member profile:

Sophie Bishop is a longshore worker in Montreal

Bargaining deadlock in New Brunswick

WORKER UNITY BUILDS SUPPORT FOR BARGAINING

FAIR TAXATION
FUNDS AN
EQUITABLE
RECOVERY

SOPHIE BISHOP
Longshore worker, CUPE 375

SHE SAID

“My father and grandfather were longshore workers, and so too is my brother. At the outset, my father thought the work was too difficult and did not want me to get into it. He eventually came around and I’m thrilled. I love what I’m doing.”
Sophie Bishop p 4.

Taxing the rich for the recovery we need

Billions of dollars of tax cuts over the past 20 years have helped the rich get exponentially richer and more powerful than the rest of us, while at the same time starving public services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified both income and wealth inequality in Canada, exposing long-standing unfairness in our tax system. Income inequality is the difference in how much we earn each year, and wealth inequality is about differences in how much we’re able to accumulate over time.

The way the Canadian system is structured helps the rich get richer. For example, returns on wealth, such as capital gains or dividends, are not taxed at the same rate as income from employment. These profits are taxed at a lower rate than in the 1990s.

Since the 1990s, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have also cut corporate tax rates in half, and allowed corporations to use accounting

tools to avoid paying tax. Corporate tax cuts and loopholes allow shareholders to accumulate more wealth than workers and enable huge compensation packages for executives.

Widening wealth gap

Between 2010 and 2019, the average wealth of Canada’s richest one per cent more than doubled from \$4.9 million to \$10 million. The average wealth of the bottom half of people in Canada grew at a snail’s pace in comparison, increasing from \$32,043 to \$37,403. As of 2019, the richest one per cent in Canada owned more than a quarter of the wealth in our country.

Time to tax the rich

Inequality is not inevitable; it is the result of policy choices. Important changes to personal and corporate taxation could help rebalance wealth and power, and would fund public services that are the heart of a more equal society.

CUPE has partnered with the Broadbent Institute, Canadians for Tax Fairness, and others to call on the federal government to

implement a wealth tax, close tax loopholes used to hoard wealth, and implement a tax on excess profits made during the pandemic.

Canada is the only G7 nation that doesn’t have a wealth, estate, or inheritance tax for large fortunes. There is growing support for an annual wealth tax in Canada.

Fair taxation funds an equitable recovery

Canada’s richest people get most of their wealth from ownership of corporations.

Corporate tax cuts and tax avoidance have helped enable rising wealth inequality. Restoring the federal general corporate tax rate from 15 per cent to 21 per cent would generate over \$10 billion a year.

The shape of our economic recovery is going to be a key issue in the next federal election, and restoring fairness in our tax system is at the heart of creating a more equitable economy and society. Tax fairness not only prevents wealth hoarding, it also helps pay for the services that we all rely on.

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Federal budget child care promise – what does it really mean for working parents?

Child care advocates across Canada gave a resounding cheer when the federal government released its plans for child care in the 2021 budget. Finally, the calls of advocates have been heard and the federal government has committed to reduce the financial burden of child care. By the end of 2022, child care fees should be reduced by 50 per cent on average across the country. By 2025-2026, child care fees will average \$10 a day. This is exciting news, but it depends upon

the cooperation of provinces and territories.

The budget reflected major lessons we have learned throughout this pandemic: the economy needs child care; families need child care; women need child care; and children – especially those who are financially disadvantaged – need child care.

Some provinces are well on their way to making a \$10/day child care

fee a reality. Quebec was the first province to implement universal child care. Newfoundland and Labrador is offering a \$25 a day child care plan. BC is looking to expand their \$10 a day prototypes and their “seamless day” model which covers some of the early years. However, provinces such as Ontario and Alberta are crying out for more flexibility and balking at the federal preference for non-profit child care spaces.

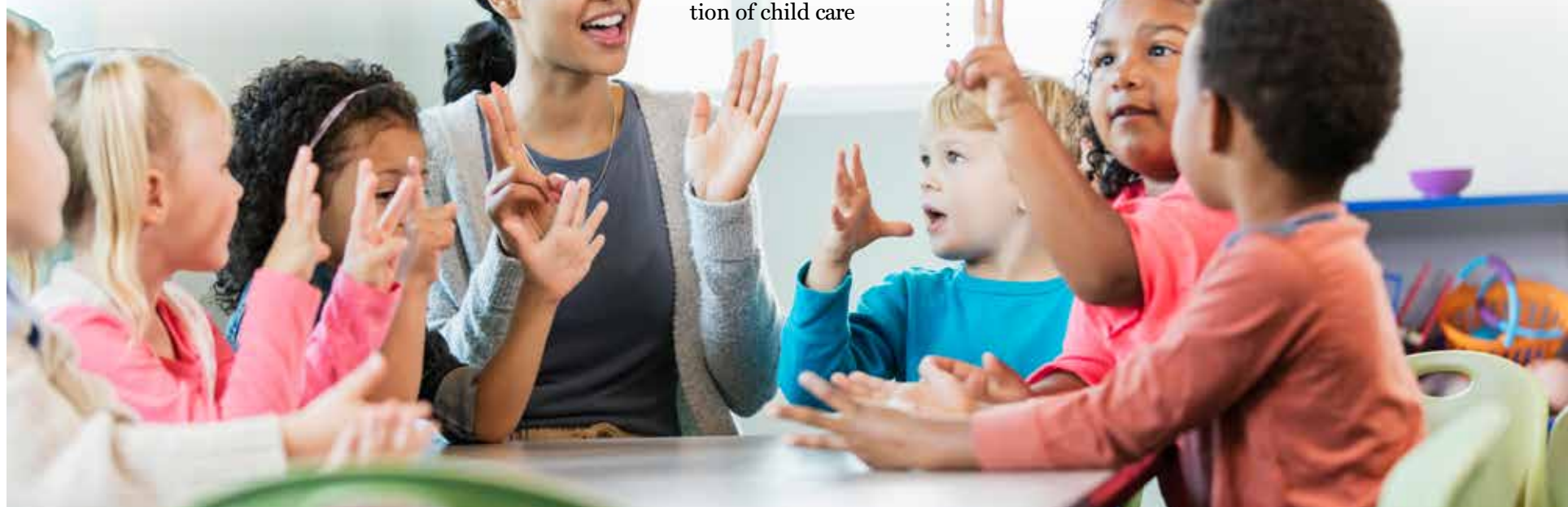
Problems with recruitment and retention of child care

workers continue, mostly because of low wages and poor benefits. Where is the commitment to the worker who delivers that care? Budget 2021 did acknowledge that child care workers are grossly underpaid. However, it offered no solutions to address this disparity. There was no mention that provinces or territories would need to increase wages of child care workers, provide them with benefits, and ensure they weren't left to retire in poverty.

The child care sector already struggles with high turnover and low recruitment. It relies heavily on the work of racialized and newcomer women. This is likely how governments

have gotten away with paying so little for so long. In the current system, increasing wages means increasing parents' fees. Child care workers don't want to see families struggle, so they are reluctant to ask for more. This needs to change. We need to untangle parent fees from workers' salaries, we need to increase wages, offer benefits and pensions, and ensure these unsung heroes of the pandemic know and realize their value. The economy cannot recover without a she-covey. A she-covey cannot happen without child care. The federal government needs to make a commitment to the workers too.

■ **Adrienne Silnicki**



NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

Bargaining forward beyond the pandemic

Any CUPE local that has been through bargaining during the pandemic knows it has been a different and often difficult experience. There has been so much uncertainty in our world for over a year now, and while things are looking up in some areas, I'd bet that bargaining isn't about to get any easier.

It's hard to believe, but it has now been almost five years since the National Executive Board ratified a renewed bargaining policy for our locals across the country, in the aftermath of some devastating bargaining in the auto sector that saw hard-won rights negotiated in the form of concessions.

CUPE's bargaining policy is straight-forward: we will not accept concessions or two-tier proposals at the bargaining table. We bargain forward, not backward. That means we will not negotiate away hard-won achievements from past rounds of bargaining. It also means we will not sell out younger or future members through two-tier proposals that deprive them of rights and benefits that we have enjoyed ourselves.

Our locals make this clear to employers across the

table, and both our locals and employers around the country know that if our members are being backed into a corner, we will bring the full weight of our national union to support them.

In nearly five years, we've seen clearly how successful the policy has been.

We have heard consistently that local bargaining committees are confident in standing up to employers who table concessions and two-tier language, because they know that CUPE National and our 700,000 members across the country have their back.

Time and again, our locals are bringing the same clear, simple but powerful message to employers: we won't accept concessions and we won't sacrifice the next generation of workers either. And employers back off – because they know we mean business.

In the months ahead, it's going to be more important than ever for our locals to continue bringing that same message to the bargaining table as we return to bargaining in the wake of the pandemic.

Governments have been spending more in the last year – on health care, and on various efforts to prop up the economy. So we know to expect renewed calls for austerity, from Conservative and Liberal governments alike, in the coming months. Across Canada, governments and employers are readying the red ink and fiscal arguments, getting ready to slash that new spending at the cost of public services and public sector jobs.

But with our bargaining policy serving as our north star, CUPE locals will be ready to defend the jobs and services that got our communities through the pandemic – and they'll have the power and might of their national union behind them every step of the way.

MARK HANCOCK ONLINE  twitter.com/MarkHancockCUPE





PROFILE SOPHIE BISHOP

A female longshore worker tells her story

Due to back-to-work legislation this past April, the media turned their attention to the work of CUPE’s longshore workers, which dates back a hundred or so years at the Port of Montreal.



Though a traditionally male occupation, women currently hold 12.5% of positions represented by the Port of Montreal longshore workers union, CUPE 375. Like many of her female colleagues, Sophie Bishop, who has been a longshore worker since 2015, managed to gain employment at the port thanks to her father.

“My father and grandfather were longshore workers, and so too is my brother. I have cousins both male and female who are colleagues. At the outset, my father thought the work was too difficult and did not want me to get into it. But he eventually came around and I’m thrilled. I love what I’m doing, but I must admit it’s not for everyone,” she said.

The work is very demanding. Employees work 19 out of 21 days. Work-life balance is very difficult. Because the working conditions are rather out of the ordinary, the solidarity that exists among longshore workers is remarkable and almost unequalled.

“The camaraderie that longshore workers share is exceptional. Yes, it’s still pretty much a male environment, but the guys have adjusted quite well to the women who have been hired. The language on the job site does take some getting used to,” she said with a laugh. “It’s definitely not the place for sensitive ears.”



The work was physically harder before automation. Back in the day, men and women could only count on the raw strength their arms would muster when unloading a ship. Today, with the new machinery that has been developed, brute force is not as important as it once was, but the work requires a high level of concentration and dexterity when handling and moving containers weighing tonnes.

“It’s a great job where we work by the water. I’d really like it if more women signed on to work at the port! Maybe my son or daughter will work there one day,” added Sophie Bishop.

■ Lisa Djevahirdjian





Strike at the Port of Montreal

On April 30, 2021, Prime Minister Trudeau’s Liberal government, with the support of the Conservative party caucus, voted in favour of legislation forcing longshore workers at the Port of Montreal, who had been on a general strike, back to work.

On May 1, CUPE 375 – the longshore workers union –led the International Workers’ Day march in Montreal.

At the event the union representative and spokesperson for CUPE 375 stated that “The rights to free collective bargaining of striking longshore workers have been restricted by the passage of back to work legislation in the House of Commons. We’re pleased to march along with our brothers and sisters to mark this International Workers’ Day, even though it’s a really sad day for union members across the country. We clearly have a long way to go to protect the hard-earned free collective bargaining rights of workers.”

It takes two to negotiate

The collective agreement of CUPE 375 expired in December 2018. Discussions with the employer bogged down mainly on the issues of schedules and life-work balance.

The negotiations were quite tough, because the Maritime Employers’ Association (MEA) simply didn’t want to negotiate. The employer wasted more than a year and a half in their attempt to have

the entire port declared an essential service. The Canadian Labour Relations Board (CLRB) did not rule in their favour. The MEA did everything it could to get the government to vote on back to work legislation, even though such legislation restricted basic bargaining rights.

CUPE is preparing a challenge of this legislation before the courts, and a complaint has been filed with the International Labour Organization (ILO).

An avoidable strike

When the parties were still at the bargaining table in early April, the employer was first to resort to pressure tactics against the union by taking their job security away. The union responded to this affront by declaring a partial strike affecting overtime, which was extended to weekend work.

The employer again stepped up the pressure tactics by changing the way their schedules were structured, which made

work-life balance even more difficult. The union responded with notice of an unlimited general strike. However, at a press conference announcing when the strike would begin, the union offered to withdraw all strike notices if the employer would end its pressure tactics. The MEA refused.

Nonetheless, the parties did continue talks during the first few days of the strike – but as soon as the employer found out that

back to work legislation was being drafted, they walked away from the bargaining table.

The right to strike is an important part of the power equation between unions and employers. If an employer knows that the government will pass special legislation denying the right to strike to a union, it removes the incentive for employers to negotiate.

■ Lisa Djevahirdjian

BARGAINING DEADLOCKS ARE PILING UP IN NEW BRUNSWICK

One after another, provincial bargaining units in New Brunswick are receiving “deadlock declarations” from the NB Labour Board. After fruitless years in bargaining, it is clear that contract talks with the province are going nowhere. Premier Blaine Higgs is pushing major CUPE Locals towards a strike situation.

Before Christmas, in the middle of the second COVID-19 wave, Premier Blaine Higgs mandated a wage freeze for all NB public sector workers followed by three years of one percent increases. Half a year later, Higgs has not yet altered his collision course with the public sector.

Major locals such as the Departments of Transportation and Tourism (CUPE 1190), Corrections (CUPE 1251), Community Colleges (CUPE 5017), Social Development (CUPE 1418) and Education workers (CUPE 2745) have reached this formal impasse. For these 8000 members, the only step remaining is a strike vote.

Bargaining talks with the healthcare workers of CUPE 1252, and the school bus drivers, maintenance and custodial staff of CUPE 1253,

have not been fruitful either. It is just a matter of time before these two locals, which represent close to 12,500 members, reach a deadlock too.

Blaine Higgs is playing a dangerous game of chicken if he thinks that essential workers who fought off COVID-19 will simply change course rather than unite for a strike – perhaps a massive provincial one.

Journalists from the progressive *NB Media Coop* to the Irving-owned *Telegraph Journal* have already drawn parallels with the general strike of 1992, where CUPE members illegally walked off the job en masse and won.

Not once since 1992 have all provincial locals seen their bargaining timelines align to allow for true coordinated bargaining. More than two thirds of CUPE New Brunswick 20,000 strong members are now in this position. Compared to 1992, citizens are much more aware of the importance of public services. Through their dedication and sacrifices, workers are holding our system together. Residents have seen the severity of the recruitment and retention crisis in most sectors. They see that maintaining the lowest wages in Canada is not a winning strategy for our communities.

By promising nothing to everyone, the Premier has put all the right ingredients together for mass worker solidarity in the public sector.

To paraphrase Joe Ettore, a union organizer from days gone by: “If the workers want to win, all they have to do is recognize their own solidarity. They have nothing to do but fold their arms and the province will stop. United, the workers are more powerful with their hands in their pockets than all the bosses, governments and their special laws.”

■ Simon Ouellette

CAMPAIGN BUILDS MEMBER UNITY AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR BARGAINING

A new campaign to promote unity among CUPE members will make a big difference for CUPE 728 as it begins preparations for bargaining in the largest and fastest-growing school district in B.C., says CUPE 728 President Tammy Murphy. Her local, which counts over 5,000 K-12 members, represents support workers in School District 36. The CUPE 728 executive recognized that

there were concerns they needed to address and recently took up the challenge to lay a foundation for an inclusive, united group where members feel valued and respected.

“We want everyone to feel an equal part going forward into bargaining for our next collective agreement,” said Murphy, saying that the union wants to build member understanding

of the role each classification plays so that they better understand each other’s issues.

The local represents members in more than one hundred classifications for Caretakers, Clerical, Information Technology, Maintenance, School and Community Support, and Student Support.

They developed postcards that will go out to all members through Canada

Post every month. Each postcard features two diverse member classifications side by side. Newspaper ads each month feature the same members sharing thoughts on their dedication and commitment to students and Surrey schools. The local also purchased masks for each member carrying the logo and slogan, “Surrey Schools Stronger Together”.

A secondary goal of the campaign is to build public support. Since the early stage of the pandemic, a time of fear and uncertainty about the virus and how it spread, CUPE 728 members from every department “have stepped forward to make sure that the kids, families and schools were taken care of,” said Murphy. To shine a light on members’ dedication, the campaign includes newspaper ads that will feature different members throughout the year.

Murphy praised her members for their amazing commitment during the pandemic. When schools were initially closed, care-

takers, trades, and non-trades went to work to prepare the school for reopening. Education Assistants, StrongStart and all support staff arranged activities for the children of first responders who were receiving daycare in schools. With several inner-city schools in the district, many other departments including outreach workers, safe school liaison workers and meal program workers prepared lunches for families in need.

“When people were able to stay home and still be paid, these members chose to come into work, despite the personal risks,” said Murphy. “This was a scary time, and our members were great. I’m proud of CUPE 728 members and what they do for students and schools, and to support each other.”

Murphy, saying it’s important that members be recognized and acknowledged, added that they also need to understand that it takes all of them to have a strong local.

■ Janet Szliske



The bonds of solidarity

When long-simmering disputes over Indigenous land claims in the town of Caledonia, a short drive due south from the City of Hamilton, flared up last summer, offering up material support was a familiar and foregone conclusion for CUPE 3906.

After all, the McMaster University academic local had been supporting various Indigenous causes in the region for more than a decade – most notably with respect to the dispute that placed settler property developers and politicians on one side against activists from Six Nations of the Grand River. Activists have long argued that the land in question was never the Town of Caledonia’s to sell to developers.

The efforts of CUPE 3906, while appreciated, rarely if ever seemed to galvanize the local’s membership or strengthen the bonds of

solidarity between the union and Indigenous groups advocating and agitating for changes in the relationship between settlers and Indigenous people across Canada.

This time, said CUPE 3906 President Sharoni Mitra, things were different.

“The work we’re doing and the support we’re providing help in a material way to really strengthen the bonds between our members and the local Indigenous community,” said Mitra.

Involvement by CUPE 3906 activists and rank-and-file members skyrocketed following the latest occupation by Six Nations members and their supporters of the two housing developments. The activists renamed the development 1492 Landback Lane, a drily humorous line connecting the dots between the year European settlers first made contact with Indigenous people

in the Americas and the assertion by many members of Six Nations that the land in question was stolen from their ancestors.

Nowadays, involvement and outreach between the union and Six Nations activists, often called Land Defenders, continues at unprecedented levels, thanks to a well-connected and motivated Indigenous Solidarity Working Group (ISWG) at local 3906.

Mitra said the local provides the group with two crucial resources: material support and the autonomy to take on the tasks they feel are important, with no strings attached or second-guessing by the local. The working group operates with two co-chairs, one of whom is a Sociology student and member of the Haudenosaunee First Nation, which is one of the First Nations comprising Six Nations.

“Because of Sonia’s direct ties with the Six Nation community, we’ve been able to really strengthen those ties,” Mitra said.

Among the tasks undertaken by the ISWG is the solicitation for and

approval of proposals from Indigenous-led organizations and grassroots Indigenous activists to apply for and receive ‘Community Impact Grants’ of up to \$500 to support activities and actions that aid and benefit local Indigenous communities, both on and off of reserves.

Providing material support while attaching little or no strings is the sort of thing that could make a treasurer uncomfortable, but CUPE 3906 Treasurer Chris Fairweather said the program has become so popular with members that they approved an even larger budget for the group.

“In fact, we’ve had other CUPE locals approach us and ask if they could contribute to the working group’s budget,” he added.

For Mitra, one of the most gratifying aspects of seeing the working group and its efforts flourish goes well beyond funding worthwhile endeavours. As the conflict escalated and blockades were tested by police and others for weaknesses, supporters from CUPE 3906 put their bodies in harm’s way to strengthen the Land Defenders’ blockades.

“We’re getting an opportunity to engage with Indigenous people on their terms in a way that we, as a movement, haven’t always done. Labour’s relationship with Indigenous people causes is a seriously complicated one over the years and this actually lets us engage in some seriously good and meaningful dialogue,” she said.

■ Kevin Wilson





Global Justice

Global Pandemic provides cover for repression



Over the past year a troubling global pattern has emerged. Social movements, including trade unions, have experienced intensified repression while under COVID-19 restrictions. To stifle opposition there has been an intensified attack on trade unions and human rights defenders. As workers lose their jobs, activists and organizers are being criminalized, illegally arrested, and detained to prevent them from organizing workers in the streets and into unions and associations.

Intensified repression is also being met with intensified and inspiring resistance. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how people's needs are not being met by current public policies and the economic model that governs our lives, across the globe. Popular movements, such as women's groups and unions, have taken to the streets around the world, demonstrating the power of the people. As the pandemic took hold, and the economic and social conditions deteriorated, organizing and unionizing workers was as critical as ever.

In Burma, the trade unions joined other social movements to reject the

imposition of military rule. Workers in the public sector, including healthcare workers, were among the first in the streets despite the violence. In response to the forced eviction of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah, the attack on worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, and following days of bombardment on the Gaza Strip by Israel, Palestinians called for an historic general strike on May 18. The strike was an important show of strength and unity and exposed Israel's reliance on Palestinian labour. In Nicaragua, activists are not relenting to the onslaught of government led legislative and personal intimidat-

tion tactics meant to instill fear and to undermine their work to support women factory workers during the pandemic. In India, a farmers' mobilization calling for the repeal of the pro-corporate farm laws became the largest and longest sustained non-violent movement in Indian history. The protests garnered amazing solidarity in India and around the world.

In Colombia, the police used the pandemic curfew as cover to target activists. While Colombia was struggling with the third highest COVID infection rate in the Americas, the government introduced tax and health reform bills that were widely opposed by the population.

Social movements, including unions, took to the streets in opposition and were met with terrible violence, including the murder of over 40 protestors. International solidarity helped to expose government violence and the regressive reforms have since been withdrawn as the violence continues.

In the Philippines, the government passed new anti-terror legislation in July 2020, at the start of the pandemic and during a strict lockdown. While isolated in their homes, trade unionists and dissenters became more vulnerable to state-sponsored harassment and violence. Education sector workers and union members with the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) were subjected to illegal surveillance and some leaders were visited by military personnel in their homes or work. According to ACT, "Despite the relentless attacks on our organization and our leaders, teachers have unwaveringly

carried on in their just fights." In the public water sector, Ramir Corcolon, the secretary general of WATER and a vocal critic of the water privatization policy of government was incarcerated for his activism in March 2021.

Under harsh conditions, leaders and activists are successfully resisting and fighting back. Margarita Lopez, president of SINTRACUAVALLE, a water workers union in Colombia shared with CUPE that "we see an opportunity in this emergency for a new awakening, for a new world, for a more humane world."

It is in these moments when, in addition to collective bargaining, our role as the labour movement to promote policies and actions that benefit the entire society becomes clear and takes on greater urgency. This is also when international solidarity becomes essential.

■ Kelti Cameron

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY

Fighting back on all fronts to protect free collective bargaining and right to strike

By updating our bargaining strategy in December 2016, CUPE's National Executive Board renewed our union's commitment to protect the right to free collective bargaining, including the right to strike.

At CUPE National, we take that mandate very seriously. Unfortunately, too often governments pass legislation taking away these fundamental rights. CUPE National is fighting back on all fronts to protect our rights so we can bargain forward. Through political action, we are working to defeat governments that remove our right to free collective bargaining. We also continue our long legacy of defending these rights in court when necessary.

In 2008, CUPE supported the Saskatchewan Federation of Labor legal fight against the Wall government's law limiting public sector worker's right to strike. And it was worth every penny since the Supreme Court affirmed that all Canadian workers have the constitutional right to strike or to have a fair way to resolve labour disputes if their work is essential.

In recent years, we also invested millions of dollars in multiple judicial challenges to overturn Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Ontario laws limiting wage increases, New Brunswick and Québec laws unilaterally changing our members pension plans or Ontario law prohibiting our members from striking, just to name a few. And as always, CUPE National will be there with you financially in your bargaining to improve wages, working conditions, job security, pensions, and benefits. Our financial foundation remains solid despite the pandemic.

This year we kept the National Defence Fund spending mostly at 2020 levels resulting in continued resources for bargaining support campaigns. The National Strike Fund has over one hundred and twenty-eight million dollars to fund your strike-avert and strike support campaigns. With the largest strike fund in the country, CUPE National can support our locals when they need it. And be assured, I will personally make sure we continue to have the resources to back you up at each and every bargaining table across the country.



CHARLES FLEURY ONLINE twitter.com/CUPENatSec

The show must go on

How CUPE members at UBC's Chan Centre have kept the arts alive during COVID



The University of British Columbia's (UBC) West Point Grey campus, one of the largest university properties in the country, is eerily quiet. With most students and many staff working and learning remotely, the place seems empty. However, if you know where to look you can find dedicated workers on-site, facilitating UBC's COVID adaptations and keeping campus operations running until a return to in-person classes is possible.

Most of these workers are members of CUPE 116 and CUPE 2950. While the sector has seen its fair share of layoffs, one can still find library workers, maintenance staff, technicians, trades people, support and frontline service staff, food service workers and many more at their posts. CUPE workers at UBC, and institutions like it across the province, are diligently working away until something resembling normal operations can resume in the fall.

When the house went dark

An often-overlooked group of campus employees, whose work during COVID has been particularly challenging, are the CUPE 2950 members who staff UBC's Chan Centre for the Performing Arts. As the institution's primary music venue, a 1660-seat performing arts space and concert hall, the

Chan Centre has felt the pandemic's effects in the extreme.

"The stack of March 2020 *Georgia Straight* newspapers in the lobby really says it all," notes Nadia Roberts, the Centre's Events and Front of House Coordinator. "One year ago, with almost no notice, we postponed or cancelled all the great shows we had lined up and simply shut our doors."

As devastating as the abrupt closure was on morale, Chan Centre staff were not about to let the pandemic undermine the facility or its importance to the arts community. That's why, within days of the COVID-19 closure, CUPE members at the Centre were already adapting operations to allow performances to continue under the new guidelines. Through hard work and innovation—and, amazingly, after only a few weeks—Centre staff had re-opened the facility, having converted all their systems (ticketing, booking, recording, and broadcasting) to virtual platforms.

Reinventing the workplace

"While we were processing the many refunds for cancelled shows in the weeks following the closure, we were also completely re-inventing our ticketing platform to provide access to recorded and live-streaming performances," says Ticket Office Supervisor Lyndsey Roberts.

The work done by Chan Centre staff to enable online ticketing not only helped the Centre continue earning revenue for community arts groups, adds Roberts, but also enabled other parts of the university to stay open.

"It was incredibly rewarding to see how our work to create an online ticketing system helped venues like the UBC Museum of Anthropology and Biodiversity Museum safely schedule visitors and remain open during the pandemic," she says.

The work to convert to online operations went far beyond virtual ticketing. It required a wholesale re-invention of the performing arts centre's technical operations.

"From applying COVID protocols to multi-person technical work, to changing our lighting designs to accommodate records, we re-invented nearly everything we did," says Assistant Technical Director and Head Lighting Technician Andrew Riter. "We had to design, procure, install and master new equipment systems in a matter of weeks, when that work would normally take months if not years."

Head Audio Technician Lloyd Balsler says it was challenging to find cleaning solutions both strong enough to kill the COVID virus and gentle enough not to harm sensitive audio equipment: "Sometimes it was the little things that caused the largest problems."

Serving a grateful community

Despite the hard work and condensed timelines, Chan Centre staff all agree that the effort has been worth it, pointing to the many members of the arts community who have benefited from the Centre's continued operation. The place has never been busier, hosting a multitude of classes, rehearsals, performances and recording sessions for the University's School of Music in addition to its other user groups.

"Nothing can describe the sense of pride when we first heard music return to the space," says Roberts, recalling the Centre's initial hostings of performances by UBC students, Vancouver Opera, and the Vancouver Recital Society. "It is such a joy to see students here every day and know that, without the Chan Centre, their education would have been interrupted for at least a year."

For Balsler, the investment was about supporting the many people who rely on access to the arts for health and wellness. "Our work to ensure continued access to performing arts means that people can feel some connection to normalcy during all this madness," he says.

Whether providing space for struggling arts groups or creating its own content through the Chan Dot Com performance series, the Chan Centre has been a bright light of hope in an otherwise dark year for the arts community. Thanks to a group of dedicated, highly skilled CUPE workers whose entire job is to remain in the shadows while others shine, the Centre's COVID-time story serves as a strong example of how CUPE members both behind and on the front lines—are helping our communities make it through one of the toughest years in living memory.

■ Steven Beasley

