

CUPE POLICY STATEMENT
ON INTERNATIONAL
SOLIDARITY

*On the front line
locally and
globally*



CUPE National Convention • Vancouver, November 19-23, 2001

Globalization. It's a 10-dollar word for corporate greed. It's the ultimate power grab by world capitalism – a well thought-out strategy to organize the economy so that the world's growing wealth remains concentrated in the hands of a few. And right-wing governments the world over, including the Chrétien government, are aiding and abetting this process.

CUPE members are feeling the effects of this worldwide plague. Our rights to strike, organize and represent our members, and our collective agreements are under attack like never before. The pressure to cut staff, wages and benefits is enormous. Our members are increasingly finding themselves working for – or staving off – global corporations like Aramark, WMI, EDS or Suez. Clearly, the plan is to hand over control of *every* aspect of a nation's economic and social activity – even its public services – to multinational corporations.

But this race to the bottom is **not** inevitable. It can be stopped.

The anti-globalization protests in Seattle, Windsor, Quebec City, and Genoa, Italy, helped to galvanize public opposition to globalization and free trade agreements, putting these issues on the map for millions of workers, including CUPE members. Many CUPE activists took part in the North American protests, or in events in their own communities.

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These actions had a decisive impact on building opposition to globalization and free trade. They sent a message that it's unacceptable to hold secret, undemocratic negotiations to trade away people's rights, and the resources and public services of their nations. They showed hun-

dreds of millions of people around the world that trans-national corporations and the governments that do their bidding will use any means – including tear gas and bullets against ordinary citizens – to reach their goals. Most important, they demonstrated that we **can** make a difference

when we join together to fight back.

PEACE AND HUMAN SECURITY

The events of September 11th and the aftermath have brought home the importance of working for peace and security. The attacks exposed how fragile our world is. They have shown that none of us is immune from violence and war.

Violence and war are not the answer. We must not retreat from our commitment to justice and peace. This is a time to build solidarity among peoples in the world in a non-violent movement for true social, economic and racial equality. It is a time to rededicate ourselves to making a better world because a better world is possible.

WE'RE TAKING THEM ON

CUPE can be proud of the part we've played in helping to build a strong movement to challenge the power of the corporations:

- We mobilized more than 5,000 CUPE members to join the protest in Quebec City, the largest labour contingent in the march. And we supported the call for a public inquiry into the assault by police on our right to peaceful protest. We also mobilized hundreds of CUPE members to participate in the "March at the Arch" that took place on the border at Blaine, Washington – a B.C. action organized in solidarity with the FTAA protest in Quebec City.
- We supported the recent Common Front's Quebec-to-Qatar caravan and teach-ins on the WTO, and reached out to municipal councils and other allies to voice their opposition.
- We sought standing in the appeal of the Metalclad case, supporting the Mexican town fined \$17 million under NAFTA for trying to stop a US corporation from operating a toxic waste dump in the community.
- We launched a charter challenge on Chapter 11 of NAFTA, arguing against the secret NAFTA tribunals that violate our rights to freedom of expression and of the press.
- We released important legal opinions setting out the dangers of Alberta's Bill 11 (allowing for the establishment of private hospital care) as a result of NAFTA and the WTO agreements. We released similar legal opinions warning municipalities of the trade implications for privatized water – opinions that played an instrumental role in reversing the privatization of the Seymour plant in BC, and that we are using again in our campaigns against water privatization in Moncton and Halifax.
- We funded research on the impact of trade deals on health care, education, water and municipal services, publishing the results in our Third Annual Report on Privatization.
- Produced educational material for our members showing the impact of trade deals on their jobs and the public services we provide.
- We participated in the campaign to challenge corporate control of HIV/AIDS drugs in South Africa.
- We communicate regularly with labour groups in other countries to exchange information and engage in joint actions to challenge globalization.

But we still need to do much, much more to beat back the forces of globalization and free trade, and take back democracy. The key is to reach out and involve our 500,000 members, bringing the struggle home to each and every one. We need to build a massive movement on the ground, in every community, every workplace and every CUPE local.

We must:

- ☑ Increase our efforts to raise awareness of all CUPE members about the impact of globalization on our day-to-day lives, on the environment, on the lives of workers in other countries and on the rights of workers of colour, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered workers, Aboriginal workers and women.
- ☑ Pay special attention to involving youth, who know their future and the environmental future of our planet is at stake, and who have shown incredible courage in taking on the right-wing agenda.
- ☑ Develop a clear strategy for fighting back – one that puts real meaning into the slogan, “Think globally. Act locally.” CUPE members must actively resist the global transformation of the world’s economy by actively resisting the erosion of the quality of life in our own communities and the attacks on us in our workplaces. We must be prepared to take direct action on trade agreements just as we do on collective agreements.

THE CORPORATE AGENDA

Corporate interests now control virtually every nation’s economic, social and political policies. The transnationals have put in place legal mechanisms to exploit the world’s population and natural resources by promoting free trade agreements like NAFTA, the FTAA and the GATS, and exercising control over powerful financial institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Free trade agreements and international financial institutions are forcing nations to permanently privatize services, lower labour standards, and cut government funding for public programs and virtually all forms of government regulations. They are forcing nations to lower and even eliminate measures that protect our environment. Together, these instruments of corporate domination have set the rules of the game to favour corporations over citizens, the North over the South, greed over the environment, and the wealthy over the poor.

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The result is that governments at all levels worldwide have lost their power to make decisions in their national interests. Citizens and workers are being stripped of their rights. Clean air and safe water are taking a back seat to corporate profits. And privatization of public services – the final frontier of globalization and free trade – is spreading like wild fire. No matter what our government says, we know that the public services that are our public wealth – our health care and education systems, our water and electricity services – are on the negotiating table, ready to be traded away.

WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

What's happening to workers in other countries is also happening to workers in Canada, including CUPE members. More and more, our members are competing for jobs with some of the poorest paid workers on the planet. We're just starting to feel the effects of the type of exploitation that has already devastated the lives of workers in the developing countries.

Undercutting wages and benefits, speeding up production and replacing full-time jobs with casual or part-time ones are the tactics corporate interests use to increase their profits and power. It's a downward spiral and it's all about pitting groups of workers and their countries against each other to see who can provide the cheapest labour for the multinationals.

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AN ATTACK ON EQUALITY RIGHTS

It's also about turning back the clock on equality rights. Free trade agreements and international financial institutions are undermining equality rights – and creating even greater disparities among people within nations and between nations.

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And globalization has a direct impact on immigration policies. There are increased restrictions on the movement of people in order to advance economic interests. Even as money, goods and services move without restriction, people from other countries are used both at home and abroad as a cheap source of labour. Immigration policies that are based on using people as cheap sources of labour promote further intolerance and discrimination.

FIGHTING LOCALLY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

The impact of globalization and free trade agreements is so profound that it demands a profound and far-reaching response.

We must fight this right-wing agenda on all fronts. We must pressure the federal government to pursue a policy of fair trade, exclude public services from trade agreements, and ultimately repeal agreements already in existence. We must use our research and analysis to expose the destructiveness of globalization and develop alternatives. We must be prepared to launch more legal, community, and other actions to protect public services. And we must continue to work non-stop with coalitions to build a movement of worldwide opposition to globalization.

WE MUST THINK GLOBALLY AND ACT LOCALLY

But most of all, we must build **massive** resistance to free trade and globalization on the ground, and start by making the connections between local battles and the

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global struggle against corporate domination. Every fight a CUPE local takes on against job cuts, concessions, privatization or the weakening of workers' rights, must be seen as a fight against globalization. And every victory must be seen as a blow against globalization.

We must:

- ✓ Produce materials that spell out the risks of so-called free trade agreements and promote strategic actions against them.
- ✓ Organize worksite meetings, teach-ins and educational sessions that bring together members to discuss how these agreements affect our workplaces, our communities and our lives.
- ✓ Develop a workshop to help activists understand the connection between globalization and what they're experiencing at work and in their communities.
- ✓ Reach out to and involve more young people and workers of colour in strengthening our participation in the anti-globalization movement.

- ✓ Train CUPE members on the strategic use of direct action and non-violent civil disobedience, and ensure they have the support they need to take action.
- ✓ Look to affinity groups, flying squads and other ways of organizing our members to promote direct participation in confronting globalization and the right-wing agenda.
- ✓ Organize solidarity pickets and other actions to demonstrate our common cause with workers on strike or fighting the effects of globalization across Canada and around the world.
- ✓ Use a full range of tactics, including music, theatre and dance, as well as demonstrations, rallies and protests to highlight our concerns and the urgent need for action. The more vital and vibrant our actions, the more youth we'll involve.
- ✓ Examine the specific impact of globalization on women, gay and lesbian workers, workers of colour, workers with disabilities and Aboriginal workers and develop strategies to reverse its effects.
- ✓ Integrate equality issues into our educational material, workshops and other components of our fight against globalization.

- ✓ Continue to provide financial and activist support to the many local, regional, provincial and national coalitions organizing against corporate globalization – including the Common Front on the WTO (CFWTO) and the People's Global Action (PGA).

WE MUST REACH OUT TO WORKERS AROUND THE WORLD

CUPE has become increasingly active in linking with unions in other countries to stop globalization. For example, at the invitation of Brazil's National Union of Municipal Workers, CUPE representatives, including the president of Local 5167 in Hamilton, made a major presentation to a water and sewer management conference on our expertise in fighting water privatization. We sent a representative, Brother Edgar Godoy of CUPE Local 2191 and an alternate member of our national International Solidarity Committee, on the Invisible Struggles tour of Columbia. This tour of people and communities was organized partly to support popular opposition forces who are organizing against the plan to make Colombia even more dependent on foreign investment. We're active on the International Executive Board and in ongoing activities of the Public Services International (PSI). Our work at the PSI has allowed us to build strong ties to public sector unions in other countries and we have become recognized leaders in the international fight

against privatization. We have established important connections with important public sector unions in South Africa and many countries in South America, particularly on the issue of water and power privatization. And our International Solidarity Committee has established many strong ties, and is involved in many projects, with unions outside of Canada including unions in Cuba, South Africa and Chile.

We must continue to expand our international solidarity efforts on all these fronts. And we must also ensure that CUPE locals become more active in linking with other workers in other countries. To reach out to our allies around the globe, we must:

- ✓ Support links between CUPE locals and sister locals in other countries facing similar problems or employers.
- ✓ Include an international dimension within CUPE activities and campaigns to make the links with public sector struggles in other countries – whether it's our fight for equality rights, against privatization, or in defence of medicare, public education or water.
- ✓ Use United Nations Conferences, Conventions and international law to put pressure on Canadian and other governments to adhere to agreements that promote policies and programs that support the rights of all workers.

- ✓ Continue to strengthen international solidarity committees among divisions, councils and locals.
- ✓ Strengthen the Union Aid fund with a major push to increase financial contributions from local unions and from members and staff, as well as negotiating contributions from employers.
- ✓ Give priority to funding Union Aid projects that are connected to globalization.

PEOPLE POWER CAN WIN

People power is on a roll, in spite of the size and power of the transnationals and international institutions that are trying to reorganize the world to suit the corporations.

The corporate elite's best-laid plans have been stalled by huge and widely covered demonstrations against free trade negotiations. The protesters trying to break down the walls of secret trade talks reflect a broad spectrum of the population: young people, students, workers, the unemployed, environmentalists, anti-racist activists, faith communities, pensioners and union members.

And that's not all. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment was scuttled by a well-organized global network of activists. The drug companies were forced to drop their lawsuit against South Africa's efforts to provide affordable treatment for HIV-AIDS, thanks to an international campaign, actively supported by CUPE. And it's no accident that the Canadian Council on Public Private Partnerships (an organization dedicated to paving the way for the private takeover of public services by global corporations) has identified CUPE as the major thorn in its side. After all, CUPE members across Canada have relentlessly and effectively defended our public wealth from being turned into private property.

But we can't rest on our laurels. Our very way of life, the welfare of billions of other people in the world, and the health of our planet are at stake. We can never under-estimate the underhanded tactics multinational corporations, international financial institutions and right-wing governments will use, and their determination to win the day.

It's not going to be easy to win. It never is. But as the largest union in Canada – and one of the largest public sector unions in the world – we must pledge to escalate the fight against globalization by fighting every day, in every way, so that we can make a better, fairer, more peaceful world for ourselves and our families, for other people around the world, and for future generations.

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