

1375, boul. St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa, ON K1G 0Z7

Tel./Tél. : (613) 237-1590 Fax/Télec. : (613) 237-5508 Toll free/Sans frais : (844) 237-1590

cupemail@cupe.ca/courriel@scfp.ca – cupe.ca/scfp.ca

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## **NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT MARCH 2021 – JUNE 2021**

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Sisters, Brothers, and Friends:

This spring has been a difficult one for CUPE members across the country. COVID-19 has continued to wreak havoc on our communities, with a third wave of the pandemic taking hold in most provinces before vaccination campaigns could begin in earnest.

We have struggled with the added stress and uncertainty of increased infection rates and oft-changing public health regulations as we continue to deliver vital public services. Public services that have never been more important, but that are at risk from governments who will be looking to curb spending and corporations who continue to push for privatization so they can line their pockets with the profits.

We have struggled, too, with the continued rise of hate crimes and online radicalization. These remind us we have so much work to do, together, to stand in solidarity against racism and hate rooted in white supremacy and xenophobia.

And we struggled with the recent discovery of a mass grave site at a former residential school in BC, and the knowledge that there are likely more to be found. This reminds us that we have much work to do, together, to achieve reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and communities.

Some of this work towards the elimination of racism and radicalization, and towards reconciliation, requires government action through legislation and financial and political commitments.

**MARK HANCOCK**

National President/Président national

**CHARLES FLEURY**

National Secretary-Treasurer/Secrétaire-trésorier national

**PATRICK GLOUTNEY, FRED HAHN, JUDY HENLEY, SHERRY HILLIER, LEE-ANN KALEN**

General Vice-Presidents/Vice-présidences générales

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But some of this work can be done by our union, and the broader labour movement. Together, we can ensure our union spaces are safe for everyone, and work to ensure that our workplaces are safe, too. We can examine our structures and our internal policies and procedures and make the necessary changes, while we make education available to our members. We can campaign for changes in our communities and bring pressure to bear down on governments to make the necessary policy and funding decisions. And we can, as individuals, take personal responsibility for our own thoughts and actions and pledge to call out racism, misogyny and hate wherever we encounter it.

## **Provincial Division Conventions**

Spring is division convention season at CUPE. It was, as always, an honour to spend time with so many dedicated activists from across the country.

I was impressed by how well everyone adapted to the virtual platform, and the work that was done by division leaders to ensure delegate participation and robust democratic debate on important resolutions.

Division conventions also bring elections, and I congratulate the CUPE members who put their names forward, and those who were elected to positions on executive boards and committees.

Elections mean changes to our National Executive Board (NEB) as well. General Vice Presidents Paul Faoro and Benoit Bouchard are both retiring from CUPE, and Brien Watson has also stepped down as Regional Vice-President. I thank them for their leadership in our union and wish them well in their next endeavours.

Lee-Ann Kalen and Patrick Gloutney now join our National Executive Committee as General Vice-Presidents, and Stephen Drost joins us on the NEB as Regional Vice-President. Welcome!

## **Federal Budget**

The highlight of the federal budget, released April 19, 2021, was a commitment of \$30 billion over 5 years for childcare, with an annual spend of \$8.3 billion after that. The plan is very similar to the federal NDP's proposals in the 2015 and 2019 elections, reducing the average cost of childcare by half by 2022, and lowering the cost to \$10/day by 2026. The proposal includes a workforce plan, focus on not-for-profit spaces, and the need for additional data to provide accountability. Provinces and territories will need to sign an agreement with the federal government, although there are no details on what those agreements might look like. The budget commits to enshrining the principles of a Canada-wide childcare system in law, following consultations in Fall 2021.

While there are some other bright spots in this budget, overall, it fails to acknowledge the scale of the issues we are facing, and the depth of inequality that exists. There is no new action towards a national pharmacare program, and very little on the crisis in long-term care. There is no attempt to reverse decades of tax cuts for the rich, only a token tax on luxury vehicles. Solutions to the climate crisis are mostly left to the market, relying on targeted tax and investment incentives. And aside from childcare, there are few meaningful new supports for workers.

## **Federal Election**

The 2019 federal election ended in a minority government, requiring the Liberals to rely on other parties to maintain power through the pandemic. This has allowed the labour movement to push for improvements to federal government support programs, and for investment in things like childcare.

And we have achieved some of these things, largely because the NDP holds the balance of power in parliament. Jagmeet Singh and the NDP caucus have been instrumental in most of these progressive policy gains.

Minority parliaments in Canada have an average shelf life of two years. So, it's not surprising that rumours are swirling about a federal election this fall – even though Parliament adopted a motion earlier this spring to avoid an election during the pandemic.

CUPE will be ready for that election, when it comes. We are developing a plan to engage our members on the key issues, including making corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, so we can invest in critical issues like pharmacare, long term care, and child care – and people. We will provide our local leaders with the tools they need to talk to members about why elections matter, and why our union supports the NDP.

## **Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)**

CUPE participated as usual in this year's annual conference of the FCM, which was of course held virtually this year. While there wasn't the same opportunity to discuss local government issues and concerns one-on-one with mayors and councilors as there would have been in-person, our continued presence at this event remains important. This year, we hosted a workshop for delegates highlighting the work our members do in public libraries across the country, with a special focus on how library workers adapted their services during the pandemic. Big thanks to the four members who played the role of a "living library" during our session: Brandon Haynes (CUPE 4948), Patricia Larouche (CUPE 3423), Bruce Fiske (CUPE 500), and Denise Parks (CUPE 402).

## Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

Close to 600 CUPE delegates participated in the 29<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Convention of the CLC, which was held virtually from June 16 – 18, 2021. While the compressed convention schedule provided less opportunity to debate resolutions, delegates did adopt four robust policy papers and a number of important resolutions and constitutional amendments. As always, CUPE delegates played an important role in the debates.

CUPE also played an important role in the election of new CLC officers. Lily Chang, a member of CUPE 79, was elected to the position of Secretary-Treasurer as a part of Team Unite. Joining her as newly elected officers are Beatrice Bruske as President and Siobhan Vipond as Executive Vice-President. Larry Rousseau was re-elected as Executive Vice-President. I very much look forward to working with all of them.

Three CUPE members were also successful in their bid for positions on the CLC's Canadian Council as equity Vice-Presidents: Gloria Lepine representing Indigenous Workers, Gina McKay representing LGBTQ2SI workers, and Deena Kapacila representing young workers. Congratulations!

### Collective Bargaining/Strikes/Lockouts

PROVINCE	LOCAL	EMPLOYER	# OF MEMBERS	STRIKE BEGAN	DURATION (days)
Quebec	375	Maritime Employers' Association	1151	April 26, 2021	5
Manitoba	2348	Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council	17	Lockout April 27, 2021	On-going
Quebec	18 Local Unions	School Service Centres, School Board and CEGEPs	12,900	May 25, 2021	4

### Strikes and Lockouts

#### CUPE 375

Last summer, CUPE 375 (The Port of Montreal Longshoremen's Union) and the Maritime Employers Association (MEA) reached a tentative seven-month truce ending the 12- day strike that began on August 10, 2020. By mutual agreement, the parties agreed to set aside their actions and focus on reaching a collective agreement. The agreement allowed that, should their efforts fail, certain matters could be referred to arbitration and our members also retained their right to strike.

Employees had been without a contract since December 2018 and there had been little progress on the key issues of wages and life-work balance.

On April 10, 2021, the employer served lockout notice, announced they would not honour job security provisions in the collective agreement, and extended workers' shifts by up to 100 minutes. CUPE 375 served strike notice in response to escalating pressure tactics by their employer.

Before our members were able to begin their strike, the federal government announced they would introduce legislation to end the dispute. This took any remaining leverage the workers had away and the MEA refused to continue bargaining, knowing the government would resolve the strike for them through back to work legislation. Once again, the Liberals showed their true colours.

The legislation was drafted, subject to severely limited debate in the House of Commons and Senate, and given royal assent in just five days. Our members were forced back to work on April 30 and their collective agreement will now be determined by a third-party arbitrator. CUPE is challenging the legislation in the courts and at the International Labour Organization.

### **CUPE 2348**

Seventeen members of CUPE 2348 working at Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place) were locked out on April 27, 2021. These members provide essential services to recent immigrants to Canada. The local approached negotiations with the clear understanding that Welcome Place is facing funding challenges and sought to work towards an agreement that would ensure the organization continued.

Prior to the lock out, CUPE 2348 continued to negotiate issues of concern with the employer and made counteroffers that addressed those concerns, but the employer would not drop the concessions on the table. Wages had been agreed to and the local was seeking a status quo collective agreement. The members wanted to reach an agreement that would ensure the continuation of the important services they provide to Winnipeg's refugee and immigrant communities. Many of these workers are immigrants themselves.

The outstanding issues include increasing the employee share of benefit costs, reducing paid time off, a two-tier vacation benefit proposal, restrictive language on vacation scheduling, and the elimination of maternity leave top-up.

At time of writing there seems to be no end in sight to the lockout.

### **Quebec Education Sector Support Staff**

Support staff in Quebec's education sector announced 11 strike days in 18 school service centres, school boards, and colleges (CEGEPs) in May and June. Unhappy with the offers from the Legault government, they mobilized to stand up to the province. Rotating strikes commenced on May 25 with support staff in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and James Bay walking off the job. In total, 12,900 workers took strike action across the province.

Since negotiations began in December 2019, offers from the Quebec government had practically gone unchanged.

The strike action had the desired effect – after four days on the line, a tentative agreement was reached.

## **Collective Bargaining**

The CUPE Prince Edward Island Health Council announced that a tentative agreement has been reached in the contract talks between healthcare workers and the province. The Council is composed of four CUPE locals (805, 1051, 1778, and 1779), which together represent more than 1,000 workers in healthcare classifications such as orderlies, utility workers, cooks, ward clerks, maintenance trades, sterile processing technicians, power engineers, painters, cashiers, and more.

The bargaining team is recommending the deal. Each local will be holding ratification meetings in the coming weeks. The healthcare locals' contract expired on March 31, 2020, and they have been in negotiations since November 2020.

After two and a half years of negotiations members of CUPE 301, Montreal's blue-collar workers, have voted 86.7% in favour of a tentative agreement reached with the city.

The city and the union demonstrated creativity by developing a labour mobility agreement that will result in more efficient service delivery to the citizens of Montreal. The President of CUPE 301 called the deal a win for both parties, enabling the local to come up with ways to work cooperatively and at reasonable cost to the taxpayers.

Members of CUPE 1750 in Ontario have advised that Ontario's construction, infrastructure, and transportation industries may come to a grinding halt by mid-June, as the employer rejected several proposals to address workplace barriers that prevent women from advancement, skills development, and participation in the organization.

Approximately 75% of the workplace's lowest wage earners are women. The local is working to dismantle the systemic issues that perpetuate gender discrimination and oppression at work.

The union has proposed a new recruitment and diversity mentorship program to help workers, particularly those from equity-seeking communities, access pathways to training and career advancement. Additionally, the union is pursuing enhanced work-from-home language to ensure that workers have the supports and options they need to accommodate their caregiving responsibilities.

At time of writing, CUPE 1750 continues to negotiate, however the clock is ticking on a strike deadline.

Welland city workers, members of CUPE 1115, have ratified a tentative agreement after facing down a long list of concessions in a very difficult round of negotiations. The agreement includes a 7.5 per cent wage increase over four years. The city and union agreed to establish a joint Pandemic Committee to work on issues that may arise in the event of future pandemics. CUPE 1115 conducted an online ratification vote where 89 per cent of respondents voted in favour of ratifying the agreement.

CUPE members working at WestJet's mainline have signed off on their first collective bargaining agreement. Members voted to ratify the tentative collective agreement reached in February. The five-year agreement includes wage increases, and significant movement towards industry-standard scheduling and pay calculation rules. Achieving this agreement is a bright spot in what has been a tough year for our 3,100 members at WestJet and for the airline sector overall.

CUPE also represents cabin crew at WestJet subsidiaries WestJet Encore and Swoop. The tentative agreement with the 'mainline' will hopefully lead to similar agreements across the company.

CUPE 1004 members have ratified an agreement with the City of Vancouver and the Board of Parks and Recreation. The three-year deal includes a six per cent wage increase and new provisions for Indigenous paid leave for Indigenous employees requiring time off for spiritual or ceremonial responsibilities.

120 members of CUPE 7000 who work as engineers, conductors, mechanics, switching clerks, and rail maintenance staff at Southern Railway in BC have signed off on a new, six-year collective agreement that includes annual wage increases, improvements to benefits and work-life balance issues, and other language improvements.

The relationship between the employer and the union has changed significantly since the last round of bargaining, and the respectful tone and open lines of communication made a difference in the outcome.

## **Regional Updates**

### **Maritimes Region**

#### **Prince Edward Island**

CUPE PEI held its 41<sup>st</sup> annual convention – it's second virtual one – at the end of May. More than 100 delegates and guests participated in the event. Many strong resolutions were passed, on topics such as affordable and accessible housing, health and safety training in schools, a universal national pharmacare program, and bringing the paramedic service in-house under the Department of Health. Congratulations to Leonard Gallant on his re-election as President.

At the end of March, the PEI Government tabled a budget which integrated many CUPE recommendations. The bulk of the budget focused on healthcare improvements and community-support measures. CUPE PEI welcomed investments in childcare spaces and called on the government to ensure that childcare remains public, and affordable.

Healthcare investments, notably in access to care for rural residents, seniors' care, and mental health and addictions, did not go unnoticed. There was also an investment in education which will lead to the creation of 80 new front-line positions in schools, including teachers, autism consultants, educational assistants, and bus drivers.

CUPE PEI had lobbied government to develop a comprehensive public transit system in the province. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure now has the funds to conduct the necessary study and publish a public transit plan by summer 2021.

Increased funding for the Black cultural society, Pride PEI, PEERS Alliance and the Interministerial Women Secretariat recognizes how the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and marginalized communities, and that no one should be left behind. But in order for these measures to be sustainable we need a progressive taxation system, and CUPE will be there to remind government of that.

CUPE 1440 reached an agreement with Mount Allison University. In addition to a 7% wage increase over 3 years, the local obtained a pension enhancement of 0.5% to the maximum contribution to the Multi-Sector Pension Plan, and access to wage continuation during seasonal lay-off.

## **New Brunswick**

CUPE New Brunswick held its annual convention online at the end of April. More than 200 delegates representing locals from across the province attended the 58<sup>th</sup> CUPE NB convention. Congratulations to Steve Drost on his election as President of the Division. I also extend a heartfelt thank you to Brien Watson who served as President for the last two years.

One of the resolutions adopted by delegates addresses the issue of contract flipping, calling on CUPE New Brunswick to lobby the provincial government to enact legislation that would require companies to honour collective agreements when bidding to take over services. Currently in New Brunswick, when an organization flips a service contract to a new company, the unionized employees of the previous company lose their union status. When this occurs, the workers lose all the rights and benefits that they painstakingly negotiated in their collective agreement. This issue came up recently when St. Thomas University “flipped” its contract for custodial services. Members of CUPE 5083 were laid off, and some were rehired without a union and collective agreement to protect their rights. The province needs to update the successor rights provisions in its labour legislation to close the loophole.

Locals 1190, 1251, 1418, 1840, 2745, and 5017 representing more than 8,100 members in New Brunswick, have reached a formal deadlock in negotiations. Locals 1252 and 1253, representing close to 12,800 members, are in conciliation. This situation has led CUPE leadership in the province to send an ultimatum to the Premier of New Brunswick: Higgs has 100 days to settle collective agreements for our members, who have been waiting long enough for a fair deal. Government has until Labour Day to fix recruitment and retention issues and bring fair wages to the 21,860 CUPE members in bargaining and if they refuse to act, CUPE members will mount a province-wide coordinated action.

Strike training is currently being offered to members. Although we all want to avoid a strike, the CUPE members are feeling extremely frustrated, devalued, and disrespected. They haven't had a fair wage increase in almost 12 years. The pandemic has exposed the fragility of public services, but CUPE has been ringing alarm bells for years. The fact that wages and working conditions are lagging behind has created a recruitment and retention crisis. But this round of bargaining isn't just about wages – it is also about protecting public services that are in jeopardy.



In the education sector, school workers are struggling. The pandemic has brought uncertainty, changes, new stresses, and a disrupted education cycle that have made their work more difficult. Yet CUPE members are adapting and continue to do their best to support students. Instead of recognition, the Higgs government is pushing them to fight for respect.

CUPE 3515, representing firefighters at the City of Dieppe, finally reached a deal with the employer, after years of litigation in interest arbitration and judicial review. Members achieved an immediate 5% wage adjustment and a 2.97% wage increase each year for the duration of the agreement.

## **Atlantic Region**

### **Nova Scotia**

CUPE Nova Scotia held its annual convention virtually the first week of June. Delegates debated resolutions and constitutional amendments on a broad spectrum of issues and heard an inspiring presentation by Tari Ajadi from Dalhousie University on Solidarity in Uncertainty. Tari, who is also a board member of the Health Association of African Canadians, described why unions are vital to the fight for health equity. Members came out of this successful convention ready to take on the provincial government and its austerity agenda.

Congratulations go out to Nan McFadgen on her re-election as President, and to the rest of the newly elected Division executive.

At the end of March, the Rankin government presented a budget that was a disappointment for our members in the long-term care and childcare sectors, as well as community services. These are sectors that already face recruitment and retention issues directly related to the devaluing of care work performed by women.

One of the important lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that we must act now to fully support these 'care' sectors. They are essential public services and public sector workers that keep our economy going but have been undervalued by governments. There is no spending in the budget to deal with the demographic challenges in long term care.

When the number of active COVID-19 cases rose in the province, early childhood educators (ECEs) called on the government to do more to prevent exposure in childcare centres. Early childhood education – much like long term care – is chronically underfunded and underappreciated. ECEs provide quality, public childcare in Nova Scotia and deserve respect and so much more, especially in these difficult times. But the Rankin government failed to make their health and safety at work a priority.

Following the federal government's announcement regarding childcare funding, the Nova Scotia government indicated it would work towards implementation of a provincial childcare system. However, no specific announcement has been made and the budget provided no increase in funding for childcare centres and no mention of investing in childcare for children under the age of four. Austerity budgets like this one have a disproportionate impact on women who provide early childhood education, who struggle to remain in the workforce, and women who help their families when childcare spaces are not available.

## **Newfoundland and Labrador**

The much-anticipated report of the Premier's Economic Recovery Team was released in early May. As expected, the recommendations read as a list of all the neoliberal agenda ideas over the last 20 years. Titled "The Big Reset", the report is a plan of action to privatize public services and taking them away from small communities through centralization.

The report uses unconventional accounting practices and non-standard measures to create public panic and justify radical measures that will leave communities across Newfoundland and Labrador with virtually no public infrastructure or services.

This approach has been debunked by decades of research. The spending cuts, privatization, and centralization measures contained in the report are not only unnecessary, they are detrimental to the economy overall. Instead of growing revenues to support public services and invest in public infrastructure it is proposed that services be reduced or eliminated altogether. Over a six-year period, less than \$500 million in savings can be found in this plan, while the proposed cuts are more than \$3.5 billion. To deal with the deficit, we need a strong economy and confidence, not panic and austerity.

In the budget presented later in May, Premier Fury and Finance Minister Coady followed the same approach and inflated the provincial debt with misleading calculations to justify privatization and shedding public services. This budget is based on accounting measures that do not make sense for public financing. CUPE NL will be busy fighting this government's austerity agenda in the coming months.

Municipal workers represented by CUPE 2019 have reached a four-year contract with their employer, the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL. The local fought back concessions and the agreement offers wage increases to firefighters, arena workers, roads and parks workers, water and wastewater workers, municipal landfill workers, municipal officers, clerical and technical staff.

## **Quebec**

SCFP-Québec held its first virtual convention on May 11, 2021. Although it was a short one-day convention, it was an important one, with reports from Division officers, and elections. Congratulations go out to Patrick Gloutney and Frédéric Brisson on their election as President and Secrétaire-général of SCFP-Québec.

Health and education sectors in Quebec have reached a tentative agreement with the Legault government on wages and benefits at the central bargaining table. For months this government refused to make the necessary wage adjustments to address recruitment and retention issues in these sectors, but with massive member mobilization and rotating strikes, CUPE and other FTQ affiliates were able to bring the government to accept our proposal for a new salary structure. This new structure makes the necessary wage adjustments to the lowest classifications that were much undervalued. General wage increases above cost of living were also achieved, as well as a higher employer contribution to benefits.

At the same time, a number of pay equity complaints dating back to 2010 were settled in favour of two classifications in the education sector: school secretaries and daycare technicians will change pay bands and will receive retroactive pay to 2010. This outcome was possible thanks to CUPE's constitutional challenge of the amendments made to the *Pay Equity Act* by the Liberal government in 2009. The Supreme Court of Canada concluded in 2018 that limiting retroactive pay equity adjustments infringed upon women's equality rights.

SCFP-Quebec's ground transportation sector is campaigning against a plan by the Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (ARTM) to cut public transportation services in the Greater Montreal area. The ARTM is seriously considering demanding major budget cuts from the transportation services. As a result, we anticipate a possible 15% to 20% service reduction. While specialists and world leaders are stressing the importance of a green economic recovery, the Quebec Ministry of Transport would be responsible for a major decline in public transit throughout the city, while investing over \$10 billion in an unnecessary double-decker tunnel in the Quebec City area, encouraging urban sprawl and the use of personal cars instead of public transit. This approach is completely irresponsible and shows how the CAQ government has no interest in the environment and well-being of future generations.

Members of CUPE 2815 have ratified by 88% the agreement reached between the local and Videotron at the end of April. The virtual meeting was well attended, with nearly 1,500 members gathered online to discuss the deal and vote. The 7-year contract offers wage increases of over 15% for that period, including two years retroactive. Among other gains, the local has agreed to telework arrangements and has negotiated a four-day work week for certain classifications.

CUPE 1377, representing blue collar workers at the City of Candiac, has a new collective agreement that provides very good wage increases on top of the implementation of a new salary structure to maintain internal equity. The local made significant gains for precarious members and increased job protection. Faced with an impasse in negotiations last fall, CUPE 1377 had intensified their pressure tactics and the City applied for conciliation. Three days of meetings with the conciliator led to the deal.

The Syndicat des pompiers et pompières du Québec (SPQ), which represents 3,800 firefighters in more than 120 cities and municipalities in Quebec, will be joining CUPE. This is the second major union in Quebec to join CUPE in a few months, following the decision in January by the FTPQ (Fraternité des travailleurs et travailleuses du préhospitalier du Québec) to also join our union. We look forward to welcoming firefighters once the labour tribunal confirms the transfer of jurisdiction.

## **Ontario Region**

Over the course of three days in late May, CUPE Ontario held its 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention virtually with the theme “Public Services Saves Lives”. Delegates from across the province debated and approved 26 resolutions and adopted an ambitious action plan designed to bring CUPE members in Ontario into a post-pandemic world.

The actions are designed to push government to properly fund health care, so that the tragedies of the pandemic will not be seen again, and Ontarians will have ready access to publicly funded and publicly delivered hospital services and long term care. CUPE Ontario will also push for a universal, publicly funded and publicly provided childcare system, paid sick days, and ensuring access to pensions and benefits for precarious workers.

Working to defeat the Ford government and elect a pro-worker NDP government is also part of the action plan.

Congratulations go out to Fred Hahn, Candace Rennick, Michael Hurley, Yolanda McClean, Bryan Keith and all those elected to the Division executive.

On May 19, CUPE Ontario released a comprehensive report detailing the long-term underperformance of investments at the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) pension plan.

OMERS 2020 investment results, which saw the plan lose \$3 billion of members’ money, cannot just be dismissed because of the pandemic. Several other large, Canadian, defined benefit pension plans and investment funds, operating in the same economic climate and pandemic markets, not only outperformed OMERS but were able to post very positive 2020 investment returns.

The report shows that this is not a one-year, pandemic-related anomaly. OMERS investment performance also falls short over the last ten-year period and has underperformed against its own internal benchmarks. Clearly, there is a problem at OMERS that needs to be fixed.

On March 8, CUPE, SEIU, and Unifor health and long-term care workers launched a campaign for respect, protection, and adequate compensation for all health care workers. Following the overstress on health care resources and failure of Ontario’s long-term care system during the COVID-19 pandemic, health care workers are uniting to demand action from the Ford government.

Provincial hospital bargaining begins on June 21 and 22 between OCHU-CUPE, SEIU and the Ontario Hospital Association. Priorities for bargaining were decided in November, following a membership bargaining survey and 4 regional meetings with local leaders. Preparations for local bargaining are also underway and regional meetings will be held in May and June with a provincial bargaining conference focused on local issues scheduled for September.

In March, Laurentian University in Sudbury filed for creditor protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA). This situation was caused by years of underfunding by the province and fiscal mismanagement by the university's Board of Governors. This has broad implications for public sector institutions, who should never be brought to the brink of bankruptcy when government funding can be made readily available.

Laurentian University could have recovered had the Ford government injected a healthy dose of funding. But the government instead chose to let it fail, and the university found itself unable to pay its debts, leaving them with no option.

Senior management and the Board, responsible for running Laurentian into the ground, remain in place. To add insult to injury, the President has received approval from the courts to hire a Chief Restructuring Officer at \$650 per hour.

Laurentian has cut hundreds of jobs, some of which are CUPE jobs. They have also cut many programs vital to the people and economy of Northern Ontario and Indigenous communities. The community impact of this crisis is predicted to be a loss of \$150 million per year.

*The Election Finances Act* has governed election funding and spending in Ontario provincial elections since 1990. For most of that time, the restrictions on campaign activity by "third parties" such as trade unions were confined to the election period. In 2017, the Ontario Liberal government amended the *Act* to further restrict third party political activity in a 6-month "pre-election period" – the longest such restriction in Canada.

Earlier this spring, the Ontario PC government brought in further amendments via Bill 254 that, among other things, would stretch the pre-election restrictions to a full year prior to a fixed election date – a move intended to stifle any criticism of the Ford government in the lead up to the 2022 provincial election. The legislation was immediately challenged in court by a number of unions along with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and, on June 8, the Superior Court of Ontario struck down the legislative amendments in Bill 254, finding several of them violated the Charter rights of free speech and free association of third parties like trade unions.

The next day, Premier Doug Ford gave notice that he would recall the Ontario legislature and restore the Bill 254 amendments using the "notwithstanding clause". The "notwithstanding clause" – Section 33 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* – is a controversial measure that allows provincial legislatures to override portions of the *Charter* for a period of five years. On June 10, Bill 254 was reborn in the legislature as Bill 307 and, after a marathon weekend session, became law on June 14.

## **Manitoba Region**

While CUPE members continue to provide the public services the Manitoban public counts on, now more than ever in the pandemic, the Pallister government continues its attacks on the public sector. This includes legislative attacks to weaken the Manitoba *Labour Relations Act*, eliminate community autonomy in the public school sector, and weaken health and safety legislation. At the bargaining table, the government is seeking to impose its will through a wage restraint mandate that would see public sector workers falling even further behind rising costs of living. In the face of these attacks, CUPE locals and members are continuing to build collective solidarity to fight back.

Bill 64, *The Education Modernization Act*, would create a Provincial Education Authority (PEA) to run the public education system, replacing the existing 37 school divisions and their elected school trustees and becoming a single employer. The sole remaining division would be the Francophone School Division.

The PEA, governed by a small appointed board, would take over the public education system in Manitoba on July 1, 2022.

There is no information in Bill 64 about union representation votes. The provincial government has indicated that they are counting on the Labour Relations Board to settle any bargaining unit and union representation issues. Nonetheless, we are planning for the possibility of representation votes in the sector.

In the meantime, collective bargaining continues in the education sector. An arbitration award last year established a wage pattern that broke the provincial government's mandate laid out in *The Public Services Sustainability Act* – legislation that was ruled unconstitutional by the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench in 2020.

Following that, CUPE locals banded together with a CUPE School Sector Solidarity Pact. The Solidarity Pact is an agreement between our locals in the sector that they will not accept any contract that will negatively impact other CUPE school sector locals. The Pact more specifically outlines that a local will not accept a monetary settlement less than that agreed to between the School Divisions and Teachers.

At the beginning of June, CUPE 3164 and the Evergreen School Division ratified a new collective agreement with wage increases in line with the award and subsequent agreements negotiated by the Manitoba Teachers' Society. They were followed in short order by CUPE 2972 and the Interlake School Division. The wage settlement pattern for the sector is now well-established at 1.6% in 2019, 1.4% in 2020, 0.5% in 2021, and a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in 2022.

Our health care locals in the province are deep in a difficult round of collective bargaining, made even more difficult by the mammoth task of negotiating a single collective agreement for workers who had previously been covered by 123 different ones.

At the same time, strike committees have been established to prepare for a potential strike vote of our 18,000 members in the sector, should it become necessary.

The Manitoba Nurses Union recently voted 98% in favour of strike action. CUPE will stand in solidarity with the Nurses throughout any strike or job action.

## **Saskatchewan Region**

The Saskatchewan Party government's 2021 budget, released in April, is steeped in austerity and reliant on federal funding to address the effects of COVID-19. At the same time, the budget ignores its provincial responsibility to provide stable, long-term funding for health care and education.

There are no new commitments in the budget to address mental health and addictions, no long-term funding commitments for post-secondary education or community-based organizations. And the commitment of an additional 90 continuing care assistants, while welcome, will do little to alleviate the critical workload issues and chronic short-staffing challenges in the healthcare system.

The CUPE Saskatchewan Education Workers' Steering Committee (EWSC) has launched a new campaign to highlight education support workers and to renew the call for adequate funding for K-12 education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven home the importance of well-funded public education. Yet school divisions are facing another year of funding shortfalls. The campaign includes radio ads and videos that can be shared and promoted on social media and asks community members to contact local politicians and call on them to fund the public education system.

CUPE Saskatchewan has struck a Task Force on Member Engagement, following through on a resolution adopted at last year's division convention. The Task Force is mandated to explore and develop tactics and strategies to better engage CUPE members across the province, and will report to the 2022 division convention.

## **Alberta Region**

A new Parkland Institute study released in May, titled *Time to Care: Staffing and Workloads in Alberta's Long-term Care Facilities*, reveals that many seniors continuing care centres are chronically understaffed and unable to meet the basic care needs of seniors.

The study, based on a survey of more than 350 long-term care staff across Alberta, found nearly half of respondents – 43 per cent – didn't have adequate time to complete required tasks consistently. Staff are left with few options: leave important aspects of their job – including care tasks – undone, work through their breaks, or stay late to finish. Seventy per cent of respondents stayed beyond the end of their shift at least occasionally and nearly one quarter – 24 per cent – stayed late either daily or once per week. Working extra time is clearly the norm for many long-term care workers.

For far too long, the provincial government has ignored the warning signs of an underfunded and understaffed health care system. The chronically inadequate staffing levels in long term care may have been somewhat manageable prior to the pandemic, but resulted in facilities being thrown into crisis once COVID-19 hit.

The study also revealed a significant disparity across ownership/profit categories: 34 per cent of respondents based in for-profit facilities reported they never have adequate staff-to-resident ratios to meet resident needs, compared to just seven per cent for public facilities. This reinforces CUPE's call to remove profit from the long-term care system.

When students return to school in September, there will be fewer staff there to support them than in pre-pandemic times. In April 2020, the United Conservative Party Government (UCP) announced deep cuts to school board funding, resulting in job losses for education assistants and a loss of classroom support for students. In the Edmonton Public School District alone, there were 181 fewer education assistants in classrooms in September 2020.

Despite rising inflation and population growth, the UCP government cut education funding further in its 2021 provincial budget. This means families can expect even less student support this September.

### **British Columbia Region**

CUPE BC's first-ever virtual convention held in May was a big success. Over three days, delegates respectfully debated serious issues, adopted reports and heard from some great guest speakers.

Delegates also elected a new executive board. My congratulations to Karen Ranalletta who was elected president, the first woman president of CUPE BC in 26 years, and to Trevor Davies who was re-elected Secretary-Treasurer by acclamation.

In stark contrast to most provincial governments across the country, the BC NDP government introduced a provincial budget in April that made smart, strategic investments and laid the groundwork for a post-pandemic economic recovery that puts people first.

The budget included \$26.4 billion in capital investments geared towards projects in the education, health and transportation sectors, including \$3.5 billion for public schools.

Investments in public transit and transportation networks will make it easier for people to get to work, and children under 12 will now ride free – an affordability measure for families that will also help grow a new generation of transit users.



The budget also invests in expanding affordable childcare, bringing an additional 20 school districts into the Seamless Day Pilot Program, adding another 3,750 childcare spaces. The budget also contained the largest-ever permanent increase to income assistance and disability rates in provincial history.

It's never too early to begin preparing for the next round of bargaining! CUPE leaders in the K-12 sector have started that work, though their current agreement doesn't expire for another year. This spring, they engaged with over 700 members across all occupational groups and from every corner of the province. These conversations engaged members in their union and will inform the upcoming provincial bargaining survey. Model agreement language from around the province is also being compiled to help prepare both the provincial bargaining committee and local committees.

CUPE 116 welcomed new members into our union in April. These student employees who work as residence advisors (RAs) voted overwhelmingly to join CUPE. RAs are undergrads who work with other students in residence, many of whom are international students living and learning away from home.

For many of this group, belonging to CUPE 116 is their first opportunity to be represented by a union. RAs help deal with student issues and perform resident check-ins. Their work has been significantly more challenging during the pandemic, especially as it relates to safety in the workplace.

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

HEU's campaign to bring thousands of contracted out housekeeping and dietary staff back "in house" reached a new benchmark this month with nearly 6,000 letters sent to provincial legislators calling for an end to 20 years of privatization.

With collective agreement negotiations ramping up for more than 4,500 members employed by corporate contractors, the union has been calling on the BC NDP government to act now on its 2020 election commitment to transition this workforce back to BC's public health authorities.

The contracting out of housekeeping and dietary services has pushed women and racialized workers to the margins of the health care workforce, with inferior benefits, little retirement security, and wages that are lower today than during the SARS epidemic in 2003.

In 2018, the BC NDP repealed Bill 29 – the law brought in by the previous BC Liberal government that cleared the way for the privatization of these services. In 2019, HEU negotiated provisions to help transition these workers back into the public health system.

In April, HEU reached a Labour Adjustment Transition Agreement with the Health Employers Association of BC that provides a roadmap for a smooth transition. We just need the provincial government to fulfill their commitment.

After a concerted organizing effort, HEU has applied to represent security officers at 27 sites through Vancouver Coastal Health. The matter remains at the Board, where we expect a number of objections. The employer, Paladin Security, is arguing that despite

the fact that the vast majority of workers in the unit applied for had signed cards, HEU has not met the threshold.

## **Airlines**

After waiting over 13 months and calling non-stop on the federal government to act, we were very disappointed with the \$5.9 billion aid package for Air Canada that was announced in April. The deal features repayable loans to the airline conditional on reopening regional routes and refunding passengers for cancelled trips. However, the agreement betrays the government's commitment to support airline workers affected by the pandemic.

The Trudeau government had originally promised that any relief money for the airline sector would flow directly to support workers, but that commitment is not reflected in this agreement cooked up behind closed doors.

The only jobs guarantee in the agreement – that Air Canada maintain April 1, 2021 staffing levels – does nothing to help workers, since staffing was guaranteed to rise as summer approached and immunization efforts ramped up across the country. We are also concerned by the lack of transparency surrounding the agreement, and the lack of a government seat on Air Canada's board of directors – something that governments in other countries secured in exchange for airline aid packages.

Less than month after the aid package was announced, we found out that Air Canada's Board of Directors had approved a total of \$10 million in bonuses to middle management and top executives. Half of that sum has already been paid out, in the middle of the pandemic, while over 8,000 CUPE members were still laid off and were not receiving any help through the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy program (CEWS) – because Air Canada didn't want to extend the subsidy to laid off personnel. Paying out millions in executive bonuses while they kick their workers to the curb and ask the taxpayer to bail them out isn't just wrong, it's morally bankrupt.

In April, the sale of Transat to Air Canada was cancelled when the parties learned that it wouldn't be approved by the European Commission. Transat subsequently secured financial aid from the federal government as well. The deal with Ottawa allows Transat to borrow up to \$700 million, nearly half of which will go toward refunding travellers for flights cancelled during the pandemic. Unlike Air Canada, Transat did not refuse to extend the CEWS to workers on lay off.

As vaccination rates rise and the pandemic is wrestled under control, countries are beginning to loosen up their travel restrictions. We know our Airlines members cannot wait to fly again, and hope that the hard times will soon be over.

## **Organizing**

For the reporting period of April 1 to June 30, 2021, CUPE welcomed 899 new members in 22 bargaining units, including 373 in the education sector, 194 in healthcare, 106 in the municipal sector, 134 new members in emergency and security services, and six in the transportation sector.

There are currently 92 active campaigns underway that, if successful, would bring 23,132 new members into our union.

In the Atlantic region the union drive to create CUPE 5483 at Wynn Park Villa has been followed with interest by the media and the labour movement in the region. CUPE is holding an anti-union employer to account and standing up for members in long term care who put their faith in the union. CUPE will continue to fight and defend the rights of workers to organize in Atlantic Canada.

In the Maritimes region we currently have 18 active campaigns, two of which could see more than 1,000 members from the social services and emergency and security services sectors welcomed into CUPE.

The Quebec Firefighters Union (SPQ) announced on May 3 that it will join CUPE. SPQ was the largest firefighters union in Quebec, representing 3,800 firefighters in more than 120 towns and municipalities. Quebec has 3 other active organizing campaigns currently underway.

In the Ontario region, we currently have 30 active campaigns across various sectors including healthcare, education, municipal, and social services. Continued lockdowns and constantly changing rules about public gatherings are making organizing all that more difficult. Despite this, the Ontario Region has seen a dozen successful drives during the pandemic and are looking for continued success across all sectors.

We continue to prepare for a looming province wide representation vote in the education sector in Manitoba. CUPE has 11 active organizing campaigns underway across the province.

In Saskatchewan, organizing efforts continue with the focus at the moment on recreation workers in Yorkton.

The Alberta region has 8 active campaigns across several sectors including social, healthcare, and education with the potential to bring in 885 new members into our union.

In recent months, our organizers in British Columbia have had some great success with a number of long-term campaigns, which have culminated in several hundred new members in various sectors. Currently, BC has 18 organizing campaigns that have the potential of adding over 1,800 members to CUPE.

HEU has 3 active campaigns in the long-term care sector, at this time, in addition to the three new certifications issued since my last report, totaling over 180 new CUPE members.

## **In Memoriam/Personal**

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

### **Members**

- Jim Drysdale CUPE Local 1858
- Alan Lillie CUPE Local 129
- Gary Woods CUPE Local 3251
- Dave Long CUPE Local 1004 Retiree
- Claudiu Danciu CUPE Local 793
- Gary Waysome CUPE Local 5205
- Barb Storrng CUPE Local 1479
- Saeed Hassan CUPE Local 416

### **Retired Staff**

- Sherry Neis Secretary  
Calgary Area Office
- Wilma Costain Secretary  
Terrace Area Office

In solidarity,



MARK HANCOCK  
National President