

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Taking the union to the members

CUPE National's Leadership Survey discovered a lot of useful insights for building stronger union locals. Two themes in particular emerged across the board: the idea of "taking the union to the members," and the need to talk to members in person.

The project took place over the course of 2016 and 2017. It consisted of a national, online survey of elected CUPE local leaders; focus groups with CUPE's national equality committees and the National Young Workers' Committee; focus groups with CUPE members

who are precariously employed; and an online survey of CUPE national servicing representatives.

The survey identified some excellent practices that will help locals be more inclusive and engage more members in local union activities, including members of equity-seeking groups, precariously employed workers, and young workers.

Key findings

- About half (50.5 per cent) of elected CUPE local leaders who responded to the survey told us they are

dissatisfied with the levels of member participation in local union activities compared to the 35 per cent who are satisfied.

- The main reasons members aren't more involved in their local unions include: a lack of information from locals, a lack of interest, family responsibilities, work commitments, shift work, and working more than one job.

- Locals that provide food and other incentives for attending meetings, activities and events (like Union swag) found their member participation rates increase.

- Locals can also improve participation by adjusting the time and location of meetings and events to accommodate members' schedules and inviting guest speakers to appeal to members' interests.

Taking the union to the members

So, what do we mean by taking the union to the members? It's all about meeting with members in their workplaces, in person, and talking about what matters most to them.

Here's what one survey respondent says:

- Meet the members where they are at work and talk to them about the issues



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Canada Infrastructure Bank: A pipeline of privatization



The Liberal government's new way of financing public infrastructure relies on an age-old scheme: privatization.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) will rely on expensive lending from the private-sector to build or renew our water and wastewater systems, public transit, roads and electrical grids, where many CUPE members work.

The bank will allow corporations and private lenders unprecedented access to – and power over – our public infrastructure. The Liberals introduced legislation to create the bank as part of their omnibus budget bill. The bank is expected to be up and running in late 2017.

The bank of privatization

The bank's focus is on infrastructure that can generate revenue for investors. This for-profit motive will increase the privatization of public infrastructure and impose higher fees and tolls on us all. Higher government payments for private infrastructure will also mean

fewer public dollars are available for all of our infrastructure needs.

Our public facilities might be privatized through public-private partnerships, many of which involve contracts of up to 30 years with for-profit corporations to finance, maintain and operate public infrastructure. Our airports and ports, and other key infrastructure, could even be fully or partly sold to private investors.

Workers will pay the price, too. The CIB's focus on privatization will put pressure on the wages, benefits and working conditions of all workers, including CUPE members in the sectors being targeted by the bank. Contract flipping and low-waged precarious work are key ways private corporations can profit from infrastructure.

Privatization defence

There are many things locals can do to prepare for this new privatization threat. Here are the top three:

1. Review your collective agreement:
CUPE locals can use their collective

agreement language to protect against privatization. Locals have negotiated language to provide notice, disclosure and consultation about privatization schemes. Some have language preventing contracting out. Others have bargained language to contract in services. Review *Our Best Line of Defence* for more information.

2. Understand privatization risks:

Stay on top of your employer's plans by taking action and talking regularly with supervisors, managers and local politicians. Get volunteers to take turns attending all public meetings of the employer. Listen closely to statements that managers and politicians make in the media and at public events.

Members, especially those in the municipal sector, should raise concerns about the bank with mayors and municipal councillors. Identify contractors already operating at your workplace and anticipate other work they may go after.

3. Know the facts:

Check out CUPE's resources to help members, the public and decision-makers understand why public works best for our services. They include:

- **Stopping privatization guide:**

Early warning signs of privatization

- **Stopping the infrastructure bank:**

CUPE's online resource centre about the infrastructure bank

- **Asking the right questions:** A guide for municipalities considering P3s

- **Back in house:** Why local governments are bringing services home

- **Bring it on home:** How CUPE campaigns are keeping services public.

Find out more about fighting privatization by contacting your servicing representative or visit cupe.ca/privatization for more information.

■ **Sarah Ryan & Karin Jordan**

Tabletalk is published four times a year to provide CUPE bargaining committees and servicing representatives with useful information for preparing and negotiating bargaining demands.

Find past issues of Tabletalk online at cupe.ca/tabletalk

An email edition of Tabletalk is available. Subscribe at cupe.ca/subscribe

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CUPE / Canadian Union
of Public Employees

Bargaining against blood money

We often think of bargaining mostly as a tool for gaining rights for our members. But the gains we make in collective bargaining can also improve the health and lives of people outside our unions as well.

Take, for instance, the issue of paid plasma. It is recognized worldwide that the safest blood with the lowest risk of bloodborne infections comes from regular, unpaid donors. But there is a growing market for paid blood donations, and this raises many concerns.

The Krever inquiry, launched after the tainted blood crisis of the 1980s, recommended that donors not be paid; that profit should not be made from blood or blood products; and that Canada should work towards plasma self-sufficiency.

A national public agency, Canadian Blood Services (CBS), was set up to collect blood and ensure the safety of our national supply. However, Canadian Plasma Resources (CPR) – a private, for-profit clinic – has now burst onto the scene, offering to pay people for plasma and, by doing so, undermining the very principles that make our blood system safe.

CPR aims to have at least 10 clinics across the country in the next few years. It has already opened clinics in Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, and is in the process of setting up two locations in BC.

The problem lies in the safety of the blood supply. When donors are motivated by money, they are more likely to lie about why their blood may be unsuitable – and unsafe – for donation. Paying for plasma also weakens Canada's voluntary donor base, as donors stop giving to the public system for free.

Even worse, any Canadian plasma collected by private clinics will be exported to the highest bidder, mixed with American plasma to make pharmaceuticals, then sold back into Canada for a whopping profit. Rather than benefit Canadians, paid-for plasma lines the pockets of multinational corporations and threatens Canada's ability to secure its own supply of blood and blood products.

Bargain for blood donation time

One immediate way to deal with this issue is through contract language, making it easier for workers to donate blood with no loss of time or pay. Propose language for your collective agreement.

Such language would acknowledge blood donation as an important civic duty, help secure our national supply and move us closer to self-sufficiency.

What might seem like a small, innocuous proposal could, contract by contract, create a ripple effect with big results: saving lives across the nation.

For more information, visit cupe.ca/cupe-and-allies-say-no-profit-plasma

■ **Vania Tse**

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they care about; involve the members in a plan of action not just listening and then telling members that the “union” will take care of it – this sends the message that the members aren't really necessary after all.

Taking the union to the members underscores the need to talk to members in person. One-on-one conversations between union leaders and rank and file members builds community within the local, and is the most effective communication tool to engage members in local union activities.

Here's what one survey respondent says about face time:

- Face to face conversations between current union activists and members is essential. The more we know each other at a human (non-transactional) level, the more likely it will be that we will come to the aid of each other and assist in union efforts when requested.

Four key ways elected local leaders can “take the union to the members”:

1. Conduct regular worksite visits to discuss members' concerns.
2. Hold small group meetings with members in specific classifications and occupational groups, along with shift workers and precariously employed workers, to discuss issues they care about.
3. Make meetings accessible. Hold general membership meetings at the workplace or close to the work place to make attending more convenient for rank and file members.
4. Rotate meetings throughout the day to accommodate member's shifts and give them more opportunities to attend.

Better information for better communication

Members want to know what's going on in their local union and want to participate, even when they can't attend meetings and events.

Here are three ways to keep members informed and facilitate communication:

1. Provide members with the minutes of meetings via email or confidentially through internal mail at work.

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2. Consider communicating with your members online using social media, or using webinars and telephone town halls to engage and inform them.
3. Review your local bylaws with your national representative. Discuss new or different options for member participation, including voting conducted at multiple locations, or voting online through a secure system.

These recommendations provide more opportunity for members to participate in local union activities. They help locals to be more inclusive and meet members' diverse needs, such as members with disabilities; members who are shift workers; precariously employed members who work more than one job; members with child care, elder care and household responsibilities (where the majority are women); and members who lack access to transportation and/or cannot easily access public transportation.

The findings also reveal that equity-seeking groups, young workers and precariously employed workers don't see themselves reflected in union structures, activities and events.

Here are ways we can dismantle barriers to participation for these workers:

- Ensure the diversity of the membership is reflected in the composition of local union structures, activities and events, for example have designated seats in union structures.
- Open union delegations to workshops, conferences and convention to rank and file members including equity-seekers, precariously employed workers and youth.
- Create committees for equity-seeking groups, precariously employed workers and youth.

CUPE leaders are on the path to building strong local unions when we meet members' diverse needs and when we are inclusive of all members, including members of equity-seeking groups, precariously employed workers and young workers.

For more information about the CUPE National Leadership Survey project visit cupe.ca

■ **Joseph Courtney**

From pension “drop outs” to being kicked out



Last year, Canada's federal and provincial governments made a historic deal to modestly expand the benefits provided by the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). This agreement is good news and something CUPE strongly supports.

Yet, when the government tabled the legislative changes needed to implement the deal, we discovered a shortcoming that, if left unchanged, would result in CPP penalties for Canadians with disabilities and workers who spend time raising young children.

CPP benefits are a function of a workers' earnings over their entire career. Lower earnings produce lower CPP benefits and vice versa. Time away from the workforce can negatively impact CPP benefits.

Previously, the federal government recognized that the CPP formula can produce inequities. To compensate, it built “drop out provisions” into the CPP. After all, it wouldn't be fair that a worker should see their CPP benefits reduced if they had a disability and were unable to work for a period of time, so the CPP rules allowed for this time of low (or zero) earnings to be “dropped out” of a worker's CPP calculation so it does not pull their CPP retirement benefits down.

There are similar provisions for time spent away from work while raising a young child. This “child rearing drop out” primarily benefits women, who continue to do most of the child rearing work in Canada.

These “drop out” provisions have existed for decades in the CPP and they've helped reduce inequities within the plan.

But the Trudeau government shockingly wrote new legislation that does not include these “drop out” provisions for the new, expanded portion of CPP.

When CUPE discovered this change, we assumed it must have been an oversight, and we informed the government of this problem. The government, however, passed the legislation unchanged, with the consent of the provinces (changes to the CPP need joint federal-provincial agreement). These governments said they will study the omission of the “drop out” provisions in the next triennial review of CPP, which is currently underway.

CUPE is extremely disappointed that the Trudeau Liberals did not make the simple changes needed to ensure that all CPP benefits would include these important “drop out” provisions. Workers with disabilities and workers spending time raising young children should not face pension penalties.

The Trudeau government spends a lot of time talking about how it is concerned for gender equality and equal rights for all Canadians. Yet their talk does not match their action on this issue.

Take action

Write to your provincial and federal politicians now and urge them to fix this problem during the ongoing CPP review process.

Visit cupe.ca/pensions to find out more.

■ **Mark Janson**