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## NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT JUNE 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2023

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Sisters, Brothers and Friends:

It has been a long, hot summer, both from a climate perspective and at bargaining tables across the country.

In June, I reported on locals who were facing hard bargaining and difficult employers, who responded with strike votes and job action, and winning good contracts as a result. That persisted throughout the summer, and we continue to resist concessions and two-tier proposals and secure good deals with gains for our members, including real wage increases.

I am so proud of our bargaining committees, the staff working with them, and our members who support them and deliver strong strike votes when needed. We must continue to push back hard against employers to secure the improvements our members need and deserve!

As a union, we've proven time and again that we are a force to be reckoned with. We always stand up to injustice, and that includes employers who will not negotiate fair deals for our members.

Temperatures have been rising at the bargaining table. But I also want to acknowledge the hot summer we just experienced. Our country was on fire from coast to coast to coast. Across the country, whole communities were evacuated, and hundreds of homes were lost to wildfires. Smoke travelled thousands of kilometres in all directions, and almost every corner of our continent experienced air quality warnings as a result. We also saw significant flooding in many parts of Canada.

The climate crisis is real and grows exponentially every year. There is much we can do to fight back against climate change and our union has a role to play in addressing this climate crisis. I encourage you to look at the resources we have available for members and locals, but especially to talk to your families, your neighbours and community leaders about our climate and the collective actions we can take, now, to avoid an absolute planetary disaster.

Speaking of the climate crisis, there are many who are in denial – including Pierre Poilievre and his Conservatives. They are also trying to hide their real political values with an image makeover. You may have seen their new advertising campaign, where they try to appeal to working class voters by focussing on his family – those ads are actually quite appealing, on the surface.

But Poilievre is trying to hide from his record – and we won't let him. His disdain for unions and workers is real and his record as an elected official clearly shows that.

He has consistently referred to Employment Insurance premiums and Canada Pension Plan (CPP) contributions as “taxes” and vocally opposed increases to both. And yet, he is now pretending to be on the side of workers. Never mind that he himself will benefit from a very good public pension plan above and beyond the CPP. And he doesn't believe workers should have the right to organize and have the benefit of union representation, never mind the right to negotiate contracts with good wages, benefits, and working conditions.

The conservatives are desperate to rehabilitate their leader's image, to hoodwink workers into supporting him. And they are pulling out all the stops, including playing regional politics with a blatant appeal to win more seats in Québec. I know that Québécois workers – and workers across Canada – will reject the ultra conservative agenda they are peddling.

## **National Convention**

I am look forward to seeing members from across the country at our National Convention in beautiful and historic Québec City in October, where we will celebrate 60 years as a union.

CUPE was formed in 1963 when two unions, the National Union of Public Employees and the National Union of Public Service Employees, merged to form the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Sixty years ago, our union had fewer than 70,000 members. Today we represent well over 700,000 workers!

Our union has grown because workers, seeking the power and protection of a union, continue to choose CUPE – and I know that is because of the hard work, sincere commitment, and relentless solidarity of our leaders, activists, and staff.

Delegates to our thirty-first national convention will receive reports, debate resolutions and constitutional amendments, hear speeches from our greatest allies, and of course, have an opportunity to elect our union's leaders.

I very much look forward to seeing many of you at our national convention, our first in-person opportunity in four years, where we will set our priorities for the next two years and beyond!

### **Collective Bargaining/Strikes/Lockouts**

PROVINCE	LOCAL	EMPLOYER	#OF MEMBERS	STRIKE BEGAN	DURATION
Québec	5454	Société Québécoise du Cannabis	300	May 17, 2022	Ongoing
Québec	2614	Société des arrimeurs de Québec (SAQ)	81	Lockout September 15, 2022	Ongoing
Ontario	905	Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury	35	July 21, 2023	Ongoing
Ontario	71	Town of Cochrane	67	July 31, 2023	Ongoing
Saskatchewan	882	City of Prince Albert	160	August 10, 2023	Ongoing
New Brunswick	486	City of Saint John	140	September 12, 2023	Ongoing
Québec	301	City of Westmount	300	March 14, 2023	147 days
British Columbia	561	First Transit	213	February 27, 2023	124 days
Québec	2929	Société Québécoise des infrastructures	500	April 19, 2023	92 days
Nova Scotia	5047	Halifax Regional Education Authority	1800	May 18, 2023	28 days

Ontario	2577	Family Children Services of Lanark County	110	July 12, 2023	22 days
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### **CUPE 5454**

May 17, 2023, marked one year since CUPE 5454 members hit the picket line.

Wages are the main issue for these Société Québécoise du Cannabis (SQDC) workers, who are demanding salaries and benefits similar to those working in comparable state corporations, including the Québec Liquor Corporation (SAQ).

These SQDC workers earn \$17/hour upon hiring and the majority hold part-time or casual positions with little job security, subjecting them to precarity. Yet, they are responsible for informing and educating consumers on how to minimize the impact of cannabis on their health, which is the official mandate of the SQDC. They would like their remuneration to reflect this.

Negotiations are at a standstill. In December, the union presented an offer from the employer to the membership. Members in 26 units voted 94% to reject the offer. The remaining 17 units voted unanimously against it.

### **CUPE 2614**

On September 15, 2022, the Société des arrimeurs de Québec locked out 81 longshore workers, who, at the time, were negotiating clauses to protect work/life balance. The employer maintains its request to have employees work 12-hour shifts, but our members do not want these types of schedules. Like everywhere else, the Port of Québec struggles with staffing shortages and the employer is determined to place the weight of this burden on the stevedores.

CUPE 2614 members are concerned about health and safety within their workplace and are speaking out about dangerous conditions on the wharves and the inaction on the part of port authorities and the federal government to fix them. The wharves have deteriorated due to a lack of investment in infrastructure. They have been neglected in federal budgets for the past few years, and members want this serious issue addressed to ensure that every worker gets home safely at the end of their shift.

## **CUPE 905**

Members of CUPE 905, workers of Bradford West Gwillimbury Library, commenced strike action on July 21, 2023, for a fair first contract. The predominantly female bargaining unit is asking for a small step forward by their employer towards closing the massive gender pay gap that exists with other town employees and increases to wages that keep up with the ever-increasing cost-of-living.

## **CUPE 71**

Members of CUPE 71 working at the Town of Cochrane in Northern Ontario commenced strike action on July 31. With skyrocketing inflation, these striking members are demanding a fair wage increase to address the soaring cost-of-living. Members remain steadfast and are calling on the Mayor and Council to return to the table to bargain a fair contract.

## **CUPE 882**

Members of CUPE 882 working at the City of Prince Albert in Saskatchewan began job action on August 10, 2023, after weeks of their employer refusing to negotiate.

Wage enhancements are a priority for CUPE 882, given the affordability crisis facing working families in their community. Mayor and Council saw their own pay increase by more than 20% over several years, which is double what other city workers received during the same period. Picket lines remain strong, despite the employer's refusal to bargain.

## **CUPE 486**

Approximately 140 workers at the City of Saint John, New Brunswick, erected picket lines on September 12, 2023. Negotiations began in June 2022 for their contract that expired in December 2021, but the parties reached an impasse in August 2023.

CUPE 486 members are holding out for higher wages to keep up with the escalating cost of living. The local represents a wide range of municipal workers in administration, customer support, court services, finance, recreation, and bylaw enforcement, as well as dispatchers in emergency services.

## **CUPE 301**

CUPE 301's collective agreement with the City of Westmount expired on December 31, 2019. In November 2022, members voted in favour of job action.

On March 14, 2023, one month after waging a 48-hour strike, CUPE 301 members struck for another three days, before adding more rotating job action. Negotiations had reached an impasse over work schedules and wages, given historic inflation and the rising. A general strike was called on June 22, 2023, after years of negotiations failed to produce a settlement.

CUPE 301's resolve netted a collective agreement that spans 7 years, from 2019 to 2026, with wage increases of 24% to 29%, including an adjustment based on Consumer Price Index (CPI). A substantial increase to the employer's contribution to the group insurance plan was among other gains.

## **CUPE 561**

More than 200 transit drivers in the Fraser Valley, members of CUPE 561 began job action on February 2, 2023, by refusing to collect transit fares. Pressure tactics were escalated with a full withdrawal of service, excluding HandyDART services, in February, and March.

When further attempts at negotiations broke down, they began a full-scale strike on March 20, 2023. The workers were seeking wages comparable to transit workers in neighbouring communities, improvements to working conditions, and access to a pension plan.

First Transit, a U.S.-based, for-profit company, is contracted by BC Transit to provide services to the communities of Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission, Agassiz, Harrison, and Hope. HandyDART operated at essential services levels only during the strike.

With the assistance of mediator Vince Ready, CUPE 561 achieved a settlement that narrowed the wage gap with other transit workers in the region, along with the introduction of a pension plan that comes into effect in spring 2024.

## **CUPE 2929**

CUPE 2929, representing more than 500 workers at the Syndicat des employé(e)s de la Société Québécoise des infrastructures (SQI) across the province, announced a 48-hour strike on April 19 and 20, 2023. Their collective agreement expired on March 31, 2020. Negotiations had been progressing, yet despite several meetings between the parties, discussions hadn't resulted in an agreement.

These workers are responsible for supporting public organizations in the management of their public infrastructure projects by ensuring the planning, execution, and monitoring of projects, and they also support ministries and other organizations by providing them with construction, operation, and property management services. After a series of rotating strikes, and three full days on the line, CUPE 2929 finally reached a concession-free settlement with the employer. Bargaining gains included a flat rate increase for the first two years of the agreement and more flexible hours.

### **CUPE 5047**

On April 19, 2023, the Nova Scotia government, and the Nova Scotia School Board Council of Unions (NSSBCU), had reached a tentative deal. The NSSBCU represents 5,400 educational support workers, who were in a legal strike position on April 21. On May 10, 2023, members of CUPE 5047, representing Halifax-area school support staff, voted against accepting the tentative agreement and walked off the job.

While these striking workers confronted a hostile government and employer, their struggle for wage increases and improved working conditions resonated powerfully with workers across the province. Members of CUPE 5047 include early childhood educators, library specialists, educational assistants and assistive technology support workers who assist students with special needs. After a 27-day strike, these vital workers held out and reached a better deal than had been previously offered and rejected by the membership in May.

### **CUPE 2577**

CUPE 2577 members who work as child protection workers at Family and Children Services of Lanark, Leeds and Grenville took to the picket line on July 12. After striking for 20 days, they were able to secure a contract that addressed workload issues and improved wages, among other gains.

### **Collective Bargaining**

On August 3, 2023, the union representing white and blue-collar employees at the Municipality of Lacolle, located south of Montreal, signed a new contract. The new collective agreement is for a period of six and a half years and provides for overall salary increases of 22.75% as well as a bonus of \$3 an hour for certain day labourer positions and \$2.80 an hour for the inspector position. Other gains include the addition of a sick day, paid time off if overtime worked ends after 1 a.m., and the addition of a paid day off between December 24 and January 2.

An arbitration board has awarded hospital staff represented by the Ontario Coalition of Hospital Unions (OCHU) an additional 3.75% retroactive to September 29, 2021, and an additional 2.5% retroactive to September 29, 2022. With inflation razing, this is an important improvement for OCHU members. These wage increases are in addition to increases of 1% for both years which were awarded by an arbitration board in 2022. This award brings wage increases for 2021-2023 to 8.2% for hospital workers.

In addition, Registered Practical Nurses' salaries are up \$2 an hour. The award also made small improvements to shift and weekend premiums, secured mental health benefits of up to \$800 per year and big gains in health & safety.

The arbitration board made its award under Bill 124, which limited wage and other compensation increases to no more than 1% a year. In November, a court struck down Bill 124 as unconstitutional. OCHU returned to bargaining in March and arbitrated compensation issues in May. The Ontario government is appealing the court decision on Bill 124. The appeal was heard in June with a decision expected in September.

CUPE 7000 members at SkyTrain have ratified a tentative agreement, reached in June with BC Rapid Transit Company. The five-year contract, which runs from September 1, 2023 until August 31, 2028, includes general wage increases of 6.75%, 2% to 3% (depending on CPI average), and 2.5% for the remaining three years.

As well as substantial premium increases over the course of the contract, the new deal also includes improvements to health benefits and the sick leave plan, introduction of contracting-in language, and improvements to working conditions including limits to forced overtime provisions. The agreement also includes the introduction of more inclusive language and several provisions to address cultural practices for Indigenous workers.

Members of CUPE 2979 at the District of Tumble Ridge in British Columbia ratified a new collective agreement in August with significant wage gains of 28.5% over five years (including 18 months of retroactive pay) and improved language on union representation, harassment and domestic violence leave enhancements, as well as gains to sick leave benefits and weekend premiums for casual and temporary workers.

CUPE members working for Extendicare's for-profit long-term care and retirement homes in Ontario had their outstanding bargaining issues proceed to interest arbitration for determination by an arbitration board. It has been a long-standing practice that arbitration boards follow the bargaining patterns of another union in this sector and have not swayed from pattern bargaining over the years. CUPE was successful in breaking this long held practice. In years where the wages were set at 1.5% and 3% through pattern setting awards, CUPE achieved 3.5% each year for its membership along with other collective agreement enhancements.



## **Regional Updates**

### **Maritimes Region**

#### **New Brunswick**

In mid-August, I joined members of the New Brunswick Nursing Home Council of Unions (NBCNHU) for a rally in Moncton. Folks from CUPE New Brunswick, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, and General Vice-President for the Atlantic and Maritimes, Sherry Hillier, were there to march to the Minister of Finance's office. Long-term care workers, whose workplaces were some of the hardest hit during the pandemic, were marching to demand fair wages and better provisions for recruitment in the sector. Their remuneration isn't reflective of the work they do, day in and day out, and they're putting Premier Higgs on notice that they won't stand for it. The 51 locals that form the Council are currently in bargaining and the province refuses to consider wage increases that cover the cost of inflation. The NBCNHU launched a campaign "We are worth it" to demand \$13 over three years.

After the rally, we spent time in Moncton with local residents for a barbecue in Centennial Park. Leaders fired up the grills to serve food and snacks as we celebrated the hard work our members do across the province. As we saw during the historic strike of 2021, New Brunswickers support CUPE members and the vital services they provide in their communities, and I was pleased to be a part of this event that saw residents and members get together.

CUPE 2745 was successful in a legal battle to obtain retroactive pay equity adjustments for a number of casual employees. The grievance filed on behalf of education support workers was upheld and the province was ordered to pay the adjustments from April 2012 until the date employment ceased. The award was challenged in the courts and the Court of Appeal finally decided the matter in favour of the union. It's shameful that we had to fight court for over a decade for the respect of such a fundamental right as pay equity.

CUPE 3179 and CUPE 4469 representing members at Centre Évolution Jeunesse and Youth First Miramichi both signed collective agreements until 2026 that provide wage improvements that amount to \$8.50 by the end of 2025.

## **Prince Edward Island**

CUPE PEI is expressing their concern about a recent Health PEI announcement that outlines daily room rate increases in public long-term care homes. The maximum rates will be rising by almost 15%, to match the higher private sector rates. This significant rise raises worries among workers and residents on PEI, who see this as a potential move towards privatization in the sector. CUPE is advocating for a true universal and publicly-funded and delivered long-term care system in the province. Raising rates places unfair financial barriers for those who are already facing affordability constraints. Health care access shouldn't be based on what you can afford, and CUPE PEI is calling on the King government to bring all private long-term and health care into the public sector.

Candace and I joined CUPE members on the Island for Acadian Day in August. It was a sea of pink as provincial leaders and local activists from the Atlantic and Maritime regions came together in Charlottetown to celebrate at the event hosted by CUPE PEI, donning CUPE colours. We were treated with top-level hospitality, in usual PEI fashion, as we enjoyed the wonderful family-friendly event.

CUPE 3324 representing paramedics in PEI reached an agreement that brought their wages in parity with New Brunswick paramedics. This amounts to increases at the final step of between 26% and 29% over three years. Congratulations to CUPE 3324 on this achievement!

## **Atlantic Region**

### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

Members of CUPE 1615 at Memorial University have ratified a new four-year collective agreement. CUPE 1615 represents more than 700 administrative, instructional, technical, and technical support employees at the St. John's, Corner Brook, and Labrador campuses of Memorial University.

The Memorial University of Newfoundland Students' Union and members of CUPE 4554 ratified a new four-year agreement in July. The agreement includes language improvements and better pay and benefits for its members. A new fertility treatment clause provides time off and financial support for employees seeking treatment. This will be significant for those afflicted with infertility, given the current lack of fertility services in the province.

An expanded gender transition policy streamlines the process of amending individuals' identity documents, supports safety and privacy in transition, and provides financial supports for transitioning workers. Improvements were also made to mental health leave provisions and statutory holiday substitution clauses. Members were also successful in bargaining a cost-of-living adjustment in addition to the 4% salary increase for each of the four years of the agreement.

This summer saw the largest Pride events ever in the region, with CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador leading the way as allies for 2SLGBTQI+ equity rights. The energy was electric at events across the province that drew larger crowds than ever before. Our members showed that they won't stand for hate and discrimination and they proudly took to the streets in all colours of the rainbow.

CUPE leaders and activists celebrated solidarity in the movement at Labour Day events in St. John's and Corner Brook. More than 600 attended the festivities in Corner Brook, where our members showed union pride as they chatted with community members, handed out swag, and waved their flags as they marched.

## **Nova Scotia**

Residents of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBMR), along with CUPE 759 both have cause for concern as the municipal government secretly began accepting submissions from private companies for the city's garbage collection. CUPE 759, who currently handles the public service in the region wasn't notified of the plans to privatize.

When councillor Cyril MacDonald was interrogated about these secret plans, he stated that the CBRM was simply following a trend of municipalities contracting out waste collection to cut costs. CUPE members know that privatizing services only leads to higher costs for lower quality services. Both Paradise and Conception Bay in Newfoundland and Labrador are prime examples of this, as they both returned to public models and are now saving \$1,000,000 and \$230,000 respectively. Weeks later, amid a loud protest, where CUPE members were blasting airhorns and protesting the potential contracting-out, MacDonald walked back the claim and stated that he may have "misspoke" or there may have been some "confusion" about his statement. For now, it seems that waste removal will remain status quo.

CUPE was thrilled to welcome 325 teaching assistants (TAs) from Saint Mary's University to CUPE 3912. These TAs voted unanimously to join Canada's largest union, in a testament of what kind of accomplishment can be achieved when workers stand together. In what started out as an ambitious chart between three TAs last November, to 100% voting in support of unionization, these organizing efforts are proof that workers across the country realize the benefits of joining the labour movement. We wish them much success as they now shift their focus towards negotiating their first collective agreement.

Child care workers in Nova Scotia are making sure their voices are heard as the Houston government reviews different retirement and benefit options for early childhood education in the province. While the provincial government looks towards group RRSPs as a pension benefit, CUPE's report, submitted on behalf of childcare centre employees in the province, shows an overwhelming consensus that workers want a defined benefit pension plan. Unionized and non-unionized workers alike in this field, who have been fighting for a pension for years, want the reliability of a stable retirement income. These workers are already paid less than their worth for the important work they do for children during formative years. The government should recognize that they deserve a wage that can support them during retirement.

Administrative and support staff at Cape Breton University, represented by CUPE 3131, achieved a three-year agreement after having taken a strike vote. The deal includes a new wage grid with a job evaluation plan, increases in sick days and vacation leave, and language against contracting-out. Wage increases will amount to over 8% for the first year, with the economic increase and adjusted wage bands factored in.

## **Québec**

I was pleased to join our members on picket lines in Quebec this summer. I was able to support the locked-out longshoremen at the Port of Quebec. They are facing a hostile employer who is taking advantage of the absence of federal anti-scab legislation to use replacement workers. The lockout has been going on for a year, and the members of Local 2614 are holding firm, while incidents are multiplying at the Port, raising fears for the safety of facilities and people. A rally in support of the longshoremen was held in mid-September, and we all hope that the employer will get serious at the bargaining table in the coming weeks.

In July, I also met with CUPE 301 members on strike against the City of Westmount. The strike finally ended with a mutually satisfactory settlement. The agreement had expired in 2019, and among the many gains were wage increases of 24% to 29%, including a CPI adjustment, over 7 years, until 2026. The employer will also contribute to group insurance premiums will be adjusted and a pilot project for a 4-day week will be implemented.

In the health and education sectors, provincial councils are negotiating as a united front and have planned a major mobilization for the fall. The CAQ government is ignoring union demands for lasting solutions to work organization problems and severe labour shortages.

Locals representing our members at Hydro-Québec are preparing a campaign to counter privatization efforts affecting the crown corporation. With a new CEO driven by profit imperatives rather than the promotion of public services, we fear that disastrous, short-sighted decisions will be taken to generate short-term capital. This would be a tremendous loss to Quebec's heritage.

CUPE 1575, representing staff at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, won a grievance calling for recognition of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation as a statutory holiday.

## **Ontario**

Residents of Ontario's largest city had reason to celebrate on May 26, when Torontonians elected their 66<sup>th</sup> mayor in the city's by-election. Ready to lead Toronto with her progressive vision, Olivia Chow told those in attendance during her victory speech that *"If you ever doubted what's possible together, if you ever questioned your faith in a better future and what we can do with each other, for each other, tonight is your answer."* We look forward to seeing the positive change that she will effect.

Unfortunately, the government in the province isn't known for having progressive views. Doug Ford's government had made headlines for some time with its plans to develop the protected Greenbelt. Following the investigation of his conduct surrounding how Greenbelt parcels were selected by Ontario's Integrity Commissioner, Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark resigned. The former Minister's shady development selection process would have lined wealthy investors' pockets. This is just another instance that sheds light on the Ontario PC's ploy to help the rich get richer. Climate crises are more apparent than ever before, and we can't let this right-wing government sell off protected greenspace to their benefit their greedy acquaintances.

It should come as no surprise that public service workers across Ontario have to go to battle for wages and benefits that reflect the important work they do. CUPE members in various sectors are arming their bargaining committees with strong strike mandates to let their employers know that they won't be bullied by their austerity agendas. In early September, I joined CUPE 71's more than 60 municipal workers on the picket line. Their employer, the Town of Cochrane, refused to offer wages that address sky-rocketing inflation and affordability challenges these workers face, and forced a vote on what they called their "final offer". Mayor and council thought they may find cracks in their solidarity, but boots on pavement, and CUPE signs waving in the streets showed the employer that their solidarity was impermeable.

After joining workers in Cochrane, I made my way to Northwestern Ontario to meet with local leaders, activists, and staff in Kenora for CUPE member appreciation BBQ. Special thanks to OCHU Area 7 for sponsoring the event, where we discussed the challenges our members in the region face at bargaining tables and in the workplace.

Ontario paramedics the unions behind have been fighting hard for a decade to have fair access to early retirement. These first responders saw a significant victory in their fight for pension fairness. The Ontario Municipal Employees' Retirement System (OMERS), which is a defined pension plan for paramedics in the province, finally amended its rules to provide these workers with the option to retire at age 60 without suffering unfair penalty reductions.

Paramedics, like police officers and firefighters, work in designated public safety occupations, which are recognized under federal law. This designation makes them eligible under federal tax rules for earlier retirements if their respective plans allow it. The recent change under the OMERS' plan will lessen the financial burden of cuts to the pensions of workers whose jobs are physically and psychologically taxing, and crucial to patients across Ontario. Before the change becomes accessible, paramedics' unions (CUPE and OPSEU) will need to negotiate final details for the provisions at local bargaining tables.

## **Manitoba**

Manitobans go to the polls in a provincial election on October 3. The anti-worker Progressive Conservatives are seeking a third term, and the labour movement is working hard to keep that from happening. From legislation that froze public sector wages, to forced representation votes that created chaos in the health care sector, to building new schools under a public-private partnership, this government has attacked workers, and public services, at every opportunity over their seven years in power. We cannot afford another four years of this government.

This election is critical for our members in Manitoba, but its also important for our country. Having a second NDP premier and government in the country will help change the federal political landscape and add another progressive voice to federal-provincial tables like the Council of the Federation.

Which is why CUPE leaders and activists are mobilizing support for Wab Kinew and the NDP. I had the opportunity to spend a couple of days in Winnipeg in September and joined dozens of volunteers from CUPE and other unions for a night of door-knocking in support of NDP candidates. I know our members will keep up the pressure right through to election day, and I wish them good luck!

While I was in Winnipeg, I joined CUPE Manitoba President Gina McKay, members of CUPE 1475, and other CUPE folks for an information rally at Oakview Place, one of eight Extencicare care homes where CUPE members are seeking a new collective agreement.

Extencicare Inc., a private, for-profit care home operator, is refusing to negotiate a fair wage increase and address recruitment and retention issues by offering workers enough scheduled hours of work to be able to pay their bills and support their families. While our members struggle to make ends meet, the company is focused on ensuring there is enough money to distribute profits to shareholders.

Our members at these eight homes deserve a fair deal that closes the gap with CUPE members doing the same work at publicly-run long term care facilities, who earn more and have better benefits and a defined-benefit pension plan.

## **Saskatchewan**

Our members in Manitoba are not the only ones engaging in political action. This summer, CUPE members in Saskatchewan supported NDP candidates in three by-elections. When the votes were counted on August 10, the NDP candidates were elected in two of the three seats – Regina Coronation Park and Regina Walsh Acres – adding two members to the official opposition caucus. Not only did the NDP win back these two seats from the Sask Party with decisive margins, but they grew their share of the vote in the third race.

This result bodes well for the general election expected in 2024.

CUPE had another win in Saskatchewan this summer when 67 workers at Phoenix Residential Society in Regina voted to join our union. These workers provide psychosocial support to persons in Regina with psychiatric disorders, concurrent disorders (psychiatric and substance abuse) and persons with acquired brain injury (ABI) and other cognitive disabilities. They also provide immediate access to housing and intensive residential support services for individuals who are chronically unhoused.

We are happy to welcome these new members and are turning our attention to sitting down with the employer and negotiating a first collective agreement.

Meanwhile, the Sask Party government followed the lead of their counterparts in New Brunswick and implemented a new policy aimed at trans and non-binary students. At the end of August, the education minister announced that schools must notify parents when any student under the age of 16 uses a different name or pronoun at school.

CUPE Saskatchewan was quick to condemn the new policy and call on the government to rescind it, pointing out that schools are sometimes the only safe space for gender non-conforming kids to celebrate their identity.

These government policies are part of a growing effort by the right to spread disinformation about trans people and feeds the rise of anti-2SLGBTQI+ hate. CUPE will not stay silent when governments and employers attack and undermine human rights.

## **Alberta**

Following the re-election of a United Conservative Party (UCP) government in the spring, we have been assessing the threats to our members and our union. Not surprisingly, there's not a lot of good news to be had.

We are in the early stages of a Charter challenge to Bill 32, which imposed an American-style approach to union dues, giving members an option to opt out of the portion of the established dues rate spent on “non-core” activities. We are watching for potential changes to the legislation or associated regulations, which will undoubtedly be even worse for unions in Alberta. Barring a successful court challenge, it seems we are stuck with Bill 32 until the next election.

We are also preparing a Charter challenge to Bill 81, which amended the *Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act* to limit the ability of unions to participate in issues-based political advertising and effectively prohibits us from engaging in election advertising.

The minimum wage in Alberta has not been increased in four years, and there has been no signal that the government intends to take any action on that front, despite the cost-of-living crisis facing workers across the province.

And despite clear recognition of a labour shortage, the government is choosing to focus on things like graduate tax credits, fast-tracking for credentials, and out-of-province recruitment programs instead of adjusting the wage-mandates they have imposed through the *Public Sector Employers Act* which include multiple years of zeroes and remain stubbornly well below inflation. This makes coordinated bargaining in the sectors facing these wage mandates, like our education locals who are fighting together for fair collective agreements, even more important.

The provincial government has also signaled plans to push for more privatization generally, but more specifically in health care and education. Despite that, there was a surprising bit of good news in August when the government reversed their own decision from December 2022 to privatize the province’s community lab services. In less than nine months that decision had proven to be more expensive and incredibly ineffective. The services that had been transferred from the public sector to private operator DynaLIFE, will be brought back into the public Alberta Health Service.

### **British Columbia**

On the heels of an application to represent 3,200 graduate research assistants at the University of British Columbia (UBC) last spring, in July CUPE 2278 welcomed more than 800 members who work as graduate academic assistants to our union. We are working to support these new members, while we await a labour board decision on the earlier application for graduate research assistants.

We are also reaching out to hundreds of other academic workers employed as research assistants at the University of Victoria and offering them a chance to join CUPE, the clear union of choice for post-secondary workers in BC.



CUPE is also the union of choice for library workers in the province, and a new agreement reached by CUPE 2403 for members at the public library in Dawson Creek shows why. In a sector where part-time work is far more prevalent than full-time jobs, the local was able to secure benefit improvements for their members working part-time, in addition to a wage increase of 16%the four years of the collective agreement which will help our members keep up with inflation.

We continue to make progress at municipal tables across BC, too, due in large part to our strategy of coordinated bargaining at a regional level. This requires patience and cooperation on the part of our local leaders, and I am impressed with their commitment to achieve the best deals possible for all members in the sector by working together, even if it means prolonging bargaining or letting another local take the lead. Our coordination is leading to general wage increases between 3% and 6.5% per year, which will go a long way to addressing the affordability crisis our members are facing across the province.

Although in some ways it seems like the last provincial election just happened, the next election is just over a year away and we are ramping up our political engagement and activism with locals and members across BC. While memories of the 16 years of BC Liberal rule may be fading, their decisions and actions continue to affect our members, the services they provide, and the public services we all rely on. That legacy, along with the anti-union and anti-worker actions of right-wing governments in other provinces, will give us the motivation we need to mobilize our members and activists as we prepare to help re-elect the BCNDP next fall.

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

HEU members at seven long-term care homes run by Good Samaritan Canada in BC gave their union a strong mandate, and sent a firm message to their employer, with a 98% strike vote this summer.

The employer is refusing to offer a fair wage to these workers, even though the last negotiated increase was in 2019. And Good Samaritan has tabled language which would give them the right to contract out work currently done by our members. Given the ongoing staffing crisis in the sector, and the affordability crisis made worse by rampant inflation, our members expect and deserve more – including respect, job security, and a fair wage.

We know our members, who work as care aides, dietary workers, housekeepers, registered nurses, and activity aides, want to stay at work and care for their residents. Hopefully the employer will hear their message and come back to the bargaining table with a new approach and a fair offer.

## **Airlines**

CUPE's flight attendants (FAs) are getting vocal about the unfair conditions they face at work. They have had it with being forced to work for free. The Airline Division's "Unpaid Work Won't Fly" campaign has highlighted the brutal reality that our workers in this sector face. An average of 35 hours per month go without remuneration. That's almost a full week of work performed without pay. Air Canada's recent quarterly profit of \$838 million is proof that they are definitely capable of paying their flight attendants for each and every hour they work, and CUPE won't back down until FAs get just that.

An incident at Montreal-Trudeau International Airport in July further illustrated the risks these workers face at work, when they safely evacuated passengers due to a tarmac fire. A vehicle below an aircraft took fire, and our members responded promptly to ensure the safety of those onboard. Work is work, and whether these workers are doing their job in the air or on the ground, they should be paid for it.

While wildfires ravaged the west coast, flight attendants in places like Yellowknife, Kelowna, and Kamloops, were aboard evacuation flights helping residents to safety, while some of their own homes were at risk of being engulfed by flames. The devotion these members have to their work and the people they assist is incredible and I applaud their dedication.

Cabin crew at Porter Airlines could soon join the CUPE Airlines Division family. CUPE already represents ten other airlines, with a combined 18,500 proud flight attendants represented by Canada's largest union. We know how to address the issues that plague the industry, such as wages, scheduling, crew rest, duty days, and more. Porter employees could only benefit from having their voices amplified and better contract provisions, if their unionization efforts are realized.

## **Organizing**

For the reporting period of July 1 to August 31, 2023, CUPE welcomed 2,726 new members in 19 bargaining units, including 1,250 in post-secondary, 253 in emergency and security services, 650 in education, 515 in health and 58 new members in other sectors.

There are currently 152 active campaigns underway that, if successful, could bring 42,453 new members to our union.

In the Maritimes, there are currently 16 active campaigns which could bring 1,243 workers into CUPE, including 300 security guards at Paladin Security and 320 student employees at Mount Allison University.

Our Atlantic region currently has two active campaigns in health and post-secondary education, which would see 455 new members join our union.

Quebec is working towards significant membership growth, with 16 active campaigns across various sectors that, if successful, would see 7,434 new members join our CUPE family.

The Ontario region continues its organizing efforts, with 40 active campaigns in various sectors that have the potential to add 15,287 new members to our union, including 3,500 at the University of Waterloo and more than 6,582 members in health care.

Manitoba has 17 active campaigns, which could see 3,212 new members join our union, including 2,373 workers in education.

Saskatchewan has 12 ongoing campaigns in various sectors, where we hope to bring 1,038 new workers into CUPE, 500 of which are Saskatchewan Health Authority workers.

The Alberta region was busy with 13 active organizing campaigns that could bring in 2,337 new members into CUPE. Four of the ongoing campaigns are in the education/post-secondary sectors where CUPE is hoping to add 1,158 members.

In British Columbia, there are 26 active campaigns across various sectors including social services, recreation, culture and entertainment, and municipal, with the potential of welcoming 12,175 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**

Terry Egan  
Évêrard “Bozo” Bourgoïn  
Leo Cheverie

Former CUPE Manitoba President  
CUPE 886 – NB  
CUPE 1870 – PEI

### **Retired Staff**

Raymond Léger

Research Representative  
Maritimes Regional Office

Kenneth McClelland

National Representative  
Windsor Area Office

Royle Harris

National Representative  
Alberta Regional Office

In solidarity,

Handwritten signature of Mark Hancock in black ink, consisting of stylized initials 'MH' followed by a full name 'MARK HANCOCK'.

MARK HANCOCK  
National President

:sg/ceu