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## **NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT SEPTEMBER 2023 – DECEMBER 2023**

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Sisters, Brothers and Friends:

In my September report, I wrote about the long hot summer we had experienced, both weather and climate-related and at bargaining tables across the country. The season has changed, but hard bargaining continues in every region, as our locals fight hard, negotiate smart and win solid collective agreements from coast to coast to coast.

Many CUPE locals have been walking picket lines for weeks on end to achieve fair deals. From Saskatchewan through Ontario to Quebec and New Brunswick, six locals signed agreements after more than four weeks on strike. The longest of these disputes saw members of CUPE 5454 at Société Québécoise du Cannabis (SQDC) on strike for 540 days.

We still have several serious labour disputes outstanding, including our members at the Port of Quebec – these members of CUPE 2614 have been locked out since September 15, 2022.

Which is why it is so important that we finally achieve federal anti-scab legislation. In September we held a rally on Parliament Hill to push for this legislation, and for the first time were joined by not only members of Parliament from the NDP, but also members of the Bloc Québécois and the Minister of Labour. The legislation has now been introduced, and while there are some concerns about the timelines associated with it, Bill C-58 marks a significant step forward in our fight for the right to take meaningful strike action. We will continue to push the government to adopt the bill as soon as possible.

Our advocacy for workers' rights and public services matter beyond our borders, too. In mid-October, it was an honour to lead Canada's delegation to the World Congress of Public Services International (PSI), a global union federation whose membership includes public sector workers from all corners of the world. CUPE's delegation included NEB members Sherry Hillier, Fred Hahn, and Ernest Green. Congress delegates adopted a bold program of action for the next five years, elected new leadership, and congratulated outgoing General Secretary, Rosa Pavanelli on her well-deserved retirement.

**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

3,000 CUPE leaders, activists and staff gathered in the beautiful and historic city of Quebec City for our national convention in October, where we celebrated our 60th anniversary as a union. It really was good to be able to gather together again, as leaders of our union from all corners of the country, for convention. Front and centre in our deliberations were the challenges we face, and the gains we are making, at bargaining tables across the country. Delegates debated and adopted resolutions and constitutional amendments, received reports from our national committees, the Safe Union Spaces Working Group, and on the work we have accomplished arising from our Anti-Racism Strategy. Convention also provided input into and adopted our Strategic Directions, a document which lays out the priorities of our union at all levels for the next two years.

We also elected a National Executive Board and two National Trustees to oversee our union for the next two years. I thank you for your trust in me to continue as your National President, and look forward to working with our National Secretary-Treasurer, Candace Rennick and the rest of our NEB on the work ahead.

As 2023 comes to a close, I am truly optimistic about our future as a progressive, strong and caring union. I know we have the collective strength and drive to continue the fight for our members, for our communities, big and small, and for our planet. Our kids, grandkids, and future generations deserve the best possible future, and that means strong public services, vibrant communities, and a healthy, sustainable planet. It also means good-paying jobs with family supporting benefits and retirement security for everyone.

As we look ahead, I know our union will continue to do our part to take on hate in all its forms, and I count on you all to do this work in your workplaces, in your locals, and in your communities. I know we will also work together to make this country the best possible places to live, work, and play.

As we head into the holidays, I believe this is an important opportunity for each of us to take stock of where we are and commit to work to make this a better world filled with hope and optimism.

And I want to recognize that most of our members will not get a true break over the holidays because they are working to keep everyone healthy and safe – thank you for everything you do!

I wish all of you the best of the season, in what ever way you celebrate it, of course, the absolute best for 2024!

### Collective Bargaining/Strikes/Lockouts

PROVINCE	LOCAL	EMPLOYER	# OF MEMBERS	STRIKE or LOCKOUT BEGAN	DURATION
Québec	2614	Société des arrimeurs de Québec (SAQ)	81	September 15, 2022	Ongoing
Ontario	1490	Town of Black River Matheson	14	October 15, 2023	Ongoing
Quebec	2815	Videotron	214	October 30, 2023	Ongoing
Quebec	4545	City of Laval	825	Intermittent strike action taken by Local 4545	Ongoing
Quebec	CPAS – Conseil provincial des affaires sociales (health sector)  CPSS – Conseil provincial du soutien scolaire  CPC – Conseil provincial des collèges (education sector)	Government of Quebec	Approx. 45,000 SCFP members	Intermittent strike action taken by Provincial Bargaining Councils.	Ongoing
Québec	5454	Société Québécoise du Cannabis	300	May 17, 2022	16 months
Saskatchewan	882	City of Prince Albert	160	August 10, 2023	123 days
Ontario	905	Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury	35	July 21, 2023	71 days
Ontario	71	Town of Cochrane	67	July 31, 2023	53 days

Ontario	53	Town of Whitby	300	October 14, 2023	32 days
New Brunswick	486	City of Saint John	140	September 12, 2023	29 days
Ontario	3314	Hastings Prince Edward Public Health	70	September 22, 2023	11 days
Ontario	136	Town of Oakville	267	November 2, 2023	8 days

### **CUPE 2614**

On September 15, 2022, more than 450 days ago, the Port of Quebec locked out 81 members of CUPE 2614. These longshore workers salute the federal government’s decision to table a bill to prohibit the use of replacement workers under federal jurisdiction everywhere in Canada, including in Quebec. Anti-scab legislation is more necessary than ever, and it can’t come soon enough for these workers who see the bill as a glimmer of hope.

CUPE 2614 and SCFP-Quebec believe the labour dispute would have been settled long ago if anti-scab legislation existed in the Canada Labor Code. The employer continues to employ replacement workers, which is illegal for businesses under provincial jurisdiction.

Members continue to demand that the employer engage and appear more frequently at the bargaining table. CUPE 2614 has several health and safety concerns within their workplace and are making their voices heard 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 1490**

Fourteen members of CUPE 1490 working at the Town of Black River Matheson were locked out of their workplace on October 15, 2023. These municipal workers in Northern Ontario are fighting off the employer’s concessions that include installing a two-tier wage grid, which the union insists is fundamentally divisive. Members of CUPE 1490 are standing strong in solidarity and are insisting their employer return to the bargaining table and negotiate a fair collective agreement.

## **CUPE 2815**

On October 10, 2023, members of CUPE 2815 working at Videotron in Gatineau, Quebec, overwhelmingly rejected their employer's subpar offer. Instead of returning to the table and negotiating a fair contract, their employer Videotron locked out the 214 workers, less than three weeks later.

CUPE 2815's members are standing strong, while their employer wants to outsource work and ship jobs overseas. These workers, who have been without a contract since August 2020, are adamant that jobs need to remain within the community – not contracted out.

The employer employs replacement workers, which would be illegal if this business was under provincial jurisdiction. Anti-scab legislation cannot come soon enough for these workers as well.

## **CUPE 4545**

Members of CUPE 4545 set up picket lines on November 7, 2023, in a 24-hour strike to let their employer at the City of Laval know that they were denouncing the close-mindedness, scorn, and lack of transparency of labour relations department representatives at the bargaining table. The breakdown in talks between the city and the union was months old. Despite the transparency and willingness to negotiate the union had been showing at the table, the employer was tabling ridiculous proposals and refusing to divulge its wage offer. On October 25, the City of Laval asked the Ministry of Labour to appoint a mediator to the negotiations.

## **Common Front Coalition**

**CPAS – Conseil provincial des affaires sociales**

**CPSS – Conseil provincial du soutien scolaire**

**CPC – Conseil provincial des collèges**

The Common Front coalition of Quebec's 420,000 public sector members which includes three CUPE Provincial Bargaining Councils, CPAS, CPSS and CPC, was on strike for three days in November. The unions announced they will resume strike action on December 8 unless a contract settlement is reached. The Common Front coalition formed by the CSQ, APTS, CSN, and FTQ represents workers in the health, social services, and education sectors in the province.

On September 23, 2023, more than 100,000 people took to the streets to support the Common Front and to raise awareness on the Quebec government's decision to give parliamentarians a 30% catch-up wage hike in addition to other annual increases, the province is offering 10.3% in salary increases over five years to all public sector workers, as well as a \$1,000 lump sum payment and another 3% in sectors deemed as "priorities" by the government.

Workers earning less than \$52,000 a year would also receive an additional 1% increase. Leaders of the Common Front have made it clear to the government that they want a real offer brought to the table or they are prepared to undertake a province-wide unlimited strike.

### **CUPE 5454**

CUPE 5454, employees of the Société Québécoise du Cannabis (SQDC) ratified a collective agreement on November 13, 2023. Members of CUPE 5454 had been on strike for over 540 days. Wages were the main issue with the union calling for salaries and benefits similar to those working in other comparable state corporations, including the Quebec Liquor Corp (SAQ).

### **CUPE 882**

CUPE 882 members, inside workers at the City of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, began job action on August 10, 2023, and commenced a full strike on September 11, 2023. Given the escalating cost of living, wage enhancements were a priority and these 160 members were holding out for a fair wage increase. Most recently, Mayor and Council had seen their wages increase by 20% over several years, double the increase received by other city workers during the same period. There was hope that the strike would end soon after CUPE 882 reached a tentative agreement with the employer on September 29. But as the members prepared to vote, the union learned of technological, structural, and organizational changes being made by the city.

In light of this, the local filed an unfair labour practice complaint with the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board and postponed the vote in the hopes the employer would return to the table.

When the employer refused to negotiate further, the members rejected the tentative agreement on October 17, sending a strong message that the city needed to return to bargaining with a better offer. Shortly thereafter, the mayor was caught on video hitting two striking members with his car at the City Hall picket line. A mediator was called in and assisted the parties to reach a tentative agreement, which the local ratified on November 30. In addition to a fair wage increase, the deal includes a lift to the wage rate for the lowest paid classifications, a pilot project for a compressed work schedule, improved extended health benefits, and access to the employee assistance program for casual employees. City Council ratified the agreement on December 11, with the mayor abstaining. Our members returned to work on December 12.

## **CUPE 905**

CUPE 905's library workers at the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury commenced strike action on July 21, 2023, for a fair first contract aiming to close the massive gender pay gap that exists with other town employees. They wanted wage increases that kept up with the rampant inflation. Their employer applied for first contract arbitration pursuant to section 43 of the *Labour Relations Act* on August 25, 2023.

On September 30, 2023, the Ontario Labour Relations Board issued their decision, directing CUPE 905 and their employer to first contract arbitration. Though the decision of the OLRB ended the 70+-day strike, CUPE 905 has undertaken a judicial review of the OLRB decision with a view of having it overturned.

## **CUPE 71**

Members of CUPE 71, working at the Town of Cochrane in Northern Ontario ratified a tentative agreement after holding the line for 54 days. The tentative agreement was reached on September 22, 2023. CUPE 71 members were standing up for a fair wage increase to address the ever-rising rate of inflation and were able to make wage gains after a long and tense strike against their employer.

## **CUPE 53**

Three hundred members of CUPE 53, the Town of Whitby began strike action on October 14, 2023, after talks broke down over several issues, including temporary work assignments and shift schedules where workers would be made available over a greater period of time, which could mean compressed work weeks, split and rotating shifts. Negotiations came to a halt when the employer would not move off their concessionary demands.

Members showed their solidarity and pushed back against the employer's concessions and were able to negotiate a settlement on November 15, 2023.

## **CUPE 486**

One hundred and forty inside workers represented by CUPE 486 working at the City of Saint John rejected their employers offer and commenced strike action on September 12, 2023, to achieve a fair wage increase.

On October 11, 2023, after 29 days on the picket line, CUPE 486 members reached a settlement with their employer in which they made significant wage gains and other enhancements to their collective agreement. The strike, which began on September 12, suspended garbage collection among other vital services in Saint John.

## **CUPE 3314**

Seventy public health workers at the Hastings Prince Edward Public Health commenced strike action on September 22, 2023, for wages that come closer to meeting the rising cost of living due. CUPE 3314 members are fighting to secure sufficient funding for public health that protects their communities from transmissible diseases and other health issues.

On October 3, after a 12-day strike, CUPE 3314 reached a settlement with their employer that resulted in wage and benefit enhancements.

## **CUPE 136**

The Town of Oakville declared an impasse at the bargaining table and walked away, leaving CUPE 136 and its members with no choice but to take to strike action to achieve a fair wage increase and remove concessions their employer had tabled. Two hundred and sixty- seven members of CUPE 136 commenced strike action on November 2, 2023.

On November 10, the local reached a tentative agreement, free of concessions, while achieving wage enhancements, and improvements to language and benefits. The agreement has been ratified by the membership.

## **Collective Bargaining**

Some 55,000 Ontario education workers will receive salary increases to compensate them for constrained wages under Bill 124, after the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) reached a deal with the province for a remedy for the wage cap law being struck down.

The 2019 law capped salary increases for public sector workers to 1% a year for three years. An Ontario court declared Bill 124 unconstitutional, ruling that it infringes on the workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

The OSBCU says the deal would retroactively compensate education workers with 0.75% increases for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. It would also include an amount between 1.5% and 3.25% for 2021-2022, which will be determined by an arbitrator.

Education workers will receive retroactive salary bumps as a result of its agreement with the province, wage rates in the 2022-2026 collective agreements will also be increased and wage hikes will be pensionable.

CUPE 50 members have ratified a new three-year collective agreement with the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BCSPCA).



The new agreement, reached earlier this month after three days of bargaining, is retroactive to January 2023 and expires at the end of 2025. Wage increases will range from 8 to 24% in year one, depending on classification, and 3% for both of the final two years.

The contract also includes the addition of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation as a statutory holiday, and improvements to benefit access for part-time temporary employees.

CUPE 50 represents employees of the BC SPCA working in the Capital Regional District at the Victoria Centre on Napier Lane, The Wild ARC, and in Prevention and Enforcement.

The three-year deal provides wage increases of 3% in 2022, 4.5% in 2023 and 4% in 2024. It also includes a one-time, 4.5% inflationary support payment applied on 2022 wages.

Other key improvements include full coverage of dental and extended health premiums and an increase to mental health paramedical coverage.

## **Regional Updates**

### **Maritimes Region**

#### **New Brunswick**

I had the opportunity to join CUPE 486 members on the picket line this fall, as they fought for a fair contract. These inside workers at the City of Saint John were steadfast in their resolve to hold out for a collective agreement that paid them what they are worth. The striking members leveraged their bargaining rights by disrupting service deliveries to let the employer know that they meant business. They reached an agreement early in October that saw wage increases totalling 15.85% over the course of the agreement, along with two one-time payments that will put extra cash in their pockets.

Premier Higgs is showing his true colours again, as he tries to force public sector workers into a new pension plan with Bill 17 – The *Pension Plan Sustainability Act*. The province is attempting to rush the bill through the legislature to become law, in what CUPE is stating is totally illegal, and contradictory to current collective agreements and a blatant attack on collective bargaining rights. The law would force CUPE education and nursing work workers into new shared-risk pension plans and break existing contracts.

As we have seen in the past, our members in New Brunswick aren't afraid to fight back and make noise. The speaker of the House attempted to unjustly remove them from the gallery as they watched parliamentary deliberations on the controversial bill, but they remained calm and asserted their right to observe legislative proceedings.

Higgs announced early in November that he would not call an early provincial election, despite conflict and instability within the PC caucus. Higgs has hired Alberta Premier Danielle's Smith's campaign manager, in hopes of bringing home a victory in 2024, but if he continues with his attempts to strip workers of their bargained rights, he will be facing significant hurdles if he hopes to be re-elected.

Unsurprisingly, CUPE 1190 had to file a complaint of bargaining in bad faith with the Labour Board. The complaint alleged that the Province of New Brunswick breached the Public Service Labour Relations Act by not ensuring that the members of its bargaining team had a clear mandate or decision-making authority by presenting imprecise and ill-defined proposals and by presenting a wage proposal that was designed to be rejected by the local. The Board ruled that the employer had violated the *Act* by failing to respond to requests for information, and by failing to disclose its monetary offer in a timely manner.

## **Prince Edward Island**

I joined Island leaders in Charlottetown on November 8 for an All Presidents' meeting. Local leaders gave reports about the various issues they face in their locals. The general consensus was that the understaffing across the island has led to ensuing workload issues. Our members who provide essential and meaningful service to communities across PEI are exhausted.

It was wonderful to see that despite the challenges these activists face to support their members, they remained energized and willing to take on the task of mobilizing members to deal with difficult employers. There is momentum to have employers address recruitment and retention issues so that workers can regain a semblance of work-life balance, because our members are fed up and ready to fight for change.

Some key points noted at the meeting were that arbitration awards are no longer meeting the needs of CUPE members, and that defending the right to strike is a top priority. There are unacceptable restrictions on the right to strike in PEI. CUPE is committed to using every tool at its disposal to defend the right to strike and free collective bargaining.

CUPE 804 members working at the City of Summerside reached a settlement during this reporting period that saw these municipal workers obtain wage gains of 8% in the first year, and 3% each for the remaining three years. It was a positive round of bargaining, and the membership is pleased with the outcome.

## **Atlantic Region**

### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

I'm pleased to offer a warm welcome to Newfoundland and Labrador's newest CUPE members. Staff at The Gathering Place are the newest members to join the CUPE family in the province as CUPE 5478. These 84 members provide services, meals, and overnight shelter for people in the community who struggle with daily living. The varied skills these workers bring come together to provide services to some of the community's most vulnerable people, who benefit from access to social workers, kitchen, administrative, and maintenance staff, dental assistants, guest empowerment staff, and more.

I made my way to beautiful St. John's to join leaders from Newfoundland and Labrador as they gathered for their first All Presidents' meeting. Newly elected and seasoned leaders alike came together to tackle common issues facing their locals, such as staffing shortages, recruitment and retention issues, and the constant threat of outsourcing and privatization. We spoke specifically about the housing crisis in the region that directly affects our frontline workers who deliver services to people in need, as well as municipal workers who are facing workplace health and safety issues related to encampments on municipal grounds.

Government needs to find solutions to the homelessness crisis and invest in public services to address mental health and addictions issues, so that the communities remain safe for all.

CUPE 1860 members who are maintenance workers at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation were shocked to hear that their work is being contracted out as a "solution" to the housing crisis, rather than having job vacancies filled, and paying workers overtime rates in order to have work completed. The employer has been reducing staff through attrition and leaving positions vacant, then letting subcontractors remove the inventory maintenance workers require to do their jobs. There is no denying the quality of the work performed by our members far exceeds that of these contractors, and the local is pleading with the employer to let them do their jobs. Not only for the good of the union and its members, but for that of the tenants who rely on an acceptable standard for housing.

Activists also discussed political action and campaigns, and how to make good use of funding that is available through the National Defence Fund.

Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in the province were able to reach a Memorandum of Understanding with the government to increase their wages. The agreement saw monetary increases of \$2.48-\$3.11 per hour, based on years of service. This is a step in the right direction to have retention issues addressed.

## **Nova Scotia**

Contracting out is an ongoing issue plaguing the municipal sector. The Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) has been rumoured to be exploring subcontracting for some time. CUPE 759 members fought back to defend the vital work they do for their community with a campaign called “#somethingstinks” to get the message out to the public. Frustration over the outsourcing, job postings and a lack of consultation from their employer led these members to launch a 2-day job action.

The Health Administrative Professionals bargaining unit of CUPE 8920 reached a tentative agreement. The five-year agreement includes a 20% increase for the lowest paid classifications (those making less than \$20 per hour) and an average of 15.5% for classifications currently earning more than \$20 per hour.

Early childhood educators in the province participated in a day of action to urge the government to make good on its commitment to add 9,500 new child care spaces by 2026. CUPE Nova Scotia rallied child care locals across Nova Scotia to take a stand to let the government know that focus needs to be placed on incentivizing the educator positions with better wages, pensions, and benefits. The quality of care these workers provide our young is immeasurable and CUPE members in the field won't stand for being paid wages that don't reflect the vital work they do.

## **Quebec**

The mobilization of the Common Front in Quebec is unprecedented. At the end of September, I participated in the monster demonstration in Montreal, where over 100,000 people took to the streets to send a strong message to the Legault government. The government failed to understand the determination of the members of Quebec's major unions, and a three-day strike was called in November. Candace and I joined our health and education members on the picket lines, accompanied by National Executive Board members and CUPE leaders who came from across the country to show their solidarity. By the end of the month, three other Quebec unions joined the mobilization, and the Common Front announced further strike days in December. This massive mobilization should make it possible to reach a good, negotiated settlement - the parties are at the table, assisted by a mediator.

In early December, the CRTC held hearings on the regulatory framework for contributions to support Canadian and Aboriginal content. CUPE's Provincial Communications Sector Council (PCSC) argued for a dedicated news fund, financed by foreign online companies.

These multinational companies must contribute equally to the goals of Canadian broadcasting policy, just as traditional broadcasters do. In the absence of regulation, local news production by private broadcasters is a risk, depriving citizens of a diversity of reliable information that helps sustain Canadian democracy.

In fact, CUPE 687, representing the artisans of the TVA network, owned by Quebecor, had to face an unprecedented announcement from the employer: it plans to lay off 547 people at the beginning of the year, and drastically cut local and regional production.

Quebecor also made headlines by imposing a lockout affecting over 200 members of CUPE 2815. The announcement was made during CUPE's national convention: members working at Videotron in Gatineau found themselves on the picket line against their will. The dispute sparked an outpouring of solidarity from members across the union, who will stand behind the locked-out workers until an acceptable collective agreement is negotiated. Members voted for a special assessment to support members of the locked-out unit. If the Liberal government had introduced its anti-scab legislation last year as we demanded, Videotron workers would not be locked out today. It's imperative that this legislation be passed quickly once the changes we have asked for have been made.

CUPE 5454's strike has finally come to an end, after 18 months of bitter conflict. All 26 SQDC locals voted in favour of the mediator's recommendation to the parties. The pay scale for cannabis consultants has been completely revised, with a reduced number of steps and a higher hourly rate upon hire. Other improvements to the employment contract include a reduction in job insecurity for workers through advances in scheduling and guaranteed hours. This excellent result is the fruit of our members' solidarity, fighting spirit and determination, and I congratulate them!

Our members who work for public transit companies in Quebec demonstrated to send a strong message to the Caquist government: major investments in public transit are urgently needed. This is essential if we are to meet our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. Public transit must be seen as the foundation of tomorrow's economy, and permanent solutions are required to ensure quality service. Unfortunately, this public service, which is in fact a development tool, is far from the Legault government's priorities.

CUPE 4238, which represent employees in the city of Boisbriand, has reached a new agreement with wage increases of 4% per year for 2022 and 2023, and a minimum of 2.5%, rising to 3%, according to the CPI for the following years. Various bonuses and allowances were improved, and flexible work schedules, particularly over four days' schedules, and a telecommuting arrangement were negotiated.

CUPE 301 won significant improvements in the collective agreement for about 1,000 of its members working at La Ronde, particularly in the area of work organization. The scales were revised, and increases ranging from 8% to 12.5% were negotiated, depending on the level.

## Ontario

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) held its 17<sup>th</sup> biennial convention in Toronto from November 20 to 24. Delegates had important conversations and debated the course that is necessary to improve the lives of families and workers across the province. We are proud to have one of CUPE's own at the helm of the Federation. Laura Walton, OSBCU President, along with her comrades Ahmad Gaied and Jackie Taylor, of Team Ignite were victorious in their election campaign. Laura will take the reins in her new role when she is sworn in as President of the OFL at the beginning of 2024. Ahmad, a UFCW member was re-elected as Secretary-Treasurer, while Jackie, from USW, will serve a first term as Executive Vice-President.

The officers have their work cut out for them as they battle to defend the rights of workers in Ontario, and fight to keep Doug Ford and his Conservatives from their schemes to privatize public services.

Ontarians saw firsthand that nothing is safe when the PCs are in power. The infamous premier broke yet another promise when he made backdoor deals with his friends to allow them to develop the Greenbelt. In times where the devastating effects of climate change can't be denied, people across the province when they heard that the protected lands were about to be handed over to Doug Ford's cronies and supporters to profit from. When the auditor general and integrity commissioner found that the process to select the lands had been rushed, Ford later had to admit to his corruption – or “mistake” – and apologize for his government's role in trying to gut lands that had been protected for almost 20 years.

This, along with the resignation of Labour Minister Monte McNaughton, brought the premier to make some big changes within his cabinet. Unsurprising, the Housing Minister responsible for helping certain players win at “Greenbelt Monopoly” also resigned, after the integrity commissioner found that Minister Steve Clark broke the *Member's Integrity Act*.

Many public sector workers across Canada continue to fall behind due to decades of Conservative and Liberal governments who have refused to pay fair wages for the valuable services they provide. Early Childhood Educators (ECE) working in most licenced child care centres in Ontario will see their minimum wage boosted in the new year. It's high time that those who care for our young have remuneration that better reflects the important work they do. ECEs' hourly rate will increase to \$23.86 per hour next year, in a bid to address staffing shortages that advocates say impedes the growth of the national \$10-a-day program. The wage hike creates wage parity with ECEs who works in kindergarten classrooms.

Based on new data from Freedom of Information requests, financial and statistical analysis and research, a new report raises red flags about the Ford government's privatization of core services in our public hospitals, including diagnostics and surgery. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) report, *At What Cost? Ontario hospital privatization and the threat to public health care*, provides a compelling analysis of the negative impact of the provincial government's plans for Ontario's public hospitals and patients. It makes startling revelations, such as the massive discrepancies between the government's reported spending on private clinics and actual spending.

The report refutes the government's rationale for privatization by showing that adequate funding for public hospitals can significantly improve surgical backlogs.

In Ottawa, for example, local public hospital operating rooms sit idle much of the time while, as the report shows, the Ford government has dramatically increased funding to for-profit clinics and hospitals. At the same time, public hospitals are facing real dollar cuts.

## **Manitoba**

I spent what seemed like a long night watching election results slowly roll in from across Manitoba on October 3, as we waited for history to be made. At the end of the night, Manitobans had elected an NDP government with a strong majority and made Wab Kinew their premier – their first First Nations premier.

A few weeks later, history was made again when Kinew's cabinet was sworn in – it is the most diverse and representative cabinet Manitoba has ever seen, with eight members who are racialized, five who are Indigenous and two members who identify as 2SLGBTQI+.

The new government has a lot of difficult work ahead of it, as it tries to undo years of damage done by the former conservative government. But the November throne speech shows they are on the right track, with a focus on investing in public services and the workers who deliver them. That includes making good on campaign promises to re-open emergency rooms closed by the previous government, more surgical and primary care capacity, and increasing hours of care for seniors in long-term care homes – investments in health care that are desperately needed. And it also includes a commitment to keep Manitoba Hydro public!

Ministerial mandate letters released in late October also show a clear government commitment to workers. The Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care has been tasked with addressing critical staffing shortages across the sector and prioritizing improvements to staffing ratios in long-term care. The Minister of Families has been asked to improve wages for disability support workers. And the Minister of Labour and Immigration is responsible for making it easier for workers to join a union.

While it isn't always easy to work with a friendly government, there is no question that it's far easier and more rewarding than fighting conservative anti-worker governments. I know our leaders in Manitoba look forward to holding the new government to account for the commitments they have made to workers across the province.

## **Saskatchewan**

In August, Saskatchewan introduced legislation that would require education workers to inform parents when a student uses a different name or pronoun at school, putting queer and trans young people at risk of potential violence and isolation in their homes. In September, a judge recognized the threat to young people's safety and temporarily blocked the legislation.

During our September meeting, members of the National Executive Board joined other unions, community members and the federal NDP at a counter-protest on the lawns of the Supreme Court of Canada, in solidarity with 2SLGBTQI+ people and allies who are under attack from far-right groups across the country.

In October, Premier Scott Moe recalled the legislature to use the notwithstanding clause and push the regressive legislation through anyway. Moe's attempt to bypass the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* poses a threat to all constitutionally protected rights in Canada, including those that are fundamental to our rights as workers – the right to freedom of association that allows us to unionize and bargain collectively. CUPE was front and centre at a protest at the Saskatchewan legislature on October 10 to defend trans youth and fight this attack on our *Charter* rights.

In November we welcomed more than 500 workers into our union, as new members of CUPE 5430. These long-term care workers had been employed by Extencare at three homes in the Regina area when those homes were transferred to the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) in October 2022, and became SHA employees – but the appropriate bargaining unit for these workers was in question.

Following lengthy hearings, the Labour Board determined that these members properly belong with CUPE. This important decision upholds the established regional jurisdictions in health care and shows that enforcing our existing certifications is a vital organizing tool.

We also celebrated when the provincial government reversed its decision on the fate of the Regina Lutheran Home, and agreed to keep the facility open. Its looming closure had been a source of much stress for residents, their families, and our members who work in the home. While the decision comes as a relief to everyone impacted, it is a sign that the Saskatchewan Party government has no real plan for seniors' care. Despite the province's aging population, the number of long-term care beds in the province has been dropping. CUPE is calling on the government to create more long-term care spaces, build new public facilities, and increase staffing levels to ensure seniors get the care they need and deserve.



## **Alberta**

On the bargaining front, we were pleased to finally reach a negotiated first collective agreement for members of CUPE 37 working at the City of Chestermere. The path to an agreement has been a long and difficult one since these workers joined CUPE in the spring of 2022. Earlier this year, CUPE filed an unfair labour practice complaint against the city for bad faith bargaining and interfering in the union by promoting decertification. The parties finally reached an agreement only with the assistance of a mediator.

Unfortunately, while our members have ratified the deal, the employer has not yet done so. The provincial government recently dismissed the city's mayor, three of its six city councillors, and three senior staff, and appointed an interim chief administrative officer to run the city with an appointed office administrator until a by-election can be held. We are hopeful this means the employer will ratify the agreement in short order so that our members can focus on their work supporting the residents of Chestermere.

In the education sector, we secured a breakthrough collective agreement for 230 members working for the Buffalo Trail School Division. After eight years without a wage increase, CUPE 1606 recently ratified a collective agreement that gives workers increases well above the provincial government mandate of 2.75% over three years. Almost all employees will receive wage adjustments of three dollars an hour, in addition to almost 6% in wage increases in the second year of the contract. Over the life of the agreement, most workers will receive a 20% lift to their wages, with some receiving as much as 25%.

Our local leaders in the sector have been coordinating their bargaining efforts like never before, which has led to significant solidarity between among our members as they refused to settle for less than a fair wage increase. This agreement is a big win for CUPE members and sets the standard for education bargaining across the province, where we have 40 more collective agreements to negotiate in the coming months.

On the provincial front, the United Conservative Party (UCP) government continues to pursue a campaign promise to pull Alberta out of the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) in favour of a new provincial pension plan. A report released in September claims that this is a better option but is based on the false premise that Alberta would be entitled to 52% of the assets of the CPP and can use that money to seed their new plan. Despite polls showing that a majority of Albertans are opposed to the notion of a separate plan, the UCP is pursuing legislation to hold a referendum on the question. CUPE is working with other unions and allies to prepare a campaign to fight to keep the CPP in Alberta.

## **British Columbia**

Job evaluation and classification work is becoming a hot topic in BC. Work has begun on a sector-wide job evaluation plan for workers at colleges across the province, which was negotiated in the last round of bargaining. CUPE members in the Health Science Professional's Bargaining Association are also in the process of a province-wide classification redesign that will come into effect next year, which should result in significant wage increases for many of our members. This is in addition to the ongoing work to develop a Provincial Joint Job Evaluation Program for workers in the K-12 sector, where good progress is being made and the work of implementation is expected to begin sometime in 2024.

Bargaining in the municipal and library sectors has continued to be hectic through the fall. With employers putting more effort into coordinating their proposals in an attempt to control wages and win concessions, our locals have been working together more closely and coordinating to an extent we have not seen in this sector in decades. And our coordination is paying off.

We were able to establish a good municipal wage pattern for our locals in the Lower Mainland earlier this year – 11.5% over three years, with an additional and substantial one-time “inflationary relief” payment. That pattern forms the basis for new agreements that have been reached with the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, City of New Westminster, City of Delta, City of Chilliwack, and the City of Vancouver. In other parts of the province, we continue to achieve general wage increases in the 3% to 6% per year range in the sector.

We are also making other important gains at these tables, such as increasing the employer share of extended health and dental premiums, additional health benefits and mental health supports, and reductions in precarious work.

With the next round of provincial bargaining set for 2025, we know how important it is to re-elect a majority BC NDP government in the next provincial election, scheduled for October 2024. That means working with our locals and district councils to engage our members in conversations about the impact of elections on our communities and on our work, and just how important it is to ensure we elect progressive politicians to lead our province.

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

In late November, after a very long and difficult round of bargaining, more than 1,000 long-term care workers employed by Good Samaritan Canada ratified a new collective agreement. It took more than two years of hard bargaining, a solid strike vote, some targeted job action and a lot of solidarity to get the deal.

The new agreement includes improved benefits and shift differentials and protects against contracting out. It also embeds wage protections that will see these members paid the same as those working in public long-term care facilities. The wage protections provide important security for these workers in inflationary times and will also help ensure staffing levels are maintained in a sector where recruitment and retention of skilled workers continues to be a challenge.

A recent survey of HEU members working as care aides highlights the extent of the problem – nearly half of them are considering leaving health care altogether, because of working conditions that make them vulnerable to workplace injuries, impossible workloads and high levels of stress.

## **Airlines**

CUPE's Airline Division is denouncing the Legault government's termination of assistance program for regional air services in Quebec, which is leading to layoffs and base closures at Pascan Aviation. We are urging the Quebec government to reverse its decision in order to protect these critical routes and defend quality union jobs for workers in Quebec.

It seems the Prime Minister is also making poor decisions when it comes to this sector as it ignores the issue of unpaid work in the airline sector, where our members work on average 35 hours of unpaid work every month. The petition submitted by CUPE's Airline Division, and signed by more than 17,000 Canadians, called on the Feds to close the loopholes that allow big airlines to force flight attendants to do unpaid work. We had hoped that Prime Minister Trudeau and Labour Minister O'Regan would back us in this injustice, but it is once again very clear that the labour movement can't count on the Liberals to do what is right and fair for workers.

Another infamous politician put his nose where it doesn't belong in this sector recently. Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Official Opposition of Canada, thought it an opportune time to address a WestJet aircraft he was aboard to give a political speech. When outraged Canadians threatened to boycott WestJet for allowing the PC leader to have free airtime on board, the airline shamelessly tried to shift the blame to our flight attendants for the incident. Thanks to CUPE 4070 for setting the record straight!

The Air Transat Component of CUPE was quite pleased with the strike vote they took at the end of November. Members gave an overwhelming support to their bargaining team with a 99,8% strike mandate. Hopefully, the employer gets the message clearly: flight attendants have had it!

## **Organizing**

For the reporting period of October 1 to December 31, 2023, CUPE welcomed 799 new members in 24 bargaining units, including 501 in health, 111 in municipal services, and 257 in social services. There are currently 144 active campaigns underway that, if successful, could bring 45,816 new members to our union.

In the Maritimes, there are currently 15 active campaigns which could bring 853 workers into CUPE, including 280 social services workers.

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 is working towards significant membership growth, with 20 active campaigns across various sectors that, if successful, would see 7,611 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 15,216 new members to our union, including 3,500 at the University of Waterloo and more than 6,650 members in health care.

Manitoba has 17 active campaigns, which could see 3,324 new members join our union, including 2,373 workers in education.

Saskatchewan has 12 ongoing campaigns in various sectors, where we hope to bring 929 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 3,299 new members into CUPE. Four 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 29 active campaigns across various sectors including social services, recreation, culture and entertainment, and municipal, with the potential of welcoming 14,315 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**

- Francine Bédard CUPE 1179 – Quebec
- Lucie E. Nicholson Allen Retired NEB Member – Ontario
- Bonnie Phillpot CUPE 8443 – Saskatchewan
- Cheryl Kowalik CUPE 911 – Ontario
- Sandy Wilson CUPE 2784 – Nova Scotia
- Kong Chung CUPE 2316 – Ontario
- Mary-Jo Fallen CUPE 966 – Ontario

### **Retired Staff**

- Denise Quintal Secretary  
Quebec Regional Office
- Tracy J. Morey Senior Officer  
Communications Branch –  
National Office
- Rodolphe Martin National Representative  
Edmundston Area Office
- Douglas T. Lavallie Regional Director  
Saskatchewan Regional Office

### **Fraternal**

- Tom Conway International President  
United Steelworkers

In solidarity,



MARK HANCOCK  
National President

:sg/ceu