

COUNTERPOINT

SUMMER 2022

CUPE'S NATIONAL PUBLICATION



FOCUS

Progressive Conservative
Wage Cuts Fuelling Ontario's
Unprecedented Health Care
Crisis



FOCUS

The UCP's Attack on Alberta's
Public Education Has Hurt Us All



Profile

KARLA SASTAUNIK
President of CUPE 4784



Global Justice

Brazilian Workers Aim
to Turn Tide of Water
Privatization in Fall Election



Health & Safety

Post-Pandemic Health and
Safety: What Do We Need
from Our Governments?



NO TURNING RIGHT

Equality and empathy is the solution
to right-wing frauds and cynics.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

- 3 President's Message**
Equality and Empathy Is
the Solution to Right-Wing
Frauds and Cynics
- 4 Secretary-Treasurer's
Message**
How Right-Wing
Governments Use Disasters
Like a Pandemic to Advance
Their Agenda
- 5 ELECTION FOCUS**
Progressive Conservative
Wage Cuts Fuelling
Ontario's Unprecedented
Health Care Crisis
- 10 Chronology of a Pending
Victory for a Government
Out of Touch with Real
People**
- 13 The UCP's Attack on
Alberta's Public Education
Has Hurt
Us All**
- 17 Reconciliation**
A Long Way from
Reconciliation: Budget
2022 Misses the Mark in
the Search for Unmarked
Graves
- 22 Profile**
KARLA SASTAUNIK
Giving Students an Equal
Chance to Succeed: One
Educational Assistant's
Fight Against Austerity
- 26 Global Justice**
Brazilian Workers Aim
to Turn Tide of Water
Privatization in Fall Election
- 31 Health & Safety**
Post-Pandemic Health and
Safety: What Do We Need
from Our Governments?

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EQUALITY AND EMPATHY IS THE SOLUTION TO RIGHT-WING FRAUDS AND CYNICS

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

The pandemic has worn people down, and taken so much from all of us. The cost of living is skyrocketing. There is so much uncertainty about the future, and understandably, folks are feeling frustrated and let down by their governments.

It is only natural that people will start looking for solutions, or at least a way to vent their frustration. A few years back, Donald Trump tapped into widespread anger, frustration, and sense of abandonment. He channelled it, along with the racism and misogyny and intolerance and hate that became his calling card, and he turned it into a political movement that won the highest office in the world.

Many of us wanted to believe the Trump spectacle was something that could only happen south of the border. But the so-called Freedom Convoy protests this year have shown us we were wrong.

The same frustrations exist here in Canada, and right-wing frauds and cynics like Conservative leadership candidate Pierre Poilievre are trying to exploit them.

They want to manipulate working people who are tired, and angry, and fed up, and convince them that the solution is to fear and loathe our neighbours and people who are different from us. They stoke racism, misogyny and intolerance. They lash out at “the elites” and say they speak for the Canadian people – even when so much of their money and support comes from millionaires in the United States.

It is a clear shift in the way right-wing movements in Canada are organizing and positioning themselves. But despite the change in tactics, their objectives haven't changed at all. They still seek to increase corporate power, and make our country a less tolerant, less generous, and less compassionate place.

As always, my friends, it's our job to make sure that doesn't happen. It's our job to help turn that frustration into action for a better world. It's our job to help turn that sense of neglect and despair into hope. It's our job to mobilize working people toward a better future for everyone.

The right-wing in this country, led by folks like Pierre Poilievre, Jason Kenney, Doug Ford, Blaine Higgs, know they have nothing to offer. Their power is built on stoking fear, anger, and frustration.

Our movement is built by lifting people who have been let down by the system. It is built by strengthening our social safety net to ensure no one is left behind, and facing our collective challenges with a sense of empathy and shared struggle.

This has always been a critical part of who we are and what we do.

But in today's world, this work is more important than ever.



HOW RIGHT-WING GOVERNMENTS USE DISASTERS LIKE A PANDEMIC TO ADVANCE THEIR AGENDA

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

Public services across Canada were already in trouble when COVID-19 arrived. Decades of underfunding and privatization had forced Canadians to endure longer wait times at hospitals, fewer ambulances on the road, larger class sizes, few child care spaces and reduced supports for people in need.

In the early days of the pandemic, it seemed like governments might be waking up to the impacts of their attacks on our public services. Everyone across Canada rallied in support of front-line heroes and recognized the value of the essential services they deliver.

Two years later, it is evident that governments have lost all ambition to reverse the damage done through decades of austerity leading up to the pandemic. Public funding of services remains woefully inadequate. People who depend on these services to survive continue to be tossed aside. Public sector workers continue to be denied safe working conditions and proper compensation even as inflation is skyrocketing.

Right-wing governments aren't budging from their agenda: they continue to direct public money to wealthy individuals and corporations through tax breaks and privatization giveaways, rather than address the gaps in public services and social protections that the pandemic made so visible.

They looked at understaffing, wait times, overwork and burnout, and saw the same solutions they always see – privatization, budget cuts, and wage caps – despite the current crisis.

Activist and journalist Naomi Klein has discussed extensively how right-wing governments take advantage of natural disasters, like pandemics, to entrench their right-wing policies and programs. She calls it "The Shock Doctrine".

We have seen the shock doctrine in action over the last two years: whether it is the Saskatchewan Party furthering privatization of health care calling it "modernization", the UCP in Alberta going to war with doctors and nurses, Ford's PCs protecting private long-term care operators from death toll repercussions in Ontario, or the Higgs government in New Brunswick doubling down on zero-wage increases for front-line workers.

As working people, we can't assume that our governments will learn the same lessons that we do from a crisis like COVID-19. But there is nothing saying we can't put the shock doctrine in reverse.

In New Brunswick, CUPE members mobilized and they forced Higgs to back down from his mandate. Together we can make real gains for our members and all Canadians. The unprecedented challenges across the country demand nothing less of us.

We can use this crisis – the relentless suffering and insecurity of the past two years – to win better for working people. We can use all our strength, all our leverage, to make the change we need and want. And you have my word that you can draw on CUPE's national strength and resources to fuel our fight.

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE WAGE CUTS FUELLING ONTARIO'S UNPRECEDENTED HEALTH CARE CRISIS

By **Stella Yeadon** and **Craig Saunders**

Between them, registered practical nurses (RPNs) Answilla Joseph and Sonja Bernhard have nearly 50 years of experience in nursing. But, even for these two seasoned RPNs, the last two years of pandemic-related workloads, health and safety risks and understaffing have left them battle-fatigued and ready to pack it in.

It is not solely the challenges of pandemic work they point to as the reason pushing them over the edge. Rather, they describe a seething frustration that is rooted in the disrespect they think is behind the Progressive Conservative government. It is a government that brought in a pre-pandemic wage cap law (Bill 124) and pandemic emergency orders that usurped contracts and interfered with collective bargaining.



Years of low wages and heavy workloads mean front-line health care workers in Ontario are leaving their jobs in record numbers.

Joseph and Bernhard aren't alone. This anger over PC government disrespect is shared by many of the tens of thousands of Ontario's health care staff.

Having endured one of the highest COVID-19 workforce infections and burnout rates in the world, Ontario's mostly female health care workforce "is completely demoralized by our working conditions and the increasing violence against us," says Bernhard. "On top of a provincial government that seems to want to demean us by offering inadequate pandemic pay premiums for some workers and not for others, they want to cut our wages under Bill 124."

Following yet another physical attack from a patient in early 2022, Bernhard gave up the full-time nursing position at Hamilton's St. Joseph's Healthcare that she held for 14 years, for a part-time job at the same hospital. She makes up for the lost income with more part-time work at a community college nursing program.

Wage cuts amid record-high inflation

By capping wages of most public sector workers at 1% under Bill 124, the Ontario PC's have cut real wages for people like Bernhard by 10% over the last two years, as inflation hit 7% – a 31-year high. The cap also limits bargaining for increased mental health

protections that are sorely needed by health care workers, after years of pandemic trauma.

During 2021-2022, front-line staff in hospitals, long-term care and community health care have loudly and visibly told both the government and their employers across Ontario that they want Bill 124 scrapped, so they can bargain wages and improved pandemic and mental health benefits.

Despite the burnout and exhaustion they have experienced during the pandemic, they are pushing back, mobilizing dozens of protests and workplace actions to repeal Bill 124.

Through their activism, health care's front-line workers have earned widespread support from Ontarians and all three Ontario opposition parties.



In Ontario, CUPE represents more than 90,000 health care workers. Recent CUPE polling shows 81% of more than 2,500 Ontarians surveyed support scrapping the PC government's 1% wage cap, so that hospital workers can get a pay increase that at least matches inflation. Overwhelmingly, Ontarians said they want the province to stabilize staffing by making more of the jobs full-time and by increasing wages to retain staff. They believe this will help attract the additional 50,000 health care workers needed over the next few years to provide care to a growing and aging population.



"Surely the thanks we are getting from the Ontario government for caring for more sick hospital patients than ever before, and for fragile residents in understaffed long-term care homes in a pandemic, cannot be a wage cut," says Joseph, an RPN for more than 30 years.

Like so many others in health care, over the last year, Joseph has frequently considered leaving her



nursing job in the musculoskeletal and multisystem rehabilitation program at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute. It is something she never would have considered earlier in her career.

"Not being able to bargain additional mental health protections for front-line staff, who have worked through a pandemic, is nothing short of cruel," she says.

Deteriorating conditions that hurt patients and staff

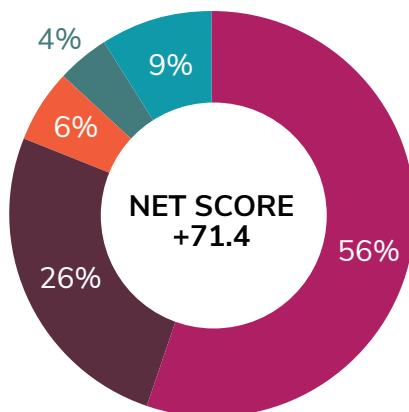
Beginning in the summer of 2021, CUPE's Ontario Council of Hospital



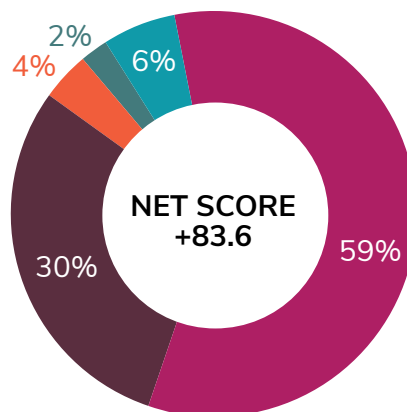
Unions (OCHU-CUPE), in coalition with SEIU Healthcare, began bargaining a new provincial contract for nearly 70,000 hospital workers. Negotiations hit a brick wall when the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) tabled concessions, in addition to hiding behind the PC wage cap and their own refusal to negotiate meaningful protections related to the pandemic and rising violence against hospital staff.

Vacancies in hospitals are soaring as Bill 124 artificially suppresses their wages. Data shows that the hospital job vacancy rate has increased from 1.6% at the end of 2015 to 6.3% at the end of 2021.

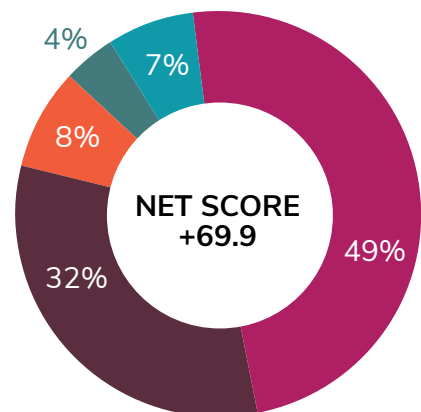
Support for scrapping the Ontario government's 1% wage cap



Support for increasing access to mental health supports for hospital workers



Support for increasing the pay for all hospital workers



● Support ● Somewhat support ● Somewhat oppose ● Oppose ● Unsure

Source: Nanos Research, online representative survey, February 4 to February 8, 2022, n=2,550 Ontarians



“The Ford PC government’s ongoing disrespect for the women working in health care is hurting our members and it is hurting the public,” says Michael Hurley, president of CUPE’s Ontario Council of Hospital Unions.



Hospitals and nursing and residential care facilities now have more than 32,000 job vacancies. Add another 10,350 for ambulatory health care and the total is over 42,000 job vacancies. That is up from about 10,000 at the end of 2015, a fourfold increase.

Over 2020 and 2021, registered nurse vacancies more than doubled and registered practical nurse vacancies more than tripled. Nurse aide and orderly vacancies more than doubled. Other assisting occupations in support of health services saw vacancies more than quadruple.

As OCHU-CUPE President Michael Hurley put it in a press conference on January 6, 2022, “we wouldn’t have 45,000 health care staff catch COVID-19 at work, and 24 die, in Ontario alone, if they had been given access to adequate personal protective equipment. And instead of repealing a bill that is fuelling the pandemic staffing crisis, the PCs offer modest permanent pay increases for personal support workers (PSWs), and a one-time payment for nurses that is a fraction of the PSW increase, while excluding hundreds of thousands of other vital workers,” Hurley deplures.

“This approach has satisfied no one working in health care. It has worsened morale and caused upheaval and demoralization in a sector that relies heavily on teamwork to provide high-quality patient and resident care,” he emphasizes.

Stabilizing the health care workforce is now widely seen as a big problem for the Ford PC government. But their ideology and apparent stubborn commitment to a wage cap law, passed before the pandemic hit, is getting in the way of solving the problem.

“When you layer the wage cuts caused by Bill 124 on top of the failure to provide proper personal protective equipment during the pandemic and the backbreaking workloads that come from working in a hospital system with the fewest staff of any developed economy, many people are just giving up,” says Sharon Richer, OCHU-CUPE secretary-treasurer.

“Bill 124 is sexist and demeaning to Ontario’s predominantly female workforce. The PCs should be listening to the increasingly loud calls from the front lines to scrap it,” she adds.



“It isn’t lost on them that you never see this kind of exploitation of male-dominated first responders like police or firefighters,” denounces Sharon Richer, CUPE’s Ontario Council of Hospital Unions secretary-treasurer.

Job vacancy in long-term care up by 457% in 7 years

To make matters worse, Bill 124 only applies to Ontario’s non-profit long-term care homes and retirement residences, capping staff wage increases to 1%. For-profit and municipal facilities are exempt from the legislation.

Two years into a pandemic, all long-term care workers have continued to support seniors, and they all deserve significant wage increases, not wage restraint.

“The PC’s have, through Bill 124, penalized the workers and non-profit operators that had much better outcomes for residents during the pandemic. The majority of residents who died from COVID-19 were in for-profit homes,” says Debra Maxfield, chair of the CUPE Ontario Health Care Workers’ Coordinating Committee.

Indeed, for-profit long-term care homes had 7.3 COVID-19 deaths per 100 beds, while non-profit facilities had 3.8 deaths per 100 beds. This is likely linked to lower staffing levels found in for-profit long-term care when compared with non-profit homes.

Along with a significant lack of resources, and retention and recruitment challenges, non-profit homes saw themselves unable to compete on general wage increases, overall compensation and additional wage adjustments with other health care operators, therefore losing skilled workers to other sectors.

The problem became so pronounced that at St. Joseph at Fleming, a non-profit home in Peterborough, front-line staff and the home’s administrators banded together at several community rallies to tell the Ford government the wage cap under Bill 124 is disproportionately harming them and must be repealed.

This staffing crisis comes at a time when the need for long-term care workers will grow dramatically over the coming years. The wage cap will make it difficult if not impossible to achieve the government’s commitments of four hours of direct care per resident per day by 2024-2025, for which CUPE has fought so hard. It will also affect many of the Ford government’s promised new long-term care beds – in fact they are choosing to allocate more than half of them to private, for-profit companies.

On June 2, 2022, Doug Ford’s government was re-elected to a second four-year majority term.

“We can’t go on like this. If we’re going to have quality care in hospitals, retirement and long-term care homes, and in-home and community care, we need a government that respects health care workers, and their wages and working conditions. A government that strives, like us, to provide a higher level of care in public services,” Maxfield insists.





2022 QUÉBEC ELECTION: CHRONOLOGY OF A PENDING VICTORY FOR A GOVERNMENT OUT OF TOUCH WITH REAL PEOPLE

— By Ronald Boisrond



FOCUS

Québec is going to the polls in 2022, and all indications point to the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) coasting comfortably to an overwhelming victory this fall. The election of a government led by an unprecedented number of CAQ MNAs is of concern to labour organizations like CUPE, who represent workers in essential services.

Both before and during the pandemic, these workers were under severe strain due to budget cuts, lack of protective equipment, understaffing, harsh working conditions, chronic lack of recognition and the government's reluctance to negotiate.

However, most Quebecers are satisfied with the CAQ according to major surveys, and the party could gain total power without having to share it during its second mandate. The most recent Léger polling from May pegged its support at 46%, 28 points over its closest rival, the Québec Liberal Party (QLP). The Conservative Party of Québec ranks third, followed by Québec solidaire (QS) and the Parti Québécois (PQ).

The CAQ currently has 54% support among Francophone voters, another sign that it is headed for a resounding victory in next fall's election.

The 338Canada website is projecting that the CAQ will maintain its lead in its 74 current ridings, and could well increase its gains by approximately 30% during the election. If these projections hold true, this will mark a first in Québec – in the National Assembly, 63 seats are required to form a majority government.

Premier François Legault's televised daily press conferences during the pandemic possibly had some bearing on the trust that people currently have in him, despite the decrees and ministerial orders adopted during the pandemic until December 2022.

Furthermore, the CAQ has begun making inroads in electoral divisions that its adversaries have held. Last April, it won a by-election in the Marie-Victorin riding, which had been a Parti Québécois stronghold for close to 40 years.

As for the Québec Liberal Party, it could end up being hurt by the creation of two new provincial parties that are attempting to win over dissatisfied Anglophones, a segment of the electorate that has traditionally voted Liberal.

Back in 2018, the CAQ waged a campaign described as leaning “somewhat to the right”, but several unions, including CUPE, openly opposed the CAQ, as well as the Liberal Party that had the wear and tear associated with a lengthy stay in power.

The pandemic probably influenced the establishment of the CAQ's ideological line and galvanized the premier's popularity, but we hope it also forced him to acknowledge the importance of public services and public servants themselves.

It is worth remembering that during the health crisis, workers in the health and social services sectors were particularly affected because the government resorted to a series of decrees to keep services running, which resulted in the suspension of collective agreements. The CAQ had unilaterally given itself the power to impose new working conditions on already exhausted staff.



In 2021, public sector negotiations between the union common front and the Québec government lasted more than a year and a half. Workers in the health, education and social services sectors were demanding recognition of their work and improvements to wages and working conditions.

Furthermore, thousands of female workers have also had to deal with inexcusable delays by the government to pay them the money they were owed for the purpose of maintaining pay equity agreements.

While the CAQ was freeing up billions of dollars for infrastructure and concrete, workers in the field, who were worn-out and receiving little consideration, resigned in droves.

This worsened the acute labour shortage and once again undermined the quality of public services in Québec. In addition, the ground granted by the CAQ to the private sector continues to be a concern.

The Quebec Federation of Labor (la Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, or FTQ) has just launched the campaign “On en a plein notre CASQue!” to publicize its priorities and those of Quebecers in view of the October 3rd election. The campaign paints a bleak picture of the CAQ government: undemocratic, anti-worker, arrogant, and out of touch with ordinary people. The FTQ notably polled the population who, contrary to voting intentions, said they were dissatisfied with the party’s record and want reinvestments in health, education and the environment.



The next public sector negotiations in 2023 will obviously be crucial to improving the quality of public services.

In the past few weeks, Québec’s major unions, as well as the FTQ, have noted a change in the government’s tune. Following the traditional meeting between the premier, the labour minister and union leaders on May 1st, International Workers’ Day, the latter indicated they were more optimistic than they were before.

“We hope that this change in tune is sincere and that if the CAQ is voted in as the next government this fall, it will consider unions as partners who contribute to the quality of public services, and not as adversaries,” said Patrick Gloutney, president of CUPE Québec.

Is François Legault’s change in tune conditioned by the coming election? We will see what his true intentions are once he has begun his second term – a term which, from all indications, will be in a majority government. Until then, workers must keep defending their values and demand that he makes real commitments to the services they care for.



THE UCP'S ATTACK ON ALBERTA'S PUBLIC EDUCATION HAS HURT US ALL

By Cheryl Oates





IN THE SPRING OF 2019, FORMER FEDERAL CABINET MINISTER JASON KENNEY WAS RUNNING TO BE PREMIER OF ALBERTA. HE STOOD BEHIND A PODIUM IN A CLASSROOM FILLED WITH COLOUR WHEELS AND DIAGRAMS, AND PROMISED TO BRING COMMON SENSE BACK TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

Three years into its mandate, the United Conservative Party (UCP) has brought anything but order to classrooms in Alberta. They have starved the public education system year after year, and funnelled money to the private sector.

Earlier this year, Jason Kenney announced \$25 million in new operational funding for Alberta's charter schools. He paired that with an additional \$47 million in charter

school capital. Meanwhile, the measly 1.7% increase in UCP's budgets didn't even cover the cost of inflation and population growth.

The UCP have also done their best to silence those who oppose their agenda through anti-democratic legislation intended to limit unions' abilities to organize and muzzle working people speaking truth to power.

Jason Kenney and the UCP would have Albertans believe that these sweeping changes are in the public's interest. They cloak their anti-worker ideology in the rhetoric of personal choice, efficiency and responsible budgeting. But behind those buzzwords is a dangerous political agenda determined to decentralize and privatize Alberta's public services.

In reality, the last few years of underfunding and education cuts have had significant impacts on the quality of Alberta's public education and students' experience.

Class sizes are getting bigger, and education workers are continually asked to do more with less. This year alone, there are 1,000 fewer teachers funded by the government than when the UCP took power in 2019, and the ratio of teachers to students continues to balloon.

Education assistants, who provide support to students in need of extra attention, have had their hours cut, eating away at salaries already below the poverty line. The students they support are no longer getting the extra help they deserve in order to succeed – they are falling behind.

Morale is low, and the Kenney government's ideology-driven curriculum review is salt in the wound for public education workers trying to find a silver lining in their current situation. After forming government, the UCP scrapped an extensive in-progress curriculum review favouring a rewrite driven by an appointed advisory committee.

The curriculum they have come up with has been criticized by a diverse group of Albertans as racist, Eurocentric, and age-inappropriate. Despite public outcry, the curriculum is slated to be taught in some schools as early as this fall.

As more voices join the chorus speaking out against Jason Kenney and the UCP, the government is doing all it can to silence its detractors.

In July 2020, the UCP brought in Bill 32 – legislation that eliminates important employment standard protections, and attacks the ability of unions to represent their members and advocate for better working conditions. These changes specifically affect the work of unions in Alberta, but all Albertans should be concerned by the prospect of their charter-protected rights being undermined.



THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGES LIKE THIS OFTEN RIPPLE OUT TO ALL CORNERS OF SOCIETY.

Burdened by the implications of COVID-19, the UCP hasn't had the capacity to truly implement its agenda. On May 18, Jason Kenney resigned, proving that we are making progress and our voices are being heard. But our fight against the UCP government's anti-worker, anti-union, anti-Alberta agenda must continue, no matter who their next leader is.

The conservatives are still pushing ahead with a plan to privatize and dismantle public services, Bill 32 remains on the books, and the party is staying focused on itself and distracted by internal disarray and infighting, instead of focusing on the things that matter to Alberta families. If emboldened with a fresh mandate in the upcoming provincial election – scheduled for May 29, 2023 – public services will be the UCP's target as they prop up private options.

At risk is the quality of Alberta's K-12 education, thousands of public sector jobs and workers' constitutional rights. Though the UCP promised it, there is no common sense in this government.





A LONG WAY FROM RECONCILIATION: BUDGET 2022 MISSES THE MARK IN THE SEARCH FOR UNMARKED GRAVES

By Rebecca Benson



The 2022 federal budget, released on April 7, falls notably short of what is required for Canada to continue to advance its efforts at reconciliation.

In June 2021, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that the hurt and trauma felt by Indigenous communities was “Canada’s responsibility to bear” and pledged that, “while we cannot bring back those who were lost, we can – and we will – tell the truth of these injustices, and we will forever honour their memory”.

Since the initial announcement of the uncovering of 215 unmarked graves at Kamloops Residential School in May 2021 (later revised to 200 graves), more than 1,800 confirmed or suspected unmarked graves have been identified at residential school sites across Canada.

It is important to note that Indigenous communities have always spoken of children that never came home from residential schools, and have always known of the presence of unmarked graves on residential school sites. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission included information about known and suspected unmarked graves in its final reports released in 2015.

However, as of April 2022, only 15 of the 139 residential school sites have been searched, with 124 school sites yet to be investigated.

Unfortunately, this year’s federal budget does not provide effective financial commitments to follow through on the Prime Minister’s promise. And one of the budget’s prominent weaknesses is the lack of support directed toward Indigenous communities to search residential

school sites to recover unmarked graves.

In the lead up to the 2022 federal budget, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) provided a detailed preliminary set of recommendations. Notably, they identified a need for \$1.2 billion over two years for the investigation and commemoration of unmarked gravesites by Indigenous communities.

The federal government responded by providing only \$209.8 million over five years for a list of various activities, including a new building for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and the complete disclosure of federal documents related to residential schools. While the recovery and commemoration of unmarked graves is included in this amount, it remains unclear what portion of this meager budget will



be provided directly to Indigenous communities and allotted to the search of residential school grounds.

The federal budget also spares \$65 million for other activities and projects related to the commemoration of residential schools, but none is provided directly to Indigenous communities. Instead, this funding is reserved for government ministries and departments, and the RCMP who will oversee decisions regarding the resources shared with Indigenous communities. This includes:

- \$5.1 million over five years to the RCMP “supporting community-led responses to unmarked graves”.
- \$10.4 million for “a Special Interlocutor who will work collaboratively with Indigenous peoples and make recommendations for changes to strengthen federal laws and practices to protect and preserve unmarked burial sites”.
- \$25 million over three years to digitize documents related to the federal Indian Day School System.
- \$25 million over three years to Parks Canada to support the commemoration and memorialization of former residential school sites.

Yet again, government ministries and departments will decide to what extent Indigenous communities have access to this funding.

And while the 2022 budget aspired at “making housing more affordable”, the AFN noted that the commitments to Indigenous housing fall well short of what is required. Facing a need of \$44 billion over ten years, according

Not only is this budget a sliver of what is really required, by providing little funding directly to Indigenous communities engaging in residential school site searches. It also ignores the full spectrum of resources that Indigenous peoples need and have desperately lacked for decades.

to the AFN, the federal government has chosen to advance only \$3 billion over five years.

Community reactions were mixed. On the one hand, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) praised the federal budget for its allocation of funds toward Inuit housing, listed as \$845 million over seven years. But on the other, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, representing

off-reserve status and non-status Indians, Métis and Southern Inuit Indigenous peoples, criticized the budget as lacking support for the over 80% of Indigenous people who live off-reserve.

The Native Women's Association of Canada has likewise raised red flags, because the 2022 budget provides no funding for the implementation of the 231 calls for justice that were



outlined in the National Inquiry Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People.

For many years, Indigenous activists, politicians, and communities as a whole have been asking for Indigenous peoples to have a meaningful say in how funding allotted to Indigenous issues and communities is spent. Standing up with them, CUPE is committed to reconciliation and justice for Indigenous peoples.

In fact, at our union's National Convention in November 2021, members reaffirmed their commitment to truth and reconciliation through the adoption of Resolution 66. They

also responded to the devastating uncovering of unmarked graves, as well as the need for additional resources toward searches of residential school grounds across the country.

CUPE delegates also adopted Resolution 60, which states that we will, with other like-minded labour organizations and institutions, demand a search and investigation of all residential school grounds, funded by the federal government and led by Indigenous people.

We continue to call on all governments in Canada to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to

action and to provide resources to remedy all the issues experienced by Indigenous peoples on a daily basis.

Canada has a proven history of underfunding services and infrastructure for Indigenous communities. This chronic neglect has created injustice and crisis. Despite the 2022 federal budget's inadequacy to honour the need for Indigenous-led responses, and to provide what is required to find and appropriately memorialize thousands of unmarked graves across the country, CUPE will continue to advocate for fair and equitable funding and to hold the Canadian government to account for truth and reconciliation.



Comparison between the AFN preliminary budget recommendations and the 2022 federal budget allowances for funding for unmarked gravesites on residential school grounds.

ITEM DESCRIPTION IN AFN'S PRELIMINARY BUDGET	AMOUNT RECOMMENDED BY AFN	ITEM DESCRIPTION IN FEDERAL BUDGET 2022	AMOUNT ALLOTTED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	ORGANIZATION, MINISTRY OR DEPARTMENT TO RECEIVE FUNDING
Unmarked gravesites investigation and commemoration. This estimate was designed to allow for enough funds to search all residential school sites across Canada for unmarked gravesites.	\$1.2 billion over 2 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To document, locate, and memorialize burial sites at former residential schools. 2. To support the operations of and a new building for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. 3. To ensure the complete disclosure of federal documents related to residential schools. 	\$209.8 million over 5 years	Indigenous communities, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and federal departments
N/A	N/A	To appoint a Special Interlocutor who will work collaboratively with Indigenous peoples and make recommendations for changes to strengthen federal laws and practices to protect and preserve unmarked burial sites.	\$10.4 million over 2 years	Department of Justice
N/A	N/A	To ensure the Royal Canadian Mounted Police can support community-led responses to unmarked burial sites.	\$5.1 million over 5 years	The Royal Canadian Mounted Police via Public Safety Canada
N/A	N/A	To support the digitization of millions of documents relating to the federal Indian Day School System, which will ensure survivors and all Canadians have meaningful access to them.	\$25 million over 3 years	Library and Archives Canada
N/A	N/A	To Parks Canada to support the commemoration and memorialization of former residential school sites.	\$25 million over 3 years	Parks Canada



PROFILE KARLA SASTAUNIK

By Tria Donaldson and Aline Patcheva

GIVING STUDENTS AN EQUAL CHANCE TO SUCCEED: ONE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT'S FIGHT AGAINST AUSTERITY

Karla Sastaunik is president of CUPE 4784 and co-chair of CUPE's National Women's Committee. She is also an Educational Assistant (EA) in a K-12 school at Good Spirit School Division in Saskatchewan.

She is passionate to work with all students, and more specifically with students with special needs, who require supplemental learning supports, or who are newcomers to Canada. She is a proud advocate for students, and she is determined to fight for an improved education system in Saskatchewan.

Question 1

How did you become an Educational Assistant (EA) and what do you love about the work you do?

Growing up, I was inspired by my dad who was a teacher and vice-principal, he was very involved in the community, and he still is today, at 75. He raised us telling us to be part of the solution. When I was 13, I started babysitting for a child born with disabilities. I always knew that I wanted to work with children with disabilities. After graduation, I became certified as an EA and I was thrilled to work in my community.

I love the magic that happens when kids love something new or understand something for the first time. It could be something like tying their shoes or learning to solve a math problem. EAs build a different relationship with these students than teaching staff, and I feel blessed to be part of their lives.

Question 2

Why are education workers like you essential for students' development and perseverance?

Educational Assistants play a vital role in the education system. We provide intensive and unconditional support to students regardless of the circumstances, and sometimes we may be the only adult who advocates for them and sees them as they really are. Relationships that develop are special. We care about them like they are our own and make sure they have everything they need – be it personal care support, extra time to review a concept or work through an assignment, or even, for children with an immigrant background, help in learning to speak English.



Question 3

What were the challenges brought on by the pandemic in the past two years and how did you have to adapt?

Many students have huge learning gaps as a result of the pandemic.

I work with children with intensive needs. They don't easily use technology, and often have a hard time communicating online. Without face-to-face learning, we lost many of the gains that we had made. In some cases, without daily interventions, their speech or development regressed.

And many students are behind in math and English. It has been hard to get students back on track and there is not enough support staff to go around.

Question 4

How is your profession affected by years of conservative penny-pinching toward public education in Saskatchewan?

The cuts to funding in education in Saskatchewan are seriously impacting students. There are far less education support workers and teachers than there have ever been. I have been doing this work for 35 years and my schedule has been cut – from spending multiple hours per week with students in a specific class to sometimes only having minutes to try and accomplish the same goals.

EAs are also primarily women. Our wages are low, many of our members struggle to make ends meet and must work multiple jobs. It is especially hard for single parents.

This is not a school division issue – this is a provincial government issue.

While the Saskatchewan Party states it has improved and increased funding to divisions, it is all smoke and mirrors. Most school divisions are facing budgetary shortfalls and have had to make cuts. My division received a 0.83% increase, but inflation has risen exponentially. It is impossible to maintain the status quo within classrooms, and because of the reduction in services, students are not receiving the education they deserve.

Question 5

How is your local union fighting the cuts to funding and mobilizing citizens to support CUPE education workers?

At CUPE 4784, we work hard to get the public to understand what support workers do. But it is not easy to do this work in a conservative stronghold. Everyone in town knows how I vote; I try to make my opinion known and to educate people about what is at risk in the community.

It all starts with our members, and the people I work with. CUPE 4784 members participate in community outreach activities – swim nights, skate nights, student bursaries. We write letters to MLAs and lobby, and make sure our union work doesn't alienate people. We have a good relationship with our employer, and as a result we meet with them and can work together to raise awareness on our issues.

Question 6

What is your greatest hope for the future?

The path this government has taken in forcing financial restrictions on school divisions is not sustainable and is detrimental to every student and family in this province. The time to reinvest in education is now. We may not be able to change the government, but we can demand that they hear us and take action.

My goal as an EA and as a union activist is to make sure our public education system supports students, so that upon graduation they can have the skills they need to be successful and to find happiness wherever their future takes them – into a day program, the workforce, the trades, or university. I don't do this for the money – though a raise would be nice. I do this for these young people, they are our future.



BRAZILIAN WORKERS AIM TO TURN TIDE OF WATER PRIVATIZATION IN FALL ELECTION

By Karin Jordan



Ary Girota holding a T-shirt with the slogan “Who will pay the price for CEDAE’s privatization? Water is life and health, and is not for sale!”, with a group of demonstrators on the steps of the state legislature, April 2021.

Photo: SINDAGUA-RJ



Brazilian water worker Ary Girota has not stopped fighting since the water utility where he works was carved up for privatization in April 2021. He is defending 2,500 members from mass layoffs and highlighting the dangers of for-profit water. He is equally relentless in calling out two Canadian pension funds for profiting from the selloff.

There is hope on the horizon. Girota and many others are organizing internationally to reverse the tide of privatization. They are also working to rebuild the country through the upcoming presidential election this fall.

A wastewater treatment worker for 28 years, Girota got involved in his union to fight privatization. In 2020, he was elected president of SINDAGUA-RJ, one of three unions representing workers at CEDAE, or Companhia Estadual de Águas e Esgotos. CEDAE is the country's largest and most profitable water and wastewater utility, serving 12 million residents in 64 municipalities in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

In a video address to the 2022 CUPE Saskatchewan Convention, Girota told delegates that privatization of the successful public water utility is "a tragedy," and part of a broader attack on public services and Brazilian society. He thanked CUPE members for their solidarity in a struggle that has a long history – a struggle that intensified with the 2018 election of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

"We're in one of the most difficult moments, not only for us as CEDAE workers, but for the entire country. It is a fascist government that's elected right now at the national level. They're implementing proposals and laws that take away workers' rights and attack the working class," Girota told us in an interview.

The Bolsonaro government's push to sell off Brazil's public utilities and services specifically targeted public water and wastewater services, steamrolling over legal and jurisdictional roadblocks.

"They are burning everything to get short-term money coming into the budget," says Ary Girota.

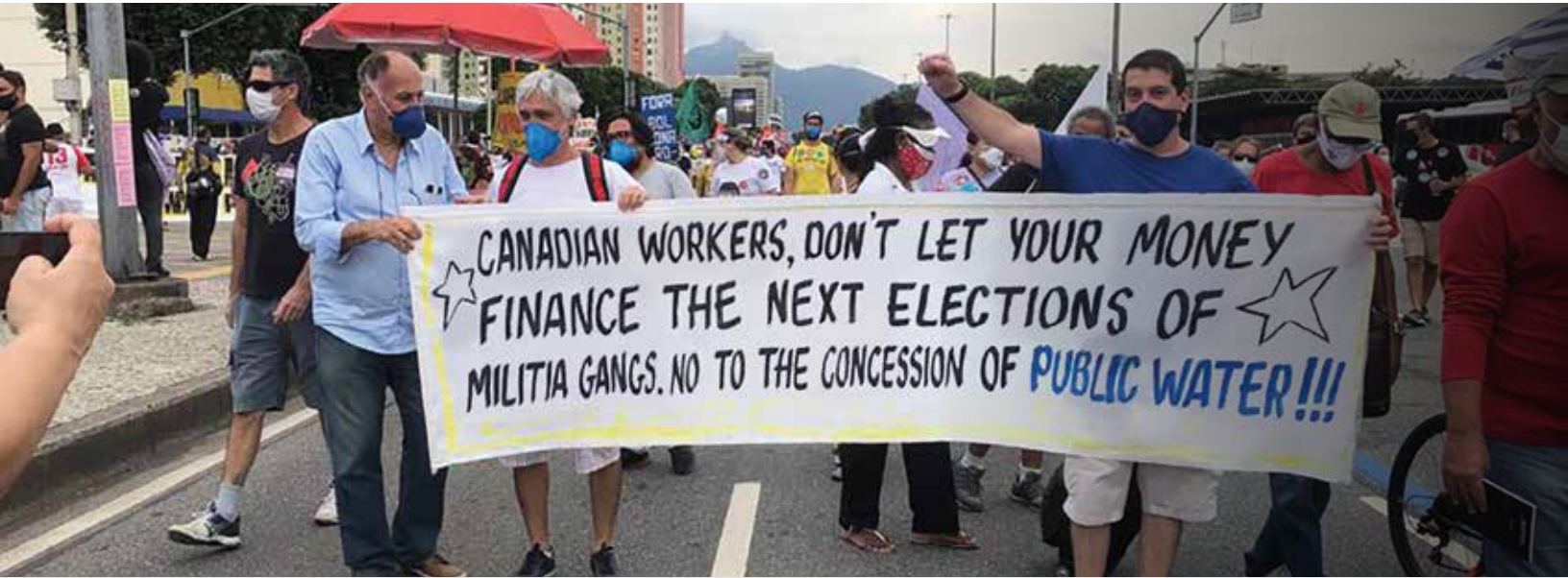
Cuts to the company's maintenance and infrastructure budgets were "active sabotage" that primed the company for privatization, according to Girota. Adding to the chaos, privatization was rammed through during a brutal wave of COVID-19.

Auctioning off a human right

In April 2021, the profitable parts of CEDAE were auctioned off in a televised spectacle where Bolsonaro himself wielded the gavel. Brazil-based Iguá Saneamento snapped up the 35-year contract for one large chunk of the utility with a \$1.7 billion bid. Iguá Saneamento is majority owned by two Canadian pension funds and already holds multiple privatization contracts in the country.

Girota was taken aback to learn Canadian workers' retirement funds were helping bankroll CEDAE's privatization. "This is ridiculous!" he thought.

He quickly realized it is "the investment managers who are controlling this, not the working class in Canada." Together with global public sector union federation Public Services International, Brazilian workers organized with Canadian unions to target CPP Investments, which manages the funds of the Canada Pension Plan.



Rio de Janeiro workers and residents protest the involvement of two Canadian pension funds in a major water privatization deal. The banner urges Canadian workers to stop their retirement funds supporting paramilitary gangs directly connected to President Jair Bolsonaro and his family, and opposes water privatization, April 2021.

Photo: SINDAGUA-RJ

CUPE joined the fight, demanding CPP Investments immediately pull out of Iguá Saneamento and National President Mark Hancock called the scheme “socially harmful and economically risky” in a letter to the head of CPP Investments.

CUPE warned the deal threatens the human right to water and sanitation services, and cited the disastrous global track record of water privatization leading to skyrocketing rates, reduced access, declining quality and cuts in service and jobs.

Canada’s role goes beyond pension fund profiteering. The Canadian government is promoting Bolsonaro’s water privatization plan as a ‘socially and environmentally responsible’ business opportunity for Canadian corporations. One of Canada’s Brazil-based trade commissioners praised Bolsonaro’s policies for increasing “market access and competition in a sector that has traditionally been controlled by state-owned companies.”

Promoters of CEDAE’s privatization also say it will increase access to water and wastewater services, a pressing situation for millions in the country. Girota dismisses these claims as “marketing,” saying corporate buzzwords can’t hide the fact that “this is an investment that will make people suffer.”

For-profit water woes

Girota speaks from experience when he says the private sector will not expand water access. He says 80% of Rio residents already have access to drinking water, after decades of painstaking work by the public utility.

To Girota, CEDAE workers are heroes and “really deserve to be recognized. In the two years of the pandemic, CEDAE never stopped for one single day. We never stopped delivering water to anybody!” he exclaims.



Ary Girota, on the right, meeting with Workers' Party President Gleisi Hoffmann, during a lobby of members of the lower house of Brazil's National Congress, November 2021.

Photo: SINDAGUA-RJ

Meanwhile, water privatization in Brazil has meant a dramatic drop in workers' wages, and difficulty enforcing health and safety standards. Private operators have dumped untreated sewage in lakes and rivers, and in the ocean, causing environmental damage.

Water prices are rising, which is also inevitable according to Girota. "The water bill for everybody starts to go up, of course, it does. It is the philosophy, it is the point of the private sector. But the problem is that nobody can live without water."

He adds that delivering water and wastewater services to people living in informal settlements, including the favelas where more than 12 million Brazilians live, takes local know-how that private companies simply don't have. Just as important, expanding access to unserved communities will not deliver the profits that private investors demand.

Public water authorities commonly provide access to clean drinking water and wastewater treatment for people who cannot pay.

"If there's anybody that has the capacity and the will, the desire to deliver water to that last 20%, it's the public authority. It is not the private actors. All our experiences with privatization in Rio have the same results. They don't want to service the poorest communities," Girota insists.

Organizing for a better future

With presidential elections set for October 2022, many see hope in the candidacy of former president and Workers' Party leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, known as Lula. Electing Lula could open the door to reversing Bolsonaro-era policies that have shredded the country's social fabric, including water privatization. "We understand that we want to get Lula elected, but we also understand that one person, one political figure, can't do all of this," says Girota.

He is clear that change won't come just from the top, and that it will take people inside and outside the government working together for change.

"It is not only about changing the president. We need to elect others in Congress and build a critical mass of people who will take decisions that are in favour of the population," he adds.

What is good for workers in Brazil could be damaging for Canadian pension funds. Investors face financial losses if CEDAE and other privatized companies return to public hands. CUPE highlighted the inherently risky nature of



Ary Girota and SINDAGUA-RJ representatives hold a banner with the slogan "We are all CEDAE – public, state-owned and efficient" outside the Canadian consulate in Copacabana, after delivering a letter for Justin Trudeau and the CEOs of the two Canadian investment firms, June 2021.

Photo: SINDAGUA-RJ

privatization in its campaign targeting CPP Investments and will keep raising the fundamental problems with pension funds owning, operating, and profiting from vital public services.

"What we need is all the power that we can put together collectively to change the situation. It is a really difficult, complicated moment in our history and there's something very, very central about water and water treatment in all this," Girota explains.

"Because when you cut off people's water, you are cutting off people's access to life," says Ary Girota.

Girota is hopeful for Lula's election: "What we're trying to do is really feed and build people's hope and capacity to dream and envision a different model," he concludes.

KEEP OUR PENSIONS OUT OF PRIVATIZATION!

Two Canadian pension funds are profiting from water privatization in Brazil.

AIMCo manages the funds of several Alberta public sector pension plans, including the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP), which most CUPE members in Alberta belong to. AIMCo first invested in Iguá Saneamento in 2018 and owns 39% of the company.

CPP Investments manages the funds of Canada's public pension plan, which every Canadian worker pays into, and bought a 45% stake in Iguá Saneamento in March 2021.

The situation shined a spotlight on a widespread problem. Private capital, including pension funds, is in overdrive seeking to profit from public services and systems through privatization. CUPE has developed a toolkit to help members protect public infrastructure and keep their pensions out of privatization.

*Visit cupe.ca and download *Keep our pensions out of privatization: A guide for CUPE members, trustees and other pension representatives.**



POST-PANDEMIC HEALTH AND SAFETY: **WHAT DO WE NEED FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS?**

— By **Troy Winters**, **Jenna Brookfield** and **Colleen Butler**





For the past two years, COVID-19 has dominated conversations on occupational health and safety. The pandemic has impacted our evaluation of risk in the workplace and our approaches to safety at work. These perspectives should shape our demands for government action on worker safety as we head into our first provincial elections since the beginning of the pandemic.

The precautionary principle

After the 2003 SARS outbreak, Ontario created a commission to examine how the virus was spread and managed. The commission concluded that we should adopt the precautionary principle to minimize the impact of future outbreaks. This means that public health authorities should take precautionary actions without waiting for scientific proof that these actions are necessary.

Unfortunately, the lessons learned from SARS did not inform Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“One of the reasons this has been such a tough two years is because the government reacted so slowly,” contends Jordan Bray-Stone, chair of the CUPE Airline Division’s Occupational Health and Safety Committee. **“It wasn’t adopting a preventative approach. It was a reactive approach.”**



For example, provincial governments tried to reduce the spread of the virus based on faulty assumptions about how it was transmitted, instead of applying public health measures that would account for various possible modes of transmission. The failure to adopt reasonable precautionary measures and to apply public health measures consistently across workplace settings led to thousands of workers being unnecessarily exposed to COVID-19.

“There was no clear direction and enforcement from the government,” says Raj Uppal, president of CUPE 41 and a member of CUPE’s National Health and Safety Committee. “When things are mandatory and enforced, it makes it a lot easier to have that protection in place.”

In addition, governments had previously made budget cuts which deprioritized tracking outbreaks and ensuring an adequate supply of personal protective equipment in case a pandemic were to occur, further jeopardizing workers’ health and safety.

“We had gotten rid of our international early warning system, and we weren’t prepared for supply chain issues,” Bray-Stone explains. “It is important that front-line workers understand and remember that when voting for a government. Cutbacks from previous years led us to have this delayed support. If another pandemic comes along and your public health department has been gutted in areas that you don’t normally see, and they have to rebuild that during the crisis, it is going to come back to haunt you as a worker.”

Sickness in the workplace

The pandemic also highlighted just how important sick days are for workers.

Despite this, many CUPE workplaces continued to use attendance management programs that track and unfairly punish workers for taking sick days, even when those sick days have been negotiated into collective agreements.

“Attendance management programs are used to scare people off and get rid of people,” says Uppal. “But sick days are so important because you need the time to fully recover. You need to be well to provide services to others.”



ABOUT JORDAN BRAY- STONE

Jordan Bray-Stone has been a dedicated health and safety activist in CUPE's airline sector since 2008. He has advocated for worker health and safety in a number of settings, including before Parliament.

Based in Montreal, he is the chair of his workplace Occupational Health and Safety Committee and chair of the CUPE Airline Division's Occupational Health and Safety Committee.



Workplaces that placed a moratorium on attendance management programs during the pandemic saw benefits with decreased rates of transmission and improvements to worker morale.

"A lot of members were concerned about calling in sick because of absentee management programs," explains Bray-Stone. "It was a huge relief to those individuals when we were able to say there is no program right now. The goal is to keep sick people out of the workplace."

Health and safety activists say that increasing accessibility to sick days and restricting attendance management programs should be key issues for workers in upcoming elections.

"It is something that members should really focus on when they are voting, whether it is for publicly elected officials or for bargaining surveys and contracts," argues Bray-Stone.

Mental health

Finally, the pandemic has thrown a spotlight on mental health. Isolation and loneliness are affecting both people who work from home and those who are physically at work but whose social interactions are limited due to public health restrictions.

Members are also facing additional mental stress due to the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and increased social tensions stemming from the pandemic.

CUPE health and safety activists argue that psychological health and safety should be as much a priority as physical health and safety in the workplace, and that governments should address this issue through legislation.

During the pandemic, Bray-Stone observes members "needed mental health supports in the form of counselling. Those are things that we need to look for and require from our governments in some form."

“Mental health is not different from physical health,” insists CUPE 41 President Raj Uppal. “Workers’ compensation needs to be improved immensely when it comes to mental health. Across Canada, we need tighter legislation.”



Moving forward

Elections have consequences. For example, Alberta’s United Conservative Party has dramatically rolled back provisions in the Occupational Health and Safety Act, weakening the role of health and safety committees, and making it harder to refuse unsafe work.

Workers must demand that our elected representatives address gaps in health and safety legislation and enforce health and safety standards through inspections, enforcement, and the application of penalties in the case of employer non-compliance.

“Having legislation is great, but having no consequences doesn’t change anything,” Uppal says. “More visibility from health and safety officers, frequent check-ins, additional workplace inspections – these are things that were needed and would have prevented a lot of spread. That is something our governments need to improve on.”

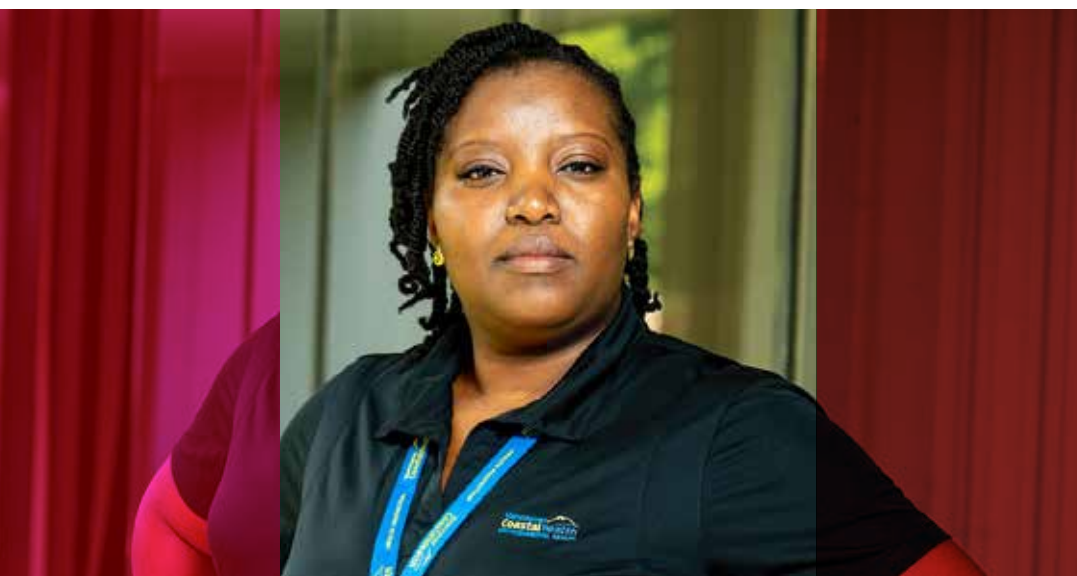
ABOUT RAJ UPPAL

Raj Uppal is the president of CUPE 41, representing 1,400 workers at Grey Nuns Community Hospital and Edmonton General Continuing Care Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

A long-time union activist, she currently serves as the diversity vice-president for CUPE Alberta. She is the chair of the CUPE Alberta Health Employees Committee (AHEC) and the worker co-chair of her worksite’s joint Health and Safety Committee. She is also a member of CUPE’s National Health and Safety Committee.



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