

## NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT DECEMBER 2023 – MARCH 2024

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Sisters, Brothers and Friends:

A new year is always an opportunity to look, with fresh eyes, at the work we have done and the work we have yet to do. I really hope you were all able to rest and reflect over the December break because, while we had some very significant accomplishments in 2023, it is clear that we have much work ahead of us in 2024.

As always, I started the year meeting with CUPE staff across the country. It's a good opportunity to hear from them about the challenges our members and locals are facing in each region. And this year it was an opportunity to review the priorities of our union, as determined by delegates to our convention in Quebec City last year.

We continue to have a strong working relationship with the Canadian Labour Congress and work closely with them on key federal issues. In this minority parliament, our work together is more important than ever.

As you know, the NDP and Liberals entered into a supply and confidence agreement two years ago. And that agreement has been bearing real, tangible results. We have seen the introduction of a dental care program and paid sick leave for workers.

Bill C-58, *An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Canada Industrial Relations Board Regulations, 2012*, was introduced last November and passed a second reading in February. It's not perfect but given how many times anti-scab legislation has been introduced and voted down by Liberals and Conservatives over the years – and as recently as 2019 – it is real and meaningful progress for labour and worker rights in this country. We are working with the CLC and MPs to ensure the legislation is adopted and brought into force as soon as possible.

On February 29, the government introduced Bill C-64, *An Act respecting pharmacare*. It creates the framework for a universal single-payer pharmacare plan, in accordance with the principles of the *Canada Health Act*. As a starting point, the plan will provide immediate coverage for diabetes and contraceptive medications, which will be life-changing for hundreds of thousands of people across the country once the bill is adopted and the program is in place.

**MARK HANCOCK**

National President/Président national

**CANDACE RENNICK**

National Secretary-Treasurer/Secrétaire-trésorière nationale

**PATRICK GLOUTNEY, FRED HAHN, JUDY HENLEY, SHERRY HILLIER, KAREN RANALLETTA**

General Vice-Presidents/Vice-présidences générales

Bill C-64 provides a path to expand pharmacare coverage beyond to everyone in Canada, for all types of essential medications. There's more work ahead to ensure universal access and coverage, through the development of a national formulary and bulk purchasing plan, and we will continue to press the federal government to ensure this happens.

Together, dental care, pharmacare and paid sick leave mark the greatest expansion of our social safety net in a generation. This is the result of decades of activism by unions and New Democrats alike, and it's important to celebrate these victories.

The next step in guaranteeing universal access is ensuring the development of a national formulary and bulk purchasing plan that provides universal coverage and access. CUPE will continue to press the federal government as the Pharmacare Act develops to ensure this happens.

I have always said that politics matter. And what we're seeing from our governments, on Parliament Hill and across the country, is proof of that. When we elect New Democrats, federally and provincially, they invest in public services and in the workers that deliver them, and they stand up for workers' rights and human rights. But everywhere New Democrats don't hold power, those things are under attack.

With a minority parliament in Ottawa, we know that the next federal election could happen at any time. And we know that there is a lot at stake for public services, for our members and our union, for workers' rights and human rights when that election comes.

Our National Executive Board spent some time together in February to begin a conversation about the next federal election, and how we can engage CUPE members, activists and leaders in the lead up to that election. Stay tuned for more!

## Collective Bargaining/Strikes/Lockouts

<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>LOCAL</b>	<b>EMPLOYER</b>	<b># OF MEMBERS</b>	<b>STRIKE BEGAN</b>	<b>DURATION</b>
Ontario	CUPE 1490	Town of Black River-Matheson	14	Locked out/ strike, October 15, 2023	Ongoing
Manitoba	CUPE 2348	Ten Ten Sinclair Housing Inc.	4	March 6, 2024	Ongoing
Quebec	CUPE 2614	Société des arrimeurs de Québec (SAQ)	81	Locked out September 15, 2022	Ongoing
Quebec	CUPE 2815	Videotron	214	Locked out, October 30, 2023	Ongoing
Quebec	CUPE 3187	École de technologie supérieure	600	Rotating strike, commence January 16, 2024	Ongoing
Ontario	CUPE 3903	York University	3000	Strike commenced February 26, 2024	Ongoing
Manitoba	CUPE 4376	Ten Ten Sinclair Housing Inc.	170	March 6, 2024	Ongoing
Quebec	CUPE 5522	Société québécoise des infrastructures	750	March 12 and 13, 2024	2 days
Quebec	CUPE 306	City of Longueuil	1,200	March 13 and 14, 2024	2 days
British Columbia	CUPE 4500	Coast Mountain Bus Company	180	Strike commenced January 6, 2024	Ratified tentative agreement February 6, 2024.

Quebec	CPAS – Conseil provincial des affaires sociales	Government of Quebec	Approximately 50,000	Intermittent strike action taken by Provincial Bargaining Councils.	Tentative agreement ratified. February 23, 2024.
Quebec	CPSS – Conseil provincial du soutien scolaire	Government of Quebec	Approximately 50,000	Intermittent strike action taken by Provincial Bargaining Councils.	Tentative agreement ratified. February 23, 2024.
Quebec	CPC – Conseil provincial des collèges	Government of Quebec	Approximately 50,000	Intermittent strike action taken by Provincial Bargaining Councils.	Tentative agreement ratified. February 23, 2024.

**CUPE 1490**

Fourteen members of CUPE 1490, who are municipal workers at the Township of Black River-Matheson in Northern Ontario, were locked out of their workplace on October 15, 2023. On January 19, 2024, the Ontario Ministry of Labour undertook a supervised vote on the employer’s last offer at its request. Members overwhelmingly rejected the employer’s final offer.

On January 21, 2024, the employer advised members they were ending the lockout, and they were prepared to allow members to return to work under terms and conditions that were just voted down during the supervised vote. The local advised that same day of their intention to commence strike action effective immediately.

Members are fighting off the employer’s concessions including installing a two-tier wage grid which the local state is fundamentally divisive and weakens the union. CUPE 1490 are standing strong in solidarity despite the employer’s efforts to undermine their right to picket. The employer has issued and put in place “no trespass” notices, banning members from picketing on municipal properties, threatening members with fines and attempting to limit their picketing. CUPE is challenging the “no trespass” orders as well as defending our members’ right to picket by all legal means available and is prepared to take this matter to the courts.

## **CUPE 2348 and CUPE 4376**

Approximately 160 health care workers at Ten Ten Sinclair Inc. began strike action to gain better wages for the vital front-line services they provide. Members who work for the independent living organization have been subjected to the previous government's wage freeze, which left them further behind given the current inflation crisis. With picket lines erected, CUPE 2348 and CUPE 4376 are sending a serious message to their employer – it's high time they start taking care of the people who provide care, and they'll remain steadfast until they achieve just that.

## **CUPE 2614**

On September 15, 2022, more than 550 days ago, the Port of Quebec locked out 81 members of CUPE 2614. These longshore workers salute the federal government's decision to pass a bill that prohibits the use of replacement workers under federal jurisdiction across Canada, including in Quebec. Anti-scab legislation is more necessary than ever, and it can't come soon enough for these workers who are holding out hope that this bill will bring a quicker end to the lockout.

CUPE 2614 and SCFP-Quebec believe that issues would have been settled long ago if anti-scab legislation was already a part of the Canada Labor Code. The employer continues to use replacement workers, which would be illegal under provincial jurisdiction.

CUPE 2614 continues to demand that the employer engage and come to the bargaining table. Local 2614 members have several concerns about health and safety within their workplace and are undertaken their due diligence in raising their voices about the dangerous conditions of the wharves and the inaction on the part of the port authorities and the federal government towards fixing them. CUPE 2614 members are also advocating for predictable work schedules that will allow for a family life and putting an end to 76 hours or more scheduled work weeks.

## **CUPE 2815**

On October 10, 2023, CUPE 2815 members who work at Videotron in Gatineau, Quebec, overwhelmingly rejected their employer's substandard offer. Instead of returning to the table to negotiate a fair contract, the employer locked the 214 workers out on October 30.

These members remain united, while the employer continues to insist that the local accept a concession that would allow unlimited contracting-out of work which would allow work to be outsourced overseas. CUPE 2815 is adamant that jobs need to be created and remain within the community. Members have been without a contract since August 31, 2020.

## **CUPE 3187**

On January 16, 2024, the 600-member local walked off the job. CUPE 3187 members have been without contract since March 31, 2022.

Following a year of negotiations, with no significant movement by the employer, members are now escalating job action. Priorities such as internal promotions, recognition of competencies, wages, and terms and conditions governing telework are among outstanding issues.

## **CUPE 5522**

Members of the union representing professionals with the Société Québécoise des infrastructures (SPSQI), CUPE 5522 announced that they would be taking job action, beginning with a two-day strike on March 12 and 13. These 700 professionals have been bargaining since 2020, but are sitting across the table from employer negotiators who don't have the power to get through the impasse of wage issues. The local wants the employer to be given a clear mandate from the President of the Treasury Board to address these workers' monetary concerns. Other key issues are working conditions and high staff turnover.

## **CUPE 3903**

Three thousand contract instructors, teaching assistants, and graduate assistants at York University, commenced strike action on February 26, 2024. With the ever-escalating cost of living rising over the last several years, combined with the unconstitutional wage restrictions imposed by Bill 124, CUPE 3903 wants its employer to address the imbalance created and bring to the table fair wage enhancement. Workload and job stability, as well as resources for members experiencing discrimination in the workplace are among other key issues for members holding the line.

## **CUPE 306**

Following a November 2023 strike vote that saw 92% in favour of job action, approximately 1,200 inside workers at the City of Longueuil, who have been without a contract since January 2021, will be holding a two-day strike on March 13 and 14. Despite attending roughly 75 bargaining sessions since May 2022, talks on the issue of equity with other Longueuil municipal workers haven't been productive. CUPE 306 inside workers want the same working conditions that were negotiated with outside workers, including a 10% increase in the wage scale and a four-day work week. Most of the inside workers are women, while outside workers are predominantly men, and they want fair remuneration.

## **CUPE 4500**

Members of CUPE 4500 ratified their mediated settlement with Coast Mountain Bus Company on February 6, 2024, ending their month-long strike. More than 180 members commenced strike action on January 6, when they began an overtime ban. The union escalated its strike action with a full withdrawal of services.

The local made it clear to their employer heading into bargaining that any settlement must address critical workload issues and wages for all members and align with those of other Translink employees. CUPE 4500 was able to make significant progress on key issues, including significant wage enhancements.

## **Common Front Coalition**

CPAS – Conseil provincial des affaires sociales (Health sector)

CPSS – Conseil provincial du soutien scolaire (Education sector)

CPC – Conseil provincial des collèges (Education sector)

Quebec's Common Front coalition counting 420,000 public sector members which includes three CUPE Provincial Bargaining Councils, CPAS, CPSS and CPC, representing over 50,000 workers have reached an agreement with the Quebec government.

In February, membership voted on the tentative agreements for central and sectoral tables for all unions affiliated with the FTQ were completed, including CUPE. More than a hundred general meetings took place between January 15 and February 19, 2024.

The message from members affiliated with the FTQ is clear, workers remain dissatisfied and there is still a lot of work required to improve working conditions within public services.

Workers were able to achieve the largest salary increase in over 50 years and have reminded the Quebec government that the inflation experienced in recent years is unprecedented and the increase was necessary. The Quebec government tried to attack their pension plan (Government and public employees retirement plan (RREGOP)), but the incredible mobilization of workers in Quebec made it possible to maintain their pension plan as it is while improving progressive retirement.

## **Bargaining**

Members of CUPE 3688 say there is a long way to go, but the provincial government's announcement of an improved wage scale, pension, and benefits for early child care educators was long overdue.

Starting April 1, the ECE (early childhood education) wage scale will increase by approximately \$3 per hour. CUPE Nova Scotia has organized days of actions across the province raising awareness of the lack of fair compensation in the child care sector which has punished workers during the inflation crisis amid worsening understaffing.

In 2022, inside and outside workers, school crossing guards, and recreation attendants employed by the Municipality of Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures banded together to form a single bargaining unit represented by CUPE. This proved to be an ideal great move as the 170 members reached an agreement with their employer which includes a wage hike of 17.35% over five years.

Negotiating a single contract empowered the bargaining committee to gain enhancements, securing a historic collective agreement for the Town of Saint-Augustin. Gains included improvements to leave and vacations, time off for union business, premiums, standby provisions, and a complete common evaluation of all job titles, which is more advantageous for our members, in comparison with those in neighbouring towns.

After multiple rounds of bargaining, CUPE 1880 ratified a new collective agreement that adds language to tackle the ongoing forced overtime issue, marking the first time the problem was addressed at the bargaining table.

Members on shift past their regular work hours will now be compensated financially fairly. The new agreement lays out specific parameters for forced overtime pay, entitling members' time and a half for the first four hours and double time thereafter. The bargaining committee was also successful in negotiating a meal allowance for those who work beyond their regular hours, and for those who work beyond midnight and 6 a.m. and do not have their own vehicle, the employer will now provide cab fare to get the member home, in addition, to supporting for any care costs incurred if a member is supporting an elderly family member.

The 800 members of CUPE 40 have negotiated a deal that will see custodial and other support staff at the Calgary Board of Education receive a 7.75% wage increase over the course of this school year. Workers will get a 5% wage increase retroactive to the beginning of the school year, and a further 2.75% upon ratification.

Members of CUPE 40 brought awareness to their dissatisfaction by making 'a lot of noise' about their low wages through "purple shirt days," rallies, demonstrations, and a letter writing campaign to make elected leaders understand their desire for wages that keep up with inflation, so they do not fall further behind.



CUPE 40 is pleased to have set this bar for the 28 school districts still in negotiations with CUPE in Alberta and hopes this is the start of a trend for education workers across the province.

CUPE 1978 members at the Greater Victoria Housing Society have ratified a new five-year agreement that provides improved working conditions for CUPE members, as well as enhanced supportive housing services for the community.

The five-year deal provides annual wage increases of 4% in 2024 and 2025, and 3.5 % in 2026, 2027, and 2028. Beginning in 2027, there is an option to re-open wage discussions should the BC Consumer Price Index exceed five percent in the previous year. The deal also includes an immediate \$1 hourly pay raise for the lowest-paid workers.

Other key gains for members include increases to vacation entitlement, enhanced health benefits and RRSP contributions, and compensation for the use of personal vehicles at work. The deal also includes improved leave for bereavement, family responsibility, and domestic or sexual violence.

Striking municipal workers in the Township of Black River-Matheson face their own battles as they continue to hold the line against an employer who is refusing to pay them decent wages for the important services, they deliver to community residents. In mid-February, the Township issued a trespass notice excluding the 14 striking members of CUPE 1490 from three municipal locations. Additionally, and incredibly concerning, the notice excludes both members and employees from CUPE.

This employer has been employing scabs to perform the work of our members who have been holding out for a fair contract since they were first locked out in October 2023. To add insult to literal injury, two of these unqualified scabs have physically hit two of our striking members with their vehicles. These are the second and third marked incidents of CUPE members in Black River-Matheson facing this type of physical harm while picketing. CUPE staff and activists alike are heading to Northern Ontario to join these workers on the line in a show of solidarity, to let the employer know that we will not surrender to their intimidation tactics. CUPE is calling on the Ontario Provincial Police and Crown attorney to fully investigate the incident and bring criminal charges where they are due.

## **Regional Updates**

### **Maritimes Region**

#### **New Brunswick**

As of December 2023, Blaine Higgs holds his infamous spot as the second most disliked Premier in the country. Angus Reid’s polling shows that less than one-in-three (33%) approve of his leadership. Staff in the region will continue to communicate that his government’s MLAs also need to own up to the part they’ve played in the damage Higgs has done in New Brunswick. We’re determined to make sure no one forgets the negative impacts he’s had across the province when New Brunswickers next head to the ballot box.

Despite recording unprecedented surpluses, Higgs’ State of the Province Address lacked any meaningful commitments towards addressing the erosion of public services as workers, seniors and families grapple to make ends meet. Families in the province will be mailed a one-time \$300 cheque – a clear attempt to buy votes – which does nothing to correct the damage done to low-income families by keeping wages low and removing rent protections.

CUPE 1253, CUPE 2745, and the New Brunswick Council of Nursing Home Unions (NBCNHU) formally launched a legal challenge against the New Brunswick PCs’ pension bill. Bill 17 strips members of their charter rights to free collective bargaining. This law is being challenged as it forces the imposition of shared-risk pension plans on workers and violates their rights to negotiate these benefits.

CUPE has filed a motion for an injunction to stop the bill from being implemented while the Charter challenge is being heard on the merits. This had to be done urgently because the process the bill imposes could cause irreparable harm to CUPE members’ pension plans. The government tried to stall things in court to prevent the injunction from being decided quickly, but we were successful in having the Court protect our rights with an interim order. The injunction will be heard in April.

#### **Prince Edward Island**

The 2024-2025 budget announced recently by Premier Dennis King’s administration fell short of providing the necessary funds for addressing the most pressing issues within the health care system. With staffing shortages, wage disparities, and resource deficiencies stifling the sector, we’re disappointed that the budget failed to address issues that have been ongoing since before COVID-19.

While the PEI Government announced the allocation of funds for additional patient medical homes and doctor recruitment, it missed the opportunity to make real change for workers and their communities by bringing long-term care workers into the public sector. The pandemic made it startlingly clear that patients in long-term care homes fare far better when the homes aren't private, for-profit centres.

CUPE 1145 made a compelling presentation to the legislative standing committee about concerns with overcrowding on school buses, bus range and capacity, and bus drivers' wages. Members' concerns were well represented, and tangible solutions were brought to the provincial government to make school buses safer for both drivers and the students they transport.

CUPE hosted a series of events across the province about how to engage and mobilize our membership to increase our bargaining. There is no doubt that CUPE locals on the island will be prepared to stand up to their employers to achieve meaningful wins when they next sit at bargaining tables.

## **Atlantic Region**

### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

The transition to provincial government for what was school boards were completed effective January 1, 2024. Meetings were held with the government to discuss the transition and address possible impacts on working conditions, now that education employees are under the government's jurisdiction. Essentially a "fence" has been placed around our agreements and all rights have been protected. Our members' service and seniority rights have been protected.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) released its report on living wage on December 11, 2023, and we found out that the highest living wage in the country as measured by CCPA methodology is in the region of Labrador/Northern Peninsula, at \$26.80. These reports reiterate the importance of making real wage gains that are adjusted to reflect what is needed to feed, clothe and house ourselves in today's financial reality.

Earlier this year, Ernest Green announced his retirement and resignation from his position as Regional Vice-President representing Newfoundland and Labrador on the National Executive Board (NEB). We thank him for his much appreciated contributions to CUPE and the broader labour movement. Mike Tobin took over the representation for the province with his appointment to the NEB the President of CUPE 879, and long-time activist. We look forward to having him join the NEB for his first official meeting in March.

## **Nova Scotia**

For the third year in a row, the Houston government has reported a budget surplus despite projecting a deficit of hundreds of millions of dollars. This money should be invested in tangible programs to lower the cost of living, rather than offering tax breaks and credits that do nothing to redress inequities and support communities.

CUPE Nova Scotia's statement stressed that the provincial government should have made real steps towards indexing social assistance so that those most in need could afford to live adequately. Nova Scotia has the highest rate of rental inflation in the country at 11.8%, and the budget does little to address this ongoing issue for workers and communities. Increasing rental supplements, which are only available to 8,500 renters, does nothing to protect the tens of thousands of Nova Scotians facing unregulated rental increases. CUPE Nova Scotia advocated that the government needs to enact a policy that limits rent hikes, regulates predatory fixed-term leases, and establishes harsher penalties for renovictions.

The province's long-term care and home support sectors have long been struggling under the weight of working short with poor pay and benefits. CUPE Nova Scotia noted that the budget promised an increase in funding, an additional 350 beds, and easier transitions to home support for those wanting to remain in their homes longer. The 9.6 million dedicated to this effort, however, does not offer enough support for the workers providing care to some of the most vulnerable in their communities.

Staff, leaders, and activists in the region have been hard at work highlighting the fact that community services workers in Nova Scotia deserve better. Counsellors, youth workers, and support staff who work in residential care centres and group homes, taking care of adults and children with disabilities and behavioural challenges haven't seen a wage increase since March 2021. The Department of Community Services, which funds 21 workplaces in the province, is refusing to come to the table with an equitable compensation package that recognizes the importance of the work our members do around the clock to provide safe and nurturing spaces. These workers are frustrated and feel undervalued and have launched a political action campaign targeting MLAs.

## **Quebec**

The remarkable mobilization of members in Quebec's health, education and CEGEP sectors has finally paid off, with substantial wage increases for our members, but we must acknowledge their dissatisfaction, especially with the Legault government's contemptuous attitude. We will have to double our efforts in the next rounds of bargaining to make the necessary adjustments.

Quebec Premier François Legault has described the agreement as a major expenditure, blaming this investment in public services for the budget deficit. As long as the government sees public services as expenditures rather than investments in the economy and the well-being of the population, our public services will remain vulnerable.

It's the same thing with public transit and the environment: the Legault government views these areas as burdens rather than instruments of sustainable development. I congratulate the Conseil provincial du transport terrestre on its successful "Tout à gagner avec un transport collectif bien financé" campaign to promote investment in essential public transit services.

Locals representing more than 16,000 Hydro-Québec employees are campaigning against the privatization of public electricity services in Quebec. The campaign condemns political decisions that will set Quebec back socio-economically. The approach advocated by Minister Fitzgibbon, with the complicity of Hydro-Québec's CEO, jeopardizes a model that has benefited Quebec's economic development while preserving the values of solidarity and social justice of the Quebec population. The campaign's message is "Let's put our energies in the right place, and not let the private sector take over".

At the end of February, as the NEB met in Montreal, we were able to join locked out members of Local 2815 who had moved their picket line in front of Quebecor's downtown offices. Quebecor is the sole shareholder of Videotron, which triggered the lockout with the intention of transferring unionized jobs to non-unionized companies or overseas. Several unions took part in the rally, and a strong message was sent to the employer: this lockout is a frontal attack on the union movement and the entire Canadian workforce.

## Ontario

Almost four years since it was first introduced in June 2019, Bill 124 continues to make headlines across Ontario. Doug Ford and the Ontario PCs rammed the controversial bill through the legislature after minimal debate, resulting in a 1% salary cap for public sector workers in unionized and non-unionized workplaces.

CUPE was among a coalition of labour organizations that challenged the unconstitutionality of the bill, as it grossly infringed on workers' charter rights to free collective bargaining. The bill, dubbed "*Producing a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019*" did nothing more than further erode the affected public services in Ontario that were already struggling due to the effects of the pandemic, by plaguing it with increased recruitment and retention issues for some of the province's most required services.

Workers in the province saw first-hand the effects of worker power when they stood together to back CUPE's education workers and made Doug Ford blink and have to revoke Bill 28 in 2022. The fight against Bill 124 was another big win for workers that showed the right wing what unions are made of. Justice Koehnen ruled the law unconstitutional when he first declared the bill null and void in November 2022. Despite the Conservatives' appeal to have the ruling overturned, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld Justice Koehnen's decision.

Citizens of Canada's largest province will need to remember that the PCs are not friends of working people, or public services, the next time they head to the polls. Bill 124 affected approximately 1.3 million public service workers – or one in six Ontario workers – and robbed them of \$2.7 billion in wages.

Three of the largest unions representing hospital workers have come together to call out and address the ongoing issues that continue to cripple the health care sector. CUPE (OCHU), SEIU and UNIFOR aim to address the staffing crisis, inadequate funding, and the constant threat of privatization. The coalition is committed to protecting the public hospital system, the workers who keep it going, and the patients they serve.

The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) which represents the employer, has refused to bargain with the collective, opting to bargain with each group separately, in hopes of creating a divide between them. The unions responded with a show of solidarity by converging at each bargaining table to show support for one another while sending a clear message to OHA that they are determined to reach a strong and fair collective agreement for all their members. The coalition amped up their efforts and rallied outside a CUPE mediation session for two days. Progress was made in mediation as CUPE pushed back major concessions on job security. The two-day meeting concluded with an agreement to proceed to expedited arbitration. We're hopeful the arbitration will yield meaningful gains for all members involved.

## **Manitoba**

After seven years of a conservative government which made deep cuts to health care and education across the province as workers fell further and further behind, the new NDP government in Manitoba has a lot of work ahead to restore trust in public services and deliver on the improvements promised during last fall's election campaign.

That work is well underway, and CUPE leaders and staff are ensuring that the needs and priorities of our members are front and centre in the conversation as we establish and deepen relationships with the government. Those priorities include making gains for our members at the bargaining table, improving public services with adequate funding and a plan to address recruitment and retention challenges in every sector.

CUPE is also working with the Manitoba Federation of Labour and other unions to pursue improvements on the labour relations front, including anti-scab legislation, pay equity, and coordinated bargaining frameworks.

With this backdrop, CUPE's public health care locals have formed a bargaining council and ratified a term of reference for their work, with bargaining set to begin in April. This

council will be bargaining on behalf of close to 20,000 health care workers and is determined to secure a fair deal for these workers.

Strategic planning for coordinated bargaining in the education sector is also underway, with most local agreements expiring later this year or early in 2025.

## **Saskatchewan**

I was honoured to join CUPE leaders and health care workers in Regina in February as CUPE 5430 released their report on the impact of the rising cost of living on Saskatchewan health care workers, *From Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque*.

The report summarizes the results of a survey of Saskatchewan health care workers on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis over the last two years. It shows that inflationary pressures have had a devastating impact on the well-being and families of CUPE 5430 members. It also shows that wage growth among these health workers has not kept pace with the growth in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) over the last decade.

Survey responses include reports of health workers skipping meals and deferring bills so they can feed their families, incurring significant debt and experiencing serious mental health challenges as they try to manage the cost of living crisis with low wages. The report sends a clear message that the employer needs to come to the bargaining table with a significant wage increase for these workers.

I was in Saskatchewan again in mid-March for the annual CUPE Saskatchewan convention. Delegates to the convention in Saskatoon had spirited debate on resolutions, heard from guest speakers on topics as varied as food insecurity, meaningful Indigenous land acknowledgements, member mobilizing, and the future of Saskatchewan's crown corporations. Delegates also reaffirmed its affiliation to the Saskatchewan NDP and heard from leader Carla Beck ahead of what is expected to be a fall provincial election.

CUPE Saskatchewan president Judy Henley has accepted an appointment as a labour representative to the province's Workers' Compensation Board, and did not seek re-election. I want to acknowledge and thank Judy for her many years of service to CUPE members, and will miss her contributions to our National Executive Board. Congratulations to Kent Peterson on his election as President, Erin Auchstaetter as Secretary-Treasurer and to all the other members elected to serve on the executive board.

## **Alberta**

I always appreciate the opportunity to join CUPE Alberta when they host their All-Presidents meeting at the beginning of February, and was happy to do so again this year in Calgary. It's a great opportunity to connect with local leaders and hear directly from them about their successes and challenges.

Much of the day was spent on the newly launched Waging Ahead campaign, focused on building solidarity among CUPE locals and members as they work together towards making real gains at the bargaining table – including long overdue wage increases and improved working conditions. Locals will engage their members in conversations about their needs and frustrations at work, invite them to get more involved, propose solutions, and build a collective strategy across sectors to gain public support and succeed at the bargaining table.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo dropped a bombshell on members of CUPE 1505 at the end of February when it announced it would be reviewing services with a view to restructuring the workplace, including contracting out and reducing services like solid waste, customer service, parks maintenance and public transit. The move has the potential to impact more than 450 CUPE members in Fort McMurray, about 50% of the current workforce.

The council met on March 12 to discuss the review, and CUPE members were joined by members of the community to protest, both inside and outside the meeting. CUPE Alberta president Rory Gill addressed the council and called on them to rethink their plans, saying they will only lead to a degradation of city services, a lack of control and oversight, and will weaken the community. CUPE 1505 is ready to fight back against the looming cuts and job losses.

## **British Columbia**

Coordination efforts are well underway in advance of widescale provincial bargaining across sectors set to begin in early 2025, with staff and locals fully engaged in strategic planning, communications strategies, member engagement and training. Given the timing of the provincial election and the short timeframe between the election, being held October 19, 2024, and the expiry of provincial agreements on March 31, 2025, we will be prepared to bargain in whatever political climate we face.

At the same time, preparations are underway to engage our members in the pending provincial election, and to mobilize and train them to participate in the campaign to re-elect the BC NDP and ensure a progressive government in British Columbia.

We welcomed 64 workers at the Richmond Olympic Oval, previously represented by the Public and Private Workers of Canada (PPWC) into our CUPE family at the end of January. These new members will become part of CUPE 718, which represents workers at most other recreation facilities in the City of Richmond.



CUPE successfully demonstrated to the Labour Board that we had enough membership support to qualify for automatic certification.

The change in union representation was granted without any objections from either the employer or the PPWC – an independent union that is not affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress and therefore outside of the house of labour. We anticipate other PPWC members to express an interest in joining our great union!

### **Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)**

HEU continues to organize health care workers throughout BC, most recently bringing four new groups covering 302 workers, to CUPE. These members work in long-term care and assisted living at private sector employers and contractors in the Lower Mainland of BC.

The success of organizing in the long-term care sector is due in part to the HEU's Care Can't Wait campaign. The campaign calls for the creation of more public or non-profit – not private – long-term care spaces and facilities, a fix to the staffing crisis in the sector by setting common standards for wages, benefits and working conditions, and an end to the contracting out of care and the work that supports it.

The campaign also engages members in issues important to them, and asks them to write their provincial elected officials and ask for support to fix long-term care in BC. Both of which are part of preparations for the fall provincial election.

### **Airlines**

The Air Transat Component of CUPE reached a new collective agreement that includes long overdue wage increases that bring them to the highest range of salaries in the industry. Members voted in favour of the mediators' recommendation and will benefit from general increases of 30% over five years. The percentage increases for 2022 and 2023 are 8,25% and 9,75% respectively. The new contract abolishes the two lowest salary steps, which means newer members will see an immediate wage enhancement on top of general increases. The component was also successful in getting crew seats guaranteed for flights over 7 hours or departing after 10p.m. Flight attendants were among some of the hardest hit during the pandemic as travel came to an abrupt halt due to COVID-19, leaving in its wake unprecedented layoffs in the sector. Congrats to our members at Air Transat on achieving an agreement that will help the membership keep up with inflation.

Earlier this year, we welcomed flight attendants at Lynx Air into the CUPE family. These new members joined more than 18,500 other flight attendants working at ten other airlines across the country. Lynx Air is an ultra-low-cost carrier, established in 2021 and based out of Calgary, Alberta. Unfortunately, the company was having financial difficulties as investors were pulling out.

Soon after CUPE was certified to represent Lynx Air flight attendants, the employer sought the protection of the Company Creditors Arrangement Act and advised that it would be shutting down operations. Although we were devastated to learn of the job losses, we were glad to be able to represent 240 flight attendants to ensure that while the company is liquidated, they get everything they are legally entitled to. Because they chose to join a union, they will not be left to fend for themselves. Members will be represented in court and will receive the information they need to claim benefits under the Wage Earner Protection Program, if necessary.

## **Organizing**

For the reporting period of January 1 to March 31, 2024, CUPE welcomed 4,463 new members in 14 bargaining units, including 302 in health, 150 in municipal services, and 2,500 in post-secondary education. There are currently 135 active campaigns underway that, if successful, could bring 42,080 new members to our union.

In the Maritimes, there are currently 11 active campaigns which could bring 749 workers into CUPE, including 300 in emergency and security services.

Our Atlantic region currently has four active campaigns in social services, health, and recreation, culture, and entertainment, which would see 369 new members join our union.

Quebec has 23 active campaigns underway in various sectors, that could bring 8,099 new members into the CUPE family.

The Ontario region continues its organizing efforts, with 40 active campaigns in various sectors that have the potential to add 11,185 new members to our union, including 1,552 in municipal services and more than 7,423 members in health care.

Manitoba has 9 active campaigns, which could see 1,180 new members join our union, including 417 workers in education.

Saskatchewan has 13 active campaigns in various sectors, where we hope to bring 1,166 new workers into CUPE, 650 of which are health care workers.

The Alberta region was busy with 16 active organizing campaigns that could bring in 2,958 new members into CUPE. Six of the ongoing campaigns are in the education/post-secondary sectors where CUPE is hoping to add 1,958 members.

In British Columbia, there are 30 active campaigns across various sectors including social services, recreation, culture and entertainment, and municipal services, with the potential of welcoming 14,331 new members.

## **In Memoriam/Personal**

I offer my sincere condolences to the families of the following CUPE members, former staff and retirees who have passed away in this reporting period.

### **Members**

- Robert Zver CUPE 606 – British Columbia
- Deborah Sinclair CUPE 8443 – Saskatchewan
- Evelyne Bemben CUPE 949 – Manitoba
- Dustin Cholosky CUPE 204 – Manitoba

### **Retired Staff**

- Paul Barry National Representative  
Ontario Regional Office
- Margaret Irwin Office Support Professional  
Ontario Regional Office
- Sylvie Bergeron Secretary  
Quebec Regional Office
- Jerry Lava National Representative  
Kenora Area Office
- Claude Hétu Assistant Regional Director  
Quebec Regional Office
- Linda Jewett National Representative  
Ontario Regional Office
- Zoel Savoie Education Representative  
Bathurst Area Office

In solidarity,



MARK HANCOCK  
National President

:sg/ceu