

# COUNTERPOINT

WINTER 2023

CUPE'S NATIONAL PUBLICATION



## FOCUS

CUPE members mobilizing for universal pharmacare in Canada

## Health & Safety

A woman or girl is killed every second day in Canada: Let's act in their memory

## Profile

AUBREY GONSALVES  
National Diversity Vice-President

## Global Justice

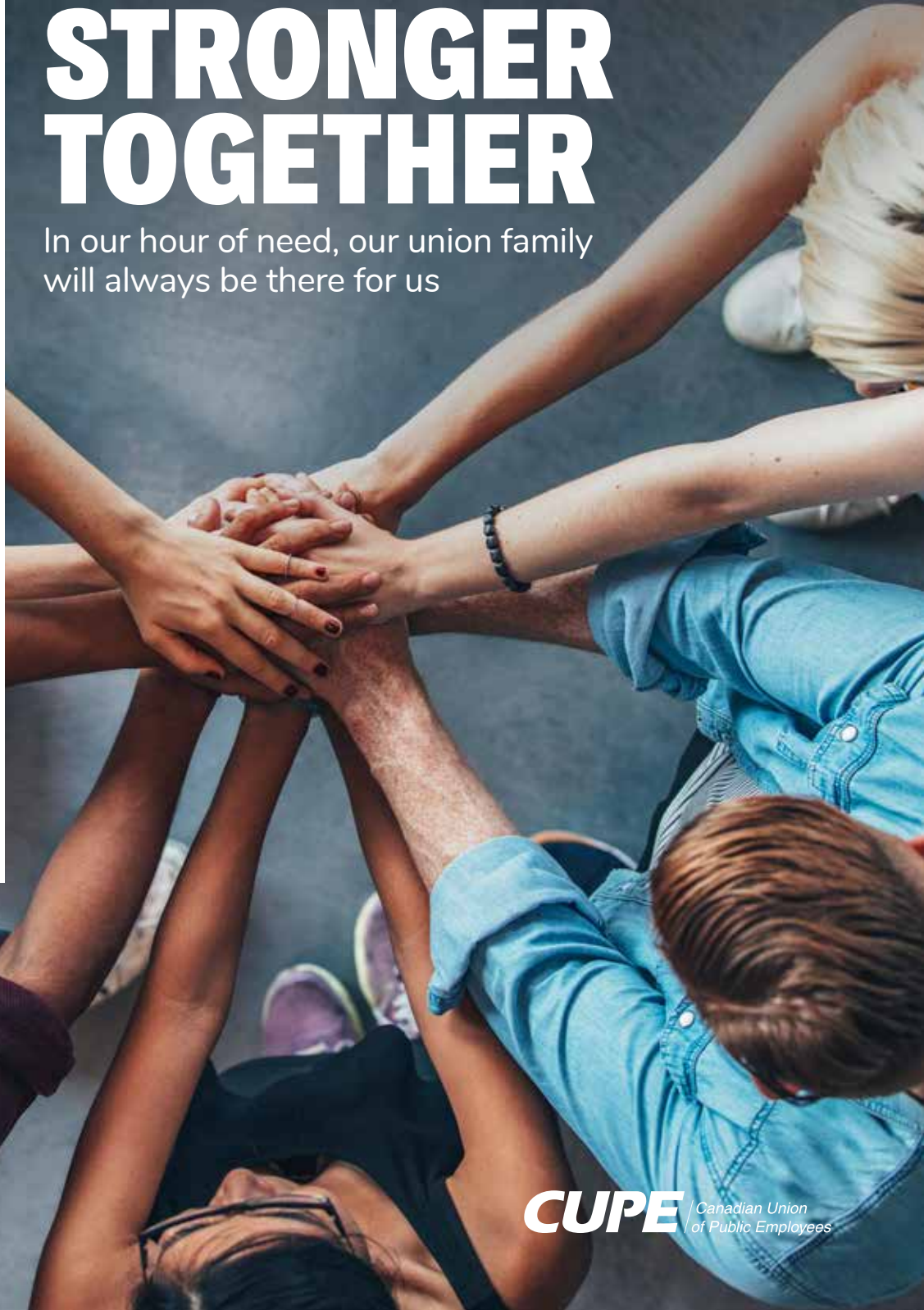
Colombia shifts to the left after Petro and Márquez's historic victory

## Economy

We can't take our foot off the gas now — 50 years in the making, Canada's public pensions fall short of seniors' needs

# STRONGER TOGETHER

In our hour of need, our union family will always be there for us



**CUPE** / Canadian Union of Public Employees

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Building solidarity, allyship and representation for an anti-racist CUPE

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# OUR BARGAINING RIGHTS ARE FRAGILE, BUT WE WILL ALWAYS DEFEND THEM

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

**S**ince the earliest days of the pandemic, despite their rhetoric praising us as public service heroes, we knew that right-wing governments would eventually come for our jobs and the services we provide. We knew they would use pandemic spending as an excuse to cut back even deeper once the crisis subsided. And that is exactly where we find ourselves now. Nearly everywhere, governments are on the attack.

From Newfoundland and Labrador all the way to Alberta, they aren't just looking to chip away at our public services. Whether it's health care or education, right-wing governments are trying to break them through understaffing and underfunding, and then claim only the private sector can fix them.

This is exactly the struggle our union was up against recently in Ontario, against Doug Ford's Conservative government. Our 55,000 members in the education sector were determined to fight for their first meaningful wage increase in many years, but the Ford government refused to negotiate a fair agreement. When these workers served notice to exercise their right to strike, Doug Ford responded with Bill 28, which imposed a new four-year contract with inadequate wages and concessions, and made strike action illegal, punishable by \$4,000 fines per worker per day. It was the most draconian piece of anti-worker legislation I have ever seen.

But the very next day, our members courageously walked off the job anyway in a political protest, to demand their fundamental and constitutional rights as workers be respected. It was a true David vs. Goliath fight.

And in our hour of need, our union family was there for us. In an incredible show of solidarity, workers from public and private sector unions joined our protests in communities across Ontario. Messages of support poured in from across the country and around the world. And under the leadership of the Canadian Labour Congress, we planned escalating actions in all sectors of the economy — including a commitment to a general strike.

We were going to raise hell, and Doug Ford knew it.

Bill 28 became law on a Thursday night and Doug Ford was at a microphone to announce he was walking it back first thing Monday morning. No government has ever scrapped its own legislation as quickly as Doug Ford did with Bill 28.

This story shows us just how fragile our rights are. And it also shows how powerful we can be when we fight together, and how vital it is for us to stand up and defend our bargaining rights.

Because our collective power to bargain for better jobs and a better life for workers isn't just about us, it is also about preserving the foundational pillars of our society like universal health care and public education.

Our members, and our movement, put Doug Ford and every other premier across Canada who might try and undermine our rights on notice: we are organized, and we are ready to fight.





# THE POWER OF SOLIDARITY

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

**B**ringing members together to raise our living standards is one of the most important things our union does. We do it when we bargain with employers and press governments for better social protections.

Government programs — like universal pensions, free dental care, accessible and affordable pharmacare, unemployment insurance, paid sick benefits and paid parental leave — are critical to our and our families' well-being. It is why they are sometimes called social wages — and unions must fight for them just as hard as we fight for good pay.

CUPE has a long history of campaigning for universal social programs and comprehensive public services. With a recession looming, and governments signalling big spending cuts, this work has renewed importance.

For example, consider child care, which has suffered decades of chronic underfunding in this country, worker shortages caused by a pervasive, often sexist view of their role, and by the lack of decent wages and working conditions.

In 2021, we won a breakthrough when the federal government agreed to build a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. It is the first new large-scale social initiative since medicare. The impact will be profound for everyone, not just those of us with kids.

When mothers have access to affordable child care, they can fully participate in the workforce and earn more. Families are more economically secure. And high-quality child care gives all children, especially the most vulnerable, equitable opportunities for early learning.

Moreover, child care has far-reaching economic benefits. The public cost of universal child care is more than repaid through the higher tax revenues that come with more people working.

One economic study concludes that a universal child care program would create over 200,000 new jobs in child care and another 80,000 jobs in industries that supply the sector. The study also estimates an increase of labour force participation and employment by up to 725,000 Canadian women. This is massive job creation in every community in Canada. Annual GDP and extra government revenues would increase too — a counterpunch to the recession that high interest rates and spending cuts are bringing our way.

Of course, it is one thing for the federal government to promise a child care program. It is another thing to get it built right and in a way that will raise the pay of those who work in child care.

Fifty years of child care advocacy have taught us what to do to win improved social programs. We must direct resources to the challenge. We must build membership support just like we do when we bargain a contract. We must convince those who remain unconvinced. We must mobilize the full power of our union, working hand in hand with others who want change.

We have shown repeatedly that when our rights are under attack, our labour movement is strong — and we will stand up for each other as family. And after every win, we will keep fighting to ensure no one takes away the precious gains we have made.



# A WOMAN OR GIRL IS KILLED EVERY SECOND DAY IN CANADA: LET'S ACT IN THEIR MEMORY

— By Julie Girard-Lemay





On December 6, 2022, CUPE Quebec opened its Human Rights Symposium with an event to commemorate the women victims of the Polytechnique massacre. At the end of the province's 12 days of action to denounce violence against women, CUPE members were invited to attend sessions on dealing with systemic racism, discrimination against Indigenous peoples and violence against women, and identify concrete solutions to combat the different types of violence that women face.

On December 6, 1989, an armed man stormed into the École polytechnique de Montréal and murdered 14 women, injuring another 10. Among the dead was 25 year-old CUPE member Maryse Laganière, a budget clerk for the school's finance department, killed as she was leaving at the end of her workday. The shooter blamed women for his rejection from the engineering program. This massacre is a femicide — the most extreme form of discrimination and violence against women and girls. These women died simply because they were women.

In 2021, 173 women and girls were murdered. This represents a 26% increase in violent killings of women and girls compared to 2019 pre-pandemic numbers. It comes as no surprise, as most cases of spousal violence take place in private, at home, a situation made worse by pandemic lockdowns.

There are several types of femicide. For example, women worldwide are much more likely than men to be assaulted, raped or murdered by a current or former partner. In this case, the killings of women are known as intimate or family femicides, or more commonly, domestic homicides.

There are non-intimate femicides, when women are killed by a stranger merely because they are women, such as the rampage at Polytechnique Montréal in 1989.

There are also femicides rooted in gendered racial violence, such as when Indigenous women and girls are murdered. The victims in these cases are at higher risk because of their combined identity as Indigenous women. Many other types of femicide exist as well, including armed-conflict or lesbophobic femicides.

Regardless of the descriptor, femicides are proof that discrimination, violence and inequalities that women are subjected to are still spreading like wildfire in our society.





## Workplaces are allies in the face of violence against women

The workplace is often the last refuge of freedom for women who are victims of domestic violence and provides them with an avenue to outside help. For these women who feel isolated and have lost control of their life, work can become a safe space where they can reveal their situation. Unfortunately, domestic violence often follows victims to work in the shape of abusive communication, stalking, harassment and even abusive contact with co-workers. This is why colleagues and unions are crucial to help them find a foothold to access assistance and information.

There are different warning signs that we can pay attention to at work, that could suggest that a woman is a victim of domestic violence, such as coming in late, absenteeism, self-isolation or hurried responses to phone calls or text messages, while appearing to be stressed and fatigued. Domestic violence can be physical, but also psychological, financial or take another form.

**Together, we have a duty to listen and offer help to a co-worker who reveals they are experiencing domestic violence. The question is whether we are doing enough.**

Employers must ensure the safety of employees exposed to situations of violence at work. To do so, they should be proactive and adopt a domestic violence policy, which should:

- Identify the risks of domestic violence in the workplace or nearby and adopt safety measures such as secure building access;



- Prevent family femicides in the workplace by prohibiting family members from loitering there;
- Develop a training plan for all staff on spotting signs of domestic violence, resorting to appropriate intervention techniques, and sharing information on resources to help women victims of violence;
- Establish a procedure to be followed when an employee reports domestic violence, that guarantees their right to privacy and confidentiality, and includes the implementation of an individual safety plan (changes to their schedule, to their phone number or email address, etc.).

Unions also play a key role in fighting domestic violence. They can put in place joint union-employer processes to establish a risk prevention strategy and intervention mechanisms when cases are reported, or to adopt a gender-based violence policy.

Through collective bargaining we can ensure that collective agreements include crucial provisions for paid leave for court dates or appointments that victims of violence would benefit from. Collective agreements should also include paid domestic violence leave and shield women from discipline and administrative monitoring, guarantee their job security if they miss work and safeguard their privacy.

CUPE's Domestic Violence and the Workplace Bargaining Guide will help you negotiate paid leave and other protective measures for workers confronting spousal violence. You can also consult the CLC's Domestic violence at work resource centre, which features a map of Canada comparing domestic violence legislation across the country.

Furthermore, every local should identify key people who are specially trained to listen to women victims of violence and support them. We must strive to make our locals safe, judgement-free spaces that welcome all victims of any form of harassment or violence. This is particularly important in work settings where women are repeatedly confronted by disproportionate levels of harassment and violence, particularly in public service sectors.

Now, 33 years have passed since the tragedy at Polytechnique Montréal, yet we still desperately need safer workplaces, schools and homes. The National Day of Remembrance and Action to End Violence Against Women, held every December 6 in the memory of the 14 young victims at Polytechnique Montréal, invites us to commit to doing more.

We must keep asking our governments to do more.

They need to take real steps to develop and implement the long-awaited cross-sectoral national action plan against gender-based violence. A collaboration was announced between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments on November 9, 2022 consisting merely of a wish list of actions.

In addition, all provinces should follow the example set by Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan, which have taken a step in the right direction by adding measures combating domestic violence to their occupational health and safety legislation. But even in these four provinces, the situation remains critical and activists are begging the authorities to do more to protect women from violence and from attempted murder.

Canada must start investing in public services that keep victims and survivors safe, meaningfully address violence and harassment in the world of work and introduce strong monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

## Days of action to end violence against women

Every year in Quebec, from November 25 to December 6, we observe 12 days of action to denounce violence against women. In Canada and around the world, activists mobilize against gender-based violence for 16 days, until December 10, International Human Rights Day. These campaigns are an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the violence that affects women in all settings and to develop action plans to eradicate this crisis.

**Every year, CUPE marks the National Day of Remembrance and Action to End Violence Against Women, December 6, joining our voices with those across the country calling for change.**



In 2023, you too can plan ahead to organize or take part in an activity to highlight December 6 in your workplace or your community. Moreover, you can use the opportunity to press for concrete commitments from the provincial and federal governments to eliminate ongoing systemic violence and protect women at work and at home.

Consult **CUPE's Stop Workplace Sexual Violence Guide** to raise awareness, support survivors and challenge gender-based violence. You can also download and share **CUPE's Violence Prevention Kit**.



"It is time to take off our rose-coloured glasses," CUPE members pledged at CUPE Quebec's Human Rights Symposium, December 2022.



# NEW FEDERAL PLAN ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE MERELY OFFERS A LIST OF OPTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

By Tara Paterson

**C**UPE has long joined allies and feminist organizations in calling for a robust, long-term, fully funded plan to end gender-based violence. But the federal government's recent National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, endorsed by provincial and territorial governments on November 9, 2022, does not go far enough to address violence at work or monitor outcomes.

The plan is proposing positive actions that provinces and territories can take in five areas: support for survivors and their families, violence prevention, improvements to the justice system, Indigenous-led approaches to ending violence, and service provision. The plan also rightfully acknowledges that gender-based violence and harassment often happen in the workplace and highlights the importance of awareness campaigns.

Unfortunately, there are no mechanisms compelling provincial and territorial governments to implement the recommended actions, no specific requirements, and no guidance on timelines or priorities. And the plan doesn't mention Canada's implementation of C-190 — the International Labour Organization Convention No. 190, the first global treaty on violence and harassment in the world of work.

Even worse, while CUPE and its allies have called for a significant increase in funding to social services for people affected by violence, none of the plan's recommended actions come with new funding. Additional financing would ensure that transition house workers and other social service providers have good working conditions and fair wages to improve staff recruitment and retention in this critical field.

Finally, the plan does not lay out a robust monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) framework, even though early investment in measuring progress to hold governments, employers and institutions accountable is critical to successful implementation of any plan to address gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is a crisis in Canada. We desperately need strong government action to prevent violence and keep women, girls, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people safe. What the federal government announced is a first step in the right direction — but it is not a meaningful and comprehensive plan.



# SAFE UNION SPACES INITIATIVES ROLL OUT

— By Colleen Butler



CUPE's National Executive Board (NEB) created the Safe Union Spaces Working Group (SUSWG) in March 2021. The working group, made up of the women members of the NEB, was formed in response to serious misconduct in our union.

Since the release of its first interim report last spring, the SUSWG has continued its work to transform how CUPE addresses sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of harassment and discrimination in union spaces.

The interim report was based on the results of membership surveys, focus groups, and listening sessions. It found that there are CUPE members who do not participate in the union because they do not feel safe.





"What we heard was members — especially women and especially members of equity-deserving groups — feel and experience harassment and discrimination in CUPE," says Karen Ranalletta, CUPE Regional Vice-President for British Columbia and the Yukon and member of the working group. "It was not a surprise to many of us. But it was still damning. And culturally, in our union, we don't talk about it out loud that much. That needs to change."

"When those who are most hurt by discrimination are coming forward to their union sisters, brothers, and friends to find support and find solutions, we have to mobilize and be responsive," adds CUPE Regional Vice-President for Manitoba and working group member Gina McKay. "These are the ways that we will build a movement to unite CUPE members across Canada."

To create this culture shift, the report identified several steps to prevent and respond to violence, harassment, and discrimination in CUPE. These include changes to education courses, the introduction of bystander and anti-oppression training, and reviews of CUPE's complaint process, trial procedure, and ombudsperson program, among other initiatives.

The working group started to roll out these initiatives at CUPE events this fall and held a panel at October's Sector Council Conference in Ottawa, updating members on their work. Conference delegates also participated in bystander intervention training as part of the Safe Union Spaces mandate. The session, led by CUPE's Education Branch,

taught members how to spot harassing behaviour and feel more confident intervening to stop it.

Safe Union Spaces work continued in November at CUPE's National All Committees Meeting in Vancouver, where participants received training on restorative justice practices. National committee members learned how restorative processes can build capacity for labour action and developed reflective listening skills. The SUSWG is currently looking at ways to integrate restorative practices and mediation into CUPE complaint resolution processes.

With right-wing attacks against the labour movement ramping up, all CUPE members need to feel safe, welcome, and able to participate in the work of the union. As National Secretary-Treasurer and working group co-chair Candace Rennick points out, every CUPE member has a role to play in ensuring this happens. "Shifting our culture — making our union safe for all — is a collective responsibility," says Rennick. "We all have to do the work. We are a progressive union, and a strong union. But we can be better."

The SUSWG encourages all CUPE members to educate themselves and to take action against violence and harassment in union spaces. The working group also invites locals to take part in Safe Union Spaces pilot projects launching soon.





# WATER IS LIFE: THE FIGHT FOR CLEAN DRINKING WATER CONTINUES

By **Rebecca Benson** and **Karin Jordan**  
Art by **Aaron Paquette**





**W**ater is life. But for far too long, Indigenous peoples in Canada have had to fight to protect this precious resource and vital service. Today, many of them don't have access to safe, clean drinking water, while government inaction and corporate pollution keep threatening water sources and treatment processes on reserves, treaty lands and traditional unceded territories.

CUPE is committed to working toward truth and reconciliation, and our Water is life campaign recognizes the strength and dignity of Indigenous peoples who have been affected by water injustice, and who have fought for change. We are committed to supporting them in their fight.

### **How long have Indigenous peoples struggled to access clean water?**

For hundreds of years, many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities have struggled with access to clean drinking water, as well as other necessities like quality food and safe housing. The impacts of colonization and ongoing colonialism for Indigenous peoples in Canada include a lack of access to basic needs and rights such as housing, equitable education and employment opportunities, and clean drinking water.

The current federal government has zeroed in on ending long-term boil water advisories in First Nation communities. But that's just the start of what's needed to end decades of water injustice and discrimination once and for all.

In 1876, the federal government introduced the *Indian Act*. Under the Act, the government is responsible for building and upkeep of infrastructure on First Nation reserves such as drinking water treatment plants and pipes to deliver water to homes and buildings.

Since then, the federal government has chronically underfunded First Nation reserves, including water infrastructure needs. Governments have harmed access to clean water for Indigenous peoples in many other ways. One example is the forced relocation of Indigenous peoples onto reserves that were sometimes very far from their traditional territories. Government inaction on pollution and industrial accidents caused by corporations have also harmed water sources.

Today, many Indigenous peoples still do not have access to clean drinking water. This violates the internationally recognized human right to water. In 2015, Justin Trudeau committed to end boil water advisories by 2021. That deadline has passed and while many long-term boil water advisories have ended, the Liberal government says many communities won't have long-term solutions until 2026.

### **How could this have gone on for so long?**

Many Indigenous peoples and allies have wondered the same thing! For decades, one federal government after another has made commitments to provide Indigenous peoples with safe drinking water. But no government has delivered adequate funding to build and maintain drinking and wastewater water treatment plants

as well as appropriate pipe systems connecting the plants to homes, or provide enough trained and fairly-paid staff to run the systems.

### **Which Indigenous peoples are affected?**

**The question of which communities or how many communities are impacted by not having access to clean drinking water is not simple, but one thing is clear: over the last several hundred years, most Indigenous communities and Nations have faced threats to clean drinking water.**

The federal government limits which Indigenous peoples it has financial and legal responsibilities to for clean drinking water. The Liberal government pledge to end boil-water advisories in First Nation communities only covers long-term drinking water advisories for water systems serving



five or more homes on First Nation reserves, which the government refers to as 'public systems.' The government is not focusing on fixing piping into homes, or on homes with no piping that rely on large tanks of water called cisterns, or on supporting wastewater treatment systems, which are vital to protect safe drinking water.

Many Indigenous peoples and communities are left out of these specific efforts. In addition, federal tracking statistics don't tell the whole story, as they don't count First Nation communities living under short-term water advisories, most Métis people, Inuit people, all communities north of the 60th parallel, seven member First Nations of the Saskatoon Tribal Council, First Nations people who use wells and private water systems and First Nation reserves in British Columbia.

Inuit and some other communities receive separate federal funding, but it is important to note how many Indigenous peoples are affected by a lack of clean drinking water, and who is excluded from the federal campaign to end boil water advisories.

### **What's it like to live under a long-term boil water advisory?**

Some First Nations have endured decades of boiling their water before it's safe to drink. Members of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation lived under a long-term boil water advisory for 24 years, from 1997 until 2021, when the construction of effective roads made the building and upkeep of a new water treatment plant possible.

June 2022 marked 10,000 days that members of Neskantaga First Nation have lived under a long-term boil water advisory. Since 1995, their tap water has at times been unsafe even for bathing or laundry, known as a 'do not use' advisory.





## HELPFUL LANGUAGE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ARE FACING:

### **Boil water advisory (BWA):**

Home users should bring their tap water to a rolling boil for at least one minute before they drink the water or use the water to cook, feed pets, brush teeth, wash fruits and vegetables, and other purposes.

### **Long-term BWA:**

A boil water advisory that has been in place for over a year.

### **Short-term BWA:**

A boil water advisory that has been in place for less than a year.

### **Public water system:**

Indigenous Services Canada refers to on-reserve water systems serving five or more households, or serving schools, community centres and other public facilities, as public water systems.

Communities without safe drinking water must spend large amounts of money supplying members with bottled water and must deal with the mountains of plastic waste that pile up. Households often must ration drinking water and water for bathing and cleaning. Water that is unsafe to drink, but deemed safe enough for bathing, can cause skin conditions such as eczema and infections.

**Communities living with water they can't use at all struggle to have clean clothes and find safe places to bathe. Community members must factor the timing, costs, and logistics of picking up water into their everyday lives.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Indigenous communities more than non-Indigenous communities. A significant factor is inadequate access to clean water for drinking or doing additional washing and hygiene to prevent the spread of the virus. One recent study found that Indigenous communities with water cisterns had double the cases of COVID-19 compared to communities with running water to their homes.

## **What about short-term boil water advisories?**

Short-term boil water advisories are a big problem! As of May 2022, there were 30 short-term drinking advisories in First Nation communities south of the 60th parallel (excluding communities in British Columbia and that are members of the Saskatoon Tribal Council). Often communities will have their boil-water advisory or other water advisory removed, and then a few weeks or months later, they will receive a short-term boil water advisory.

## **Listen, learn and act**

Indigenous peoples have been fighting threats to their clean drinking water for generations. It is vital to recognize the strength and dignity of Indigenous peoples who have been impacted by these conditions, and who have fought for change. The work of Indigenous activists and allies is what has led to government commitments advancing the work to ensure access to clean drinking water for Indigenous peoples.

CUPE's *Water is life* campaign provides educational tools to learn about Indigenous water issues and mobilize in support of Indigenous peoples and allies to protect and fix the water. For a list of ways to support Indigenous communities fighting for clean drinking water, check out *Water is life: Listen, learn, act* at [cupe.ca/water-is-life](https://cupe.ca/water-is-life)

# CUPE MEMBERS MOBILIZING FOR UNIVERSAL PHARMACARE IN CANADA

Nearly three million Canadians can't fill their prescriptions because they can't afford them.

— By **Caroline Ishii, Sarah Ryan** and **Aline Patcheva**

**C**UPE recognizes this isn't good enough. Our prescription drug coverage shouldn't be based on our job, work hours, or employer. It should be a universal right under our public health care system.

Private insurance plans may exclude part-time and low-wage workers who are more likely to be Black, Indigenous, or racialized, thus perpetuating inequalities. And even with insurance coverage, workers can face steep deductibles and co-payments, making prescription drugs unaffordable.

**Universal  
pharmacare —  
which CUPE has  
been a strong  
advocate for —  
would mean  
everyone can  
access the  
medication they  
need to stay  
healthy.**





Canada is the only developed country with universal health care that does not provide universal prescription drug coverage.

On September 12, 2022, CUPE hosted a national webinar titled “Pharma profits or health justice? Mobilizing for universal pharmacare”. It was an opportunity for members and allies to learn more about the crucial need for an equitable and accessible public program. Participants heard from Elizabeth Kwan, senior researcher at the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Colleen Fuller, researcher, writer, activist and president of REACH Community Health Centre in Vancouver, Frédéric Brisson, CUPE Regional Vice-President, Quebec, and Don Davies, MP for Vancouver Kingsway and NDP Critic for Health.

### Why does pharmacare matter?

According to Elizabeth Kwan, the current insurance coverage of prescription drugs is very uneven across the country. It is based on where people live, where they work, and their income, not on their needs. This creates an unfair and unjust system.

“Inadequate prescription drug coverage affects everyone, in all provinces, at all income levels. But it especially affects low to middle-class families, young people, women, newcomers and racialized people,” said Kwan. “With private insurance, it is a situation of ‘you get what you pay for’. With universal public pharmacare, everyone will get

accessible, affordable, and fair prescription drug coverage.”

Considering that Canada is paying the fourth highest drug prices in the world, Kwan explained there are severe consequences for the public:

- 1 in 4 households is affected by not being able to afford prescription drugs;
- 7.5 million Canadians cannot afford medication because they don't have insurance, or their medication is not covered by their insurance;
- 1 million people cut back on food and heating to pay for medication.

The case for universal pharmacare is clear, and the support is broad. Since the 1960s, five separate national commissions have recommended that prescription drugs be included in Canada's universal health care system. In a 2020 poll, 9 in 10 Canadians were supportive of a national pharmacare program.

### The importance of public research, development and production of medicines and vaccines

Like Kwan, Colleen Fuller believes public investment is needed for public research, development, manufacturing and distribution of medicines and vaccines.

Fuller gave as an example the critical role that the Connaught Laboratories at the University of Toronto played in public health efforts to ensure a diphtheria vaccine was available and affordable to everyone. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, diphtheria posed a lethal threat to people in Canada and was the number one cause of death in children under 14.



The Connaught Labs were established in 1914 to produce the diphtheria vaccine and other essential public health products, including rabies and smallpox vaccines. They produced the diphtheria vaccine as a public service for free distribution through provincial health immunization programs across Canada, laying the foundation for our public health immunization programs. By 1940, Toronto and Hamilton became the world's first diphtheria-free cities.

For its part, the Canadian government saved money because the vaccine was made by a publicly-owned pharmaceutical company at low production costs, so they were not forced to buy the vaccine on the competitive international market. Subsequent global sales also helped to offset costs.

In 1921, Dr. Frederick Banting, a Canadian surgeon, and Charles Best, a medical student, discovered insulin at Connaught Labs as well. With this discovery, Canada contributed to the world of medicine, licensing manufacturers worldwide to produce insulin and using the royalties to fund scientific research in Canada.

Fuller regrets that in 1984, the laboratories were privatized by the Conservatives. Back then, only 20% of the drugs and vaccines Canadians used were imported — today it is 85%. “We are paying a very high price for the lack of an infrastructure in Canada that would enable that public investment we are already making to benefit Canadians. Now, we are paying twice for the drugs we use — once at the development end, and once at the cash register,” she said.

Fuller recommends that we use our public investments for public research here in Canada, as well as for manufacturing and distribution. “Given the horrible experience with the COVID-19 vaccine and getting it into Canada in the first place, there has been more discussion about actually setting up a public manufacturer,” she explained.

### Where are we now with pharmacare?

Elizabeth Kwan emphasized that we are living through unprecedented times of social and economic volatility in Canada, and globally. Wages falling behind and soaring inflation rates make affordability the number one solution to keeping our families healthy.



“In slowing down the economy, there will be more job losses, with people losing private drug coverage, and wages will continue to fall behind. This is not a great scenario,” CLC Senior Researcher Elizabeth Kwan added.

She described how the current state of our public health care system results from many years of government underfunding and staff shortages, and provinces and territories have not stepped up.

“Inflation and affordability issues keep us awake about how to keep ourselves and our families healthy,” said Kwan.

NDP Health Critic Don Davies agreed, explaining that Canada was able to achieve substantial social programs under two consecutive Liberal minority governments. “We are at a unique moment in history to fight and win universal pharmacare with

the NDP leading the charge,” he said, referring to the supply and confidence agreement reached with the Liberal government in March 2022.

And while the NDP-introduced universal pharmacare legislation was defeated in February 2021, the NDP is using all their clout in this minority parliament to advocate for Canada’s health care system. The new agreement requires a Canada Pharmacare Act by the end of 2023, a national formulary of essential medicines, and a bulk buying program by June 2025. This will set the stage for affordable medication for all.

### Pharma profits or health justice?

Experts add a word of caution: not every pharmacare system would result in affordable medication for all. A fill-in-the-gaps or hybrid pharmacare plan like the one in Quebec would keep drug costs unaffordable for many. Indeed, maintaining the patchwork of private and public coverage keeps profits sky-high for insurance companies and big pharma.

A hybrid plan would also entrench the confusing patchwork of more than 100 government-run drug insurance programs and more than 100,000 private drug insurance plans.



Frédéric Brisson is very aware of these issues, having worked in the Quebec health care system for over 15 years. Between 2017 and 2021, as president of CUPE Quebec's Provincial Council of Social Affairs, he helped negotiate the group insurance plan for nearly 40,000 public health care workers. According to him, the current hybrid pharmacare model in Quebec is not working, namely because it does not take into consideration each person's ability to pay.

During the webinar, Brisson gave as an example an early childhood educator: "The vast majority of them work less than 20 hours per week at a salary that is between 22 and 26 dollars an hour, which represents approximately \$1,450 per month clear in their pockets. A family insurance premium for a single parent can cost \$280 per month. So, they have about \$1,200 left in their pocket to pay for rent, gas, food, and the 20% of the drugs that we have to pay directly at the pharmacy... there is not much left," he deplored.

In a recent CUPE poll, 77% of Quebecers said they would like the Quebec government to work with the Canadian government on a universal drug insurance plan and 80% believe such a plan would improve the health of all. In addition, 43% of those polled said that purchasing drugs has an impact on their household budget. For all these reasons, workers are organizing for a pharmacare program that puts people before profits.

Meanwhile, right-wing pundits and corporate lobbyists are mobilizing against a truly universal pharmacare program. Big pharmaceutical and insurance companies are getting organized to protect their bottom lines.

With the current hybrid plan, drug costs in Quebec are some of the most expensive in the world.

### How can we fight back?

The labour movement in Canada has been working with allies on a pharmacare campaign for a few years now and Kwan urges CUPE members and activists to keep the momentum up and send a message to their Member of Parliament asking them to support a universal pharmacare program.

For Fuller and Brisson too, mobilization on this issue is critical. Unions play a huge role in the discussion, as do national and provincial health coalitions. Fuller adds that we need to encourage organizations, including community health centres and gig workers, to speak up and we must amplify their voices.

We must combine forces in solidarity and act as a collective family to stand up to corporate greed and protect what is at stake — the safety and well-being of our loved ones and our communities. Together, we are stronger than ever, and the moment to fight back is now.

*Learn from the experts, watch the replay of the **Pharma profits or health justice? Mobilizing for universal pharmacare** webinar on CUPE's YouTube channel.*



# WE CAN'T TAKE OUR FOOT OFF THE GAS NOW — 50 YEARS IN THE MAKING, CANADA'S PUBLIC PENSIONS FALL SHORT OF SENIORS' NEEDS

— By **Emily Niles** and **Marnie Thorp**

**M**ost workers dream of a long and happy retirement. But is that dream a reality for most Canadians?

The Canadian model of retirement security is like a “three-legged stool”. The key being: you need all three legs for the stool to be secure. Two of the pension legs, Old Age Security (OAS) and the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) are public. But the system was designed so that these two public pension programs on their own are insufficient.

**The Government of Canada counts on workers having a workplace pension plan in order to have a decent standard of living in retirement. Yet 60% of workers do not have access to a workplace pension plan.**



In fact, at no point in history has a majority of workers had access to a pension benefit that is more than the modest public programs.

Old Age Security (OAS) is the basic universal public pension program for Canadian citizens and residents. We all contribute to OAS; it is funded through general taxation. Low-income seniors may also receive a Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) top-up. But an OAS/GIS pension alone does not keep people out of poverty.

The Canada Pension Plan (CPP) provides a lifetime pension to retirees who worked in Canada and made CPP contributions. CPP is funded equally by contributions from employers and from workers, in the form of payroll deductions. The value of our CPP in retirement depends on our earnings throughout our working life.

An average couple, with an average CPP benefit plus OAS/GIS would have a maximum annual income from the federal public programs of just under \$35,000 per year starting at age 65. This is more than \$2,600 below what Statistics Canada considers to be the low-income measure for a two-person household.

Retired CUPE 786 member Linda Clayborne, who worked as a registered practical nurse from 1975 to 2016 in Ontario's health care system, is well aware of the shortcomings of the public plans. "If you look at what you get from Old Age Security and the Canada Pension Plan, how do you survive on that?" she asks. "Especially today, with inflation. It's unreasonable."

The inadequacy of OAS and CPP creates a need for workplace pension plans. But even though the Canadian public pension system is inadequate by design, there is no legal requirement that employers must provide their workers with a pension plan. And the types of workplace plans that do exist vary, ranging from more secure defined benefit plans to less adequate defined contribution plans.

Clayborne, who receives a pension from the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan (HOOPP), recognizes its importance. "Honestly, I thank God all the time that I have a pension plan," she says. "I worked for 42 years and I receive a pension of about \$2,600 a month, plus the public pensions. It is a far cry from the \$1,253 I would get if I didn't have the HOOPP pension!"



Where there are workplace pension plans, such as HOOPP, it is because unions have fought for and safeguarded them. Approximately 76% of unionized workers are members of a workplace pension plan, compared to only 28% of non-unionized workers. Workplace pension plan coverage is more prevalent in the public sector, which is more densely unionized. Pension coverage in the private sector has fallen as unionization has fallen. Without unions, there wouldn't be a workplace pension system in Canada.

In addition, temporary, part-time, and low-wage earners are much less likely to have a pension. These workers are also disproportionately workers of colour, Indigenous workers and workers with disabilities. The voluntary nature of workplace pension plans extends the inequality in the labour market by perpetuating precarity in elder years.

Many CUPE members and their families are members of their workplace pension plans for many decades. Often this spans nearly 70 years, when accounting for contributing years and retirement. Their pension is also often the biggest asset in their life, sometimes even more valuable than their house.

Canada's retirement income system relies on and expects workplace pensions and/or individual private savings to bridge the needs gap left by an inadequate public pension system. For over a decade, CUPE locals in regions across Canada have been fighting to maintain the pension benefit we have, and fend off cuts or conversions. CUPE also continues efforts to expand workplace pension coverage through collective bargaining.

**The labour movement is workers' best advocate for a dignified and secure retirement for all.**

We need to remain committed to improving public pension coverage to raise the floor for everyone. Old Age Security, collectively funded through taxation and near-universal, is one of the only public programs that embodies a progressive, trade union approach to retirement security. But it isn't enough to make ends meet, even with the recent 10% boost at age 75 — far too late for many working class retirees who need immediate support.

We have a collective, public responsibility to care for seniors by ensuring decent standards of living. After a lifetime of work in this country, people should be able to retire with security and dignity and not fall into poverty.

"I think there needs to be some education done on pensions and how important they are," Linda Clayborne remarks. "So few people have a pension now that I don't know if our members recognize how incredibly lucky they are if they have a pension. Pensions are all we have. They are the most important benefit we have in our work life."



# ACADEMIC WORKERS AT UNIVERSITIES ACROSS CANADA DEMAND BETTER

By Paul Whyte

**C**UPE members at post-secondary institutions across Canada are fighting back against the harsh exploitation of academic workers.

Low wages, misleading hours of work, and a lack of transparency in job postings have marred the reputation of universities and highlight the hypocrisy between what they teach and what they practice. Academic workers, including teaching assistants (TAs), research assistants (RAs), markers and demonstrators, have witnessed the steady erosion of their working conditions.

## LEGAL LOOPHOLES PAVE THE WAY FOR UNIVERSITIES TO REPLACE GOOD ACADEMIC JOBS WITH PRECARIOUS, LOW-WAGE POSITIONS.

"At Dalhousie University, the employer sometimes takes job descriptions and work previously done at the higher TA hourly rate and uses them in job descriptions and work at the lower marker and demonstrator hourly rate. Our 2022 strike brought these rates closer together. Marker hourly rates went from 66% of TA rates, to 80%," explains CUPE 3912 President Cameron Ells.

Since many graduate degree programs have a mandatory requirement for students to also be academic workers, students are forced to accept low-paid, precarious, highly predatory jobs to

complete their studies. But these workers are now turning the tide at the bargaining table and beyond.

### Three-week strike for fair wages


More than 1,500 CUPE 3912 members at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, were out picketing for three weeks starting October 2022, protesting against wages that have not kept up with those of their peers at other universities or with the cost of living. They had been in collective bargaining since November 2020, but the employer was still refusing to correct a large disparity between wages at Dalhousie and those at other Canadian top universities.

"Across Canada, academic workers are leading the fight for fairness," says Ells. "The collective resources and experiences available to workers through organized labour, as demonstrated with strikes in Ontario, at Dalhousie University, and elsewhere, demonstrate a capacity to make significant improvements in our working conditions."

Worker engagement that has proven to be the most impactful when fighting for collective gains relies on member-to-member relationships, empowerment, and trust building.







**CUPE has led the charge to rebalance power within major post-secondary institutions, including McMaster University, the University of Toronto, and Dalhousie University.**



"We came together as a local union family and leaned on our fellow CUPE allies nationally to build massive support and momentum needed to secure a significantly improved collective agreement," says Jean-Philippe Bourgeois, CUPE 3912 vice-president of part-time faculty at Dalhousie University. "When we are dealing with massive, wealthy, corporate entities like Dal, it takes us all coming together to demand and make necessary change. We had the support of CUPE's 715,000 members, CUPE staff, and national labour allies who fought for justice right alongside us."

As a result of workers' mobilization, the employer was forced to significantly improve the offer for these workers – some of the lowest paid in the U15 (Canada's top research universities). The new four-year collective agreement grows base part-time academic instructor wages by 23%, TA wages by 23%, and marker/demonstrator wages by a whopping 44%.

### Labour and student unions converge

Allyship in labour has long proven to be foundational to securing real change that positively impacts workers and society at large.

**AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY, CUPE 3912 FOUND A POWERFUL ALLY IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT, NAMELY THE DALHOUSIE STUDENT UNION (DSU).**

During the historic strike at the university, the DSU acted in solidarity with CUPE by educating students about the strike, encouraged their support of workers who are often students too, and even hosted political demonstrations to help maintain pressure on the employer to negotiate fairly.

"Together with the DSU, the faculty association, and others, we aligned students and workers to demand that Dal do better," says Ells. "The employer was influenced by the voices of those who pay tuition today and perhaps alumni donations tomorrow. Our united voices made an impact locally and across Canada. Our union and our actions successfully challenged the perceived status quo."

This solidarity has been further galvanized by COVID-19, where workplace and other fundamental rights, particularly those concerning health and safety, were ardently tested. While the specific sectoral expertise and goals of unions may differ, there is an overarching interest in the public good that unites them.

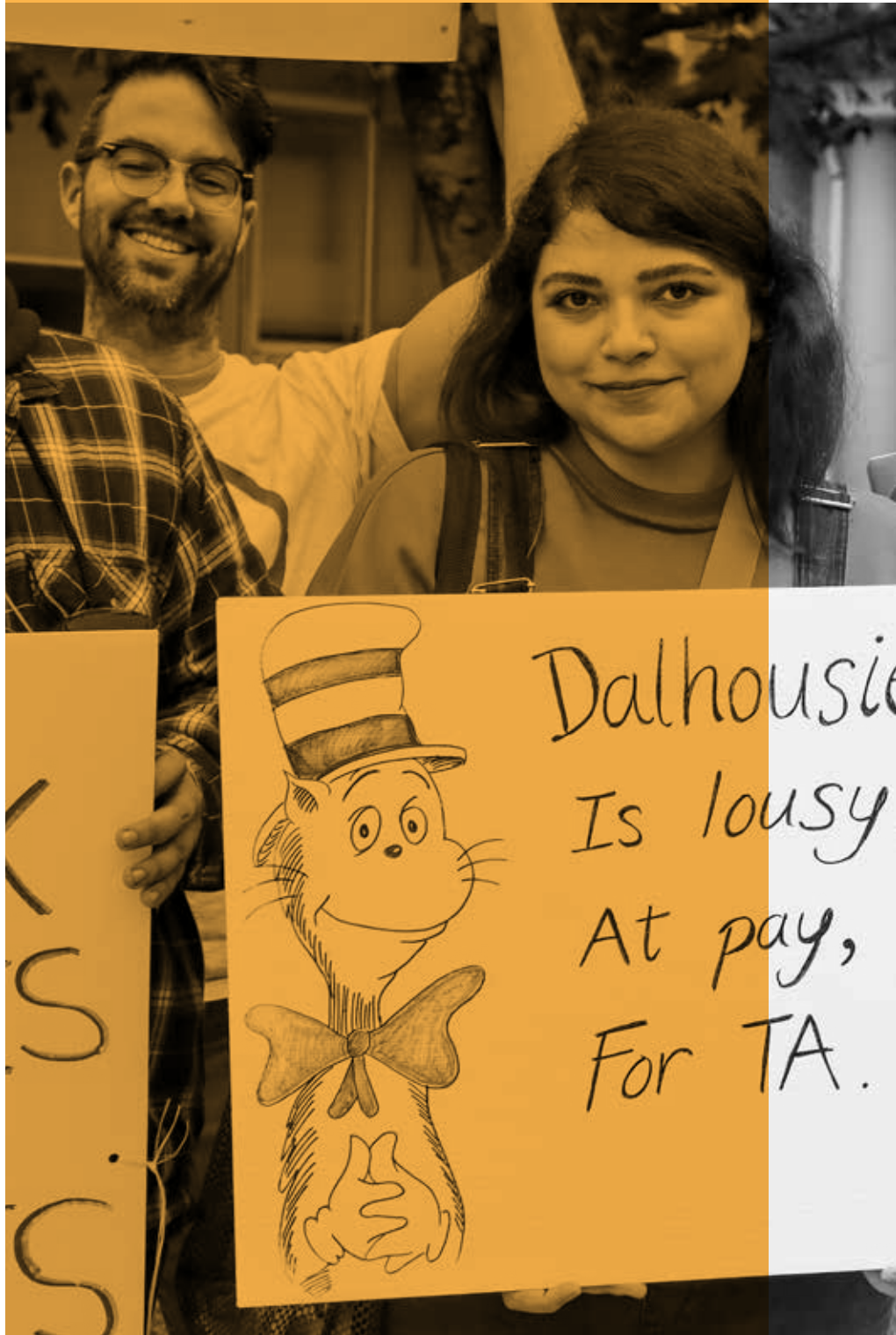




"We are all in this together — when our rights are in jeopardy, it is imperative that we all rally together to defend each other," says Bourgeois.

Labour tensions across Canada are coming to a head as workers demand not only improved wages to compete with inflation, but also better working conditions overall. Staffing and service levels, quality of life and access to paid leave, scheduling and flexibility to work remotely are top of mind for workers, particularly those who persevered on the front lines during the pandemic. Young workers in particular, like those in the post-secondary sector, are looking to connect with meaningful and decent work.

So, it is no surprise that during this time of record inflation, stagnated public sector wages, and soaring corporate profits, workers are uniting and finding common cause between themselves and others, in the pursuit of public good. The odds may be stacked, but the collective power of workers, and their ability to organize and mobilize reigns supreme.





# COLOMBIA SHIFTS TO THE LEFT AFTER PETRO AND MÁRQUEZ'S HISTORIC VICTORY

By **Kelti Cameron**



Street art in Bogotá, Colombia, of newly elected President Gustavo Petro and Vice-President Francia Márquez, July 2022.

In 2022, Colombia elected a progressive, left-wing government for the first time in its 214-year history. The election of Gustavo Petro as president, and Francia Márquez as vice-president is historic. It is a hopeful moment for workers, activists, the marginalized and the poor.

Their coalition, the Historic Pact, is a united front of progressive parties and social movements representing trade unions, youth, women, and ethnic minorities. Founded on February 11, 2021, it is the result of years of grassroots organizing and coordination by movements and communities who have endured decades of violence and poverty.

Petro and Márquez have committed to advancing a political program that promises expanded free public education and child care, new jobs, public pensions, environmental and water protection, agricultural reforms and food sovereignty. Many are optimistic they will move away from the dependence on oil and gas, and halt current and future fossil fuel expansion projects. In a country that has mainly served the interests of foreign investors and neoliberal proponents, this program is considered a radical turn of events by some. Its implementation will be challenging and is sure to draw a great deal of concern from Canadian corporate investors.

Márquez is also the first Afro-Colombian woman to hold the vice-presidency. With a long history of fighting for her community's ancestral land rights in the Cauca



Canadian labour leaders traveled to Colombia to stand in solidarity with Colombian labour and human rights defenders, such as the Union of Postal Workers of Colombia (STPC) in Bogotá, July 2022.

region of Colombia, she has working class roots, she is an environmental activist and was member of the resistance movement against corporate gold mining that she joined as a young teenager. She chose to run in this election “because our governments have turned their backs on the people, on justice and on peace.” Her victory is an inspiration for many young people from her community.

## History in the making

Petro and Márquez's victory is part of a political shift in several South and Central American countries, where left-wing governments have been elected on platforms that challenge, directly or indirectly, the imposition of U.S. foreign policy, and harmful anti-worker, anti-people practices in their countries.

In Colombia, the past several years were marked by mass mobilizations and violent crackdowns on activists. For instance, in April 2021, a tax reform bill triggered a National Strike (Paro Nacional) that lasted over four months. The bill imposed, among other things, a Value Added Tax (VAT) on basic goods and services. The response was swift from all sectors of society struggling with the rising costs of food and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young Colombians under age 24 were hit the hardest by the economic crisis, and 1 in 4 are unemployed regardless of their level of education. Therefore, the 2021 protests further



ignited massive youth-led mobilizations that challenged not only regressive government policies, but also confronted the violent state repression that followed.

Between April and June 2021, state forces, police and anti-riot troops committed serious human rights violations. Dozens of people were killed with live ammunition, hundreds were injured.

But as the protests spread throughout country, the Historic Pact was gaining support. Many member organizations of the coalition were proving to have the trust of activists in the streets, and the capacity to reach some of the most isolated and marginalized communities in the country. This effectively secured their undeniable victory in the 2022 national elections.

## Colombia's hope for change

It is an exciting and a vulnerable time for left-wing activists who are all too aware that this period of transition will be fraught with political challenges and contradictions.

More than 500 human rights defenders have been killed in Colombia since 2016 — among the highest numbers worldwide, — and according to the International Trade Union Confederation 2022 Global Rights Index, Colombia is still one of the top 10 most dangerous countries in the world for trade union leaders. Activists know these conditions will not change overnight or by simply electing a new government.

In July 2022, CUPE joined the Frontlines Delegation to Colombia with leaders from CLC, PSAC, NUPGE and CUPW to hear firsthand accounts of the significance of the election of the Historic Pact and to learn more about the state

violence that preceded it in 2021. We landed as the Truth Commission, established in 2018, presented its final report, trying to shed light on five decades of atrocities and human rights violations committed during the country's armed conflict.

The report's 10 chapters addressed themes such as human rights violations and sexual violence, their impact on mental and physical health, the role of armed groups, and the forced exile of thousands of people. Everyone we spoke with was cautiously optimistic that the new government can now begin to repair the damage caused by the right-wing governments of the past — knowing full well that many conservative politicians hold key roles on cabinet, — and provide the space for social movements to continue to organize toward justice.

Yet, the calls for justice from families who lost loved ones to police brutality in 2021 continue to be a priority for local leaders, and are a devastating reminder of the enormous task ahead for the new government. A family member who lost her son told the delegation: "We are not willing to walk toward justice on the path of impunity."

Communities throughout the country are gathering and uniting around key demands they want addressed by Petro and Márquez's new government. The trade union movement has developed a labour reform program entitled Change for Life (*Cambio por la Vida*) which includes proposals for decent jobs, labour equity, improved working conditions, and compliance with international labour standards, including freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Petro and Márquez also face major challenges in a fragmented congress and working alongside the business elite. But the new president pledged to govern with the people and to continuously consult them when developing and implementing government policies, without exceptions and exclusions.

In a meeting with faith based leaders in Cali, the delegation was told that, "only the people, save the people. In order to advance as a country, and to strengthen our political organizations and civil society, we need to continue to unite as a popular force. The new national leaders will need to unite with us because we already have a political program they can follow."

Learn more, take a look at the delegation's photo album on CUPE's Facebook page.



For almost 20 years the Frontlines Delegation has been organizing worker-to-worker solidarity exchanges between Canadian and Colombian unions, social movements and human rights organizers to support the peace process, expose the negative impacts of harmful investment and economic policies, and build mutual solidarity between public sector workers. As members of the international community, and as unions fighting in our own countries, we have an important contribution to make in this global struggle. We will carry on this work and will stand in solidarity with workers, human rights and land defenders, and social movement leaders in their pursuit for peace and justice.







# PROFILE AUBREY GONSALVES

By Tammy Kelly

## BUILDING SOLIDARITY, ALLYSHIP AND REPRESENTATION FOR AN ANTI-RACIST CUPE

Aubrey Gonsalves has been the president of CUPE 2316 since 2008, representing workers at the Children's Aid Society of Toronto. Aubrey is also the chair of CUPE Ontario's Social Service Workers' Coordinating Committee, defending the essential work of members and local unions across Ontario and advocating for high-quality, publicly-funded social services for all.

He was elected as CUPE's Diversity Vice-President representing Black and racialized workers at our National Convention in 2021. He is engaged in many initiatives in the fight against racism. He is a relentless and passionate advocate for working together, regardless of differences, to achieve more as a society. He shares his experiences and how they can shape every CUPE member's vital role in building an equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist labour movement.

### Question 1

**You were one of the Canadian labour leaders that visited activists defending labour and human rights in Colombia as part of the Canada-Colombia Frontlines Delegation in the summer of 2022. What impact did this experience have on you and how can we keep supporting our Colombian comrades?**

The delegation's visit to Colombia is a trip I will never forget. It was an important learning and growing experience for me personally. We arrived at a pivotal time when progressive social movements and the most oppressed communities had come together. The Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and marginalized populations had organized with students, human rights defenders and the labour movement. They built a strong coalition that successfully elected a government for the people a few weeks before we arrived. This moment in history was one of the most inspirational parts of the experience.

During our visit, we met with many organizations and unions, including labour and human rights defenders, as well as families who lost loved ones during the youth-led resistance of 2021. I remember asking how can CUPE continue to support them beyond this trip. To be honest, I was thinking about typical things like money or campaigns, but their answer enlightened me. Each group responded that we can support them by continuing to defend our public services, human rights and marginalized populations, because the people of Colombia use them as examples toward achieving stronger public services and human rights. This is why we, as CUPE members, must keep fighting for our rights and for public services in Canada.

**Every win, no matter how small, makes a difference in Canada and in other countries, too.**



## Question 2

**What does it mean for you to serve as CUPE's National Diversity Vice-President representing Black and racialized workers?**

It is an honour and privilege for me to be in this role and I want to pay homage to my predecessors. It is a role with a duty to achieve, to advance the work and the agenda of and for Black and racialized workers, as well as their intersecting identities. I not only represent the voices of the current CUPE membership. I also reflect and remain mindful of carrying the legacy of past leaders and members. This awareness remains alive in me, guides me, and inspires me to keep going.

As I move forward grateful to do this work, I do feel some uneasiness. While I am here, representing the voices of Black and racialized members and raising their issues, other equity-seeking groups have limited representation. While I do speak to these issues too, it is different as I speak to them as an ally, co-conspirator and accomplice without lived experience. This is the reason why I fight and support the need to increase the representation of diversity vice-president seats at CUPE's National Executive Board.

## Question 3

**There is a growing commitment to racial equity by governments and organizations. Still, the lack of improvement we see in the day-to-day experiences of Black and racialized workers is alarming. What do you think is the path forward?**

I am not sure I would define this as a growing commitment. Rather, it is a rising trend where workplaces are now starting to focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The reality is that this work will take a significant amount of time and will need a significant amount of push and support.

One step in the right direction is having opportunities for Black and racialized workers to connect, share experiences and learn from each other. Another is bringing employment equity strategies and policies into our workplaces and our union. We must keep enforcing anti-discrimination, which includes anti-racism and anti-harassment language in our locals and our collective agreements — which, in fact, aligns with CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy's goal to "administer and enforce collective agreements with an anti-racist lens". And

there are different types of support that can be provided by our leaders and allies, such as making sure that everyone does land acknowledgements and reads CUPE's statement for the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent.

Until these things happen, we will not see a significant change in the day-to-day experiences of Black and racialized workers.

## Question 4

**What is CUPE's role in putting an end to racism, multiple biases and multilayered forms of discrimination and violence?**

While CUPE has had a strong history of challenging racism, we must realize and acknowledge that there is racism within CUPE, just like in many other organizations. The difference is that CUPE is acknowledging and recognizing its hand in racism, discrimination, and violence. Acknowledging is the first step to eliminating racism and discrimination. Taking action is the next step.

I have been working alongside Debra Merrier, CUPE's Diversity Vice-President representing Indigenous workers, to put CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy into action with the participation of CUPE members who are Black, Indigenous, racialized or allies. We are hosting gatherings on a regional and national level to achieve the strategy's second key goal: "Increase the representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized members in the union".

And this is the way we will move into ending this systemic problem within CUPE, and then the larger labour movement, and our workplaces and society as a whole.

## Question 5

**How can we stimulate participation and representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized members in union leadership, and better address members' needs and vital perspectives?**

In Colombia, I was inspired by the struggle and achievements, specifically of Afro-Colombians and women. So, I want to share a story that brought tears to my eyes. During our trip, we met Dora Lilia Gomez, the first woman president of the Union of Postal Workers of Colombia (STPC). In 2004, as CUPE and other unions started working with labour activists in Colombia, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) set up an opportunity for a Colombian labour delegation to



visit Canada. The only condition was that one of the two delegates must be a woman. This is how Dora Lilia Gomez was able to visit Canada.

It was the first time she left her country, the first time she saw women being treated as equal to men, and the first time she encountered women in leadership positions. She shared with us that “her feminism started in Canada.” Back in Colombia, it inspired her to run for president of her union. She ran against the incumbent president who was a man and won, making history. Now she mentors other women to move forward, to keep the movement going.

This shows why the second goal of our anti-racism strategy is closest to my heart: it highlights lived experience and representation. Members will be impacted the most when they see themselves on the stage. It is the most empowering feeling.

I would like to challenge local leaders out there respectfully with this question: What are we doing to reach out to marginalized groups to get involved, to be part of our executives? If you are unsure, I strongly encourage you to read the action points under the 10 over-arching goals in CUPE’s Anti-Racism Strategy.

## Question 6

**Our union defends public services and workers’ rights, it fights against privatization and oppression. How can we do more? Why should we move from being not racist to the next stage — to be anti-racist?**

I see a lot of similarities between anti-racism and anti-privatization. First, someone who is not racist is similar to someone who supports public services, and it is a great start. But we need to push further — and that is what anti-racism and anti-privatization mean. Anti-racism and anti-privatization are about being proactive.

## **There is a difference between saying “I am not racist” and “I see racism and I am going to do something about it”.**

In other words, we must be proactive and take action as needed, and continually, against racism and against privatization of public services. Linking privatization to racism is important because it helps people understand that saying “I support public services” or “I am not racist” isn’t enough to eliminate privatization and racism. The question is what are we doing and what are we going to do more of to dismantle racism?

We participate in rallies to raise awareness about the impacts of privatization. We battle privatization with calls to action and campaigns. The solidarity of anti-privatization is clear, and even though some locals and places of employment are not experiencing this, we all stand in solidarity with each other on this issue.

This solidarity is so important on so many levels. It lets those experiencing privatization know they are not alone and they have support from others. It also sends a message to governments and corporations that CUPE, unions, workers and communities will not stand for it. And while many provinces have an anti-privatization committee organizing anti-privatization actions, not all provinces fight racism at this level.

That same type of solidarity, allyship and advocacy is needed when we are talking about acts and experiences of racism. We must have that same passion and vigour when fighting against racism. Those same initiatives need to be implemented when tackling racism.

Black, Indigenous and racialized members need us to prioritize their issues. They should never be left behind or alone. Building solidarity on these issues is important, but the question is what are we doing? We need to take action.

Hear more from Aubrey Gonsalves on YouTube as he speaks to delegates at CUPE Nova Scotia’s 58<sup>th</sup> Convention: [tinyurl.com/2s4evtcs](https://tinyurl.com/2s4evtcs)

At CUPE’s 2021 National Convention, delegates adopted a CUPE-wide Anti-Racism Strategy. Read the strategy and help us carry out its 10 key goals and actions.



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FRONT LINES  
KEEPING YOUR  
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