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NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT JUNE 2021 – SEPTEMBER 2021

Sisters, Brothers, and Friends:

September 2021 marks eighteen months since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, and everything changed.

As they say, change is hard.

Change has become the clear constant of this pandemic. We have changed how we work, how we interact with others, how we shop, how we spend our time. And we have changed how we do our work as union leaders and labour activists.

We have watched governments and public health officials struggle with change as well. At every turn, we have pushed them to do the right thing for our health care system, for our communities, for students, for families, for public services, for frontline workers. We have worked with community, labour, and political allies to push our country's leaders to do more, and to do better.

Around every corner, our union and our members have faced new challenges. Right now, those challenges include a COVID variant that is more virulent than anything we have seen yet, and the need to increase vaccination rates in order to prevent these new strains of the virus from taking hold.

And as tired as we are, we continue to press our governments and employers to make the right decisions for our members and our communities.

I have begun to meet in-person with CUPE members and leaders again. And I cannot begin to express how wonderful it has been to travel again, to be in the same room with our amazing provincial and local leaders instead of on the other end of a computer screen hundreds, or thousands, of kilometers away.

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

In the last several weeks I have travelled to seven provinces and spent time with CUPE members and leaders at rallies and picket lines, at meetings and summits, and on the campaign trail. And I look forward to the opportunity to continue to travel through the fall.

But that can only happen if we are able to finally get this pandemic under control, to the point where COVID-19 can truly be considered endemic, like seasonal influenza. The only way to reach that goal is for everyone who can be vaccinated to do so – and according to medical and human rights experts, there are very few of us over the age of 11 who cannot get the vaccine.

This fourth wave of COVID we are experiencing is, according to public health officials, a pandemic of the unvaccinated. The more people who step up and get the vaccine, the less opportunity the virus has to mutate and form itself into a new variant. And the more variants we face, the longer it is going to take to restore some semblance of a normal life, at work and at home.

So I am asking you, as leaders in our union, if you have not already made a vaccine appointment, or if you have had one shot but not booked your second, to do it today.

We are, of course, facing a patchwork of vaccine mandates and policies being implemented across the country, for workplaces and for social and community interactions. In many cases, government guidelines have not been clear and have created confusion.

While CUPE is calling on our members to get vaccinated, we are also demanding that governments and employers consult with us before they create and implement policies in our workplaces. We believe that education and encouragement are key to successful vaccination programs, and that these programs and policies are not a replacement for proper PPE, ventilation, and cleaning regimes.

CUPE has always prioritized our members' health and safety, and vaccines are an important part of ensuring our workplaces are safe for everyone. And, just as our members have the right to be safe at work, people have the right to receive public services in a safe environment too.

Federal Election

On August 15, the federal election that almost no one wanted, but everyone expected, was called for September 20, 2021.

CUPE rolled out regional plans, developed in consultation with our provincial divisions, that focused on building member engagement and showing our strong support for candidates who understand our union and our key issues. Things like including making corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, so we can invest in critical programs like pharmacare, long term care, and child care.

Outside of Quebec, that meant highlighting the commitments and campaign of Jagmeet Singh and the New Democratic Party. Throughout the campaign, we also promoted volunteer participation in the campaigns of the many CUPE members and staff who were seeking election as NDP candidates.

We were active across digital platforms, providing members with the resources they need to make informed decisions around how to vote. We also distributed and promoted informational products focusing on the NDP as the party best positioned to support all workers. We facilitated connecting members with volunteer opportunities on local campaigns and participated in many labour canvasses across the country.

Third party election financing rules and restrictions required that our activities across the country were coordinated and approved through, and will be reported by, National Office.

I am so proud of the CUPE members and staff who stepped up to run in this election, and those who dedicated many hours to support them and other labour and NDP candidates. And I am proud of the positive and energetic campaign run by Jagmeet Singh and the NDP. I was also pleased to see the work our new CLC officers did to engage union members in support of NDP candidates in key seats across the country.

The election results saw a few seats change hands, but otherwise we have a parliament that, in terms of seat-count, is almost a mirror-image of the last one. It seems that Trudeau was successful with his cynical pitch for “progressive” voters to vote Liberal in order to stop the Conservatives. And O’Toole made an equally cynical pitch that he was somehow on the side of workers. I was most disturbed, though, by the emergence of the PPC, who conducted a pretty ugly campaign and convinced 5% of Canadians to vote for them.

We will continue, with the CLC and our allies in labour, to push our agenda forward – on child care, but also on long term care and pharmacare, on climate change and a just transition, and on making corporations and wealthy Canadians pay their fair share through taxes.

Truth and Reconciliation: Conversations for CUPE members

On September 28, CUPE will host two webinars (one in English and one in French) for CUPE members to discuss our role as a union, and as union members, in truth and reconciliation. We will discuss how we can contribute to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, what we can learn from the experiences and activism of Indigenous CUPE members, and how we can support the fight for justice for today’s generation of Indigenous children and youth.

Registration can be found online [here](#).

National Pension Summit

This fall, CUPE is convening a virtual National Pension Summit to share strategies about how to improve access to pensions for part-time and other precarious workers.

On October 27, from noon to 4 PM eastern time, CUPE members and pension specialists will meet online to discuss the obstacles that stand in the way of equal access to pensions and share strategies for overcoming them. Participants will have the opportunity to share their experiences and to speak with CUPE members like themselves about successful pension campaigns.

Watch for more details, and an invitation to register online, in the coming weeks.

Collective Bargaining/Strikes/Lockouts

PROVINCE	LOCAL	EMPLOYER	# OF MEMBERS	STRIKE BEGAN	DURATION (days)
Newfoundland and Labrador	1349	Town of Grand Falls-Windsor	100	July 15, 2021	On-going
Manitoba	2348	Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council	17	Locked out April 27,2021	78 days

Strikes and Lockouts

CUPE 1349

CUPE 1349 members were locked out on July 15, 2021 by their employer, the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor. Among other demands, the employer is asking for concessions on the benefit plan and wants to eliminate joint committees. This employer does not want to hear from their employees regarding the work they do and the public services they deliver. Members were ready to fight back for respect, and this local is holding strong. The residents are behind them and have signs on their lawns to show support for our members.

The local held a rally on the afternoon of August 19, and a family event in the evening. I was fortunate to be able to join them to bring solidarity on behalf of CUPE members across the country, and to picket garbage trucks operated by scabs. The rally was attended by a great number of union leaders and activists not only from CUPE, but also from other CLC affiliates who pledged financial and moral support.

Elections for Grand Falls-Windsor town council will be held on September 28, 2021. The new council will need to be able to work to end the lock-out, repair the damage that has been done to the community, and show respect to the hard-working and dedicated members of CUPE 1349. The local has written an open letter to residents to ask them to vote for candidates who will listen, be respectful and work with town employees to unite the community.

The CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador Division is doing great work in supporting CUPE 1349 members in this dispute.

CUPE 2348

Seventeen members of CUPE 2348 who provide critical services to recent immigrants to Winnipeg stood strong together and walked a picket line for 12 weeks to stave off the concessionary demands of their employer – Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place). They were facing concessions that included an increase in their share of benefit costs, reduced paid time off, the elimination of maternity leave top-up, and a two-tier vacation entitlement proposal.

After mediation failed, and with no path forward, CUPE filed a request to the Manitoba Labour Board following 60 days of the lockout. This allowed our members to return to their vital community work while an arbitrator is appointed to help the parties reach what is hoped to be a fair agreement.

This right to access arbitration is currently being threatened by the Pallister government under Bill 16, which could prevent arbitrators from settling labour disputes, resulting in prolonged lockouts or strikes.

The united action of these members in standing up to their employer and resisting concessions sends an important message to other employers in the sector and the community, and will empower other CUPE bargaining units in the face of similar concessionary demands in the future.

Collective Bargaining

The Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) served notice to bargain, negotiated a Memorandum of Conditions for Joint Bargaining, and met with the Ontario Hospital Association to exchange proposals for their central agreement set to expire on September 28, 2021. Bargaining is being conducted jointly with SEIU. The unions have also applied for conciliation in order to keep the open period to a minimum, to reduce the possibility of being raided by unions outside of the house of labour.

The Ontario Hospital Association has tabled fourteen significant concessions with their initial proposal package, including amendments to job postings, job security, and contracting out language.

OCHU had a very busy summer, coordinating with SEIU to host rallies at hospitals across the province. Frustrated with the lack of respect they are getting from the provincial government and their employers in contract negotiations, the rallies engaged members and called attention to key issues, including workers' wages, working conditions, and the need for better pandemic safety measures that will protect both patients and workers. OCHU continues to advocate on behalf of all hospital workers for a fair contract, instead of the wage cut under provincial policy (Bill 124) that restricts wage increases to 1/3 of the rate of inflation.

Since early 2020, CUPE school support locals in Manitoba have been meeting to coordinate and plan for what was anticipated to be very difficult bargaining. In the spring of 2021, locals in the sector came together to endorse a solidarity pact to resist the government's austerity agenda. The solidarity pact included a commitment that no CUPE local will accept any contract that will negatively impact another local in the sector. The pact also outlined that CUPE locals will not accept a monetary settlement less than that previously awarded to the Manitoba Teachers' Society in arbitration, which broke the provincial government's austerity wage mandate. Locals committed to taking strike action, if necessary, to back this demand for fairness for school sector support workers.

The strength of this solidarity has meant that five CUPE school sector locals have been able to achieve the wage settlement awarded to teachers and have been able to breach the government wage restraint mandate. This significant victory is strengthening the resolve of all remaining school sector locals to achieve this same united success.

More than 250 members of CUPE 5435 in Saskatoon have ratified their first collective agreement, after almost eight months of bargaining made more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic. The agreement will provide higher standards for working conditions in private group homes, where the majority of the local's members work.

The group homes run by CBI, where members of the local are employed, experience some of the highest staff turnover rates in the province because of pay disparity and poor relationships between workers and management, among other issues. Members are optimistic this agreement will give them the tools to address these longstanding concerns, and that the collective agreement protections, seniority status, and recognition of both full and part-time status for employees will help to resolve their concerns.

Most members of CUPE 5435 work as community support workers and childcare workers, supporting the vulnerable children and adolescents living in these homes. While this work is rewarding, it can be quite difficult, and burnout is always an issue. As a result of the agreement these workers have achieved, they will receive consistent pay increases as well as much-needed time off for vacation, sick leave, and bereavement leave.

Bargaining in a pandemic-impacted economic climate, CUPE 391 still managed to achieve significant gains at the bargaining table for members working at Vancouver Public Library. In addition to resisting concessions and achieving wage increases on par with other regional and sectoral settlements, the local negotiated innovative language that includes Indigenous Elder representation, leave for trans-affirming care, and cultural/religious diversity leaves.

Regional Updates

Maritimes Region

Prince Edward Island

CUPE PEI participated in several government consultations over the summer. We made a submission urging the government to update the statute of limitations to better protect survivors of sexual or gender-based violence. CUPE PEI also participated in a consultation on gender diversity guidelines for the public school system and prepared a detailed submission in response to the government's draft *Temporary Worker Protection Act*.

CUPE 3324, which represents PEI paramedics, raised alarm bells regarding delays in service and ambulances being tied up at hospitals because there are no beds available for their patients. Patients are waiting six to eight hours in ambulance bays and hospital hallways because emergency rooms at Island hospitals are over capacity. If the ambulances cannot leave the hospitals, they are not available to respond to new emergencies.

Health PEI acknowledged the significant delays and attributed them to staffing shortages in hospitals. The union has been lobbying the province for more resources for the past five years. The problem is chronic and it's getting worse. PEI needs to address the staffing and funding shortfalls and improve working conditions in order to retain existing healthcare and emergency response workers and recruit new ones.

New Brunswick

Members of CUPE locals 963, 1190, 1251, 1252, 1253, 1418, 1840, 1866, 2745, 5017, and 5026 have been without a contract for far too long, ranging from two years to almost five years. CUPE members are losing money every year because their wages do not keep up with the rising cost of living. Hundreds of union positions are left unfilled as qualified New Brunswickers choose to work outside the province where wages are fair. This is totally unacceptable.

CUPE New Brunswick gave the Higgs government an ultimatum back in May: they had 100 days to fix this and offer fair wages to the 21,860 CUPE members in bargaining.

The 100 days expired on Labour Day. CUPE locals agreed in good faith to centralized bargaining on the wage mandate, hoping that the Higgs government was coming to the table to bargain in good faith as well. But that wasn't the case. The first week of September, the government asked for concessions on benefits from our central bargaining team, despite an agreement that the central table was only for the wage mandate.

Our members are, to say the least, extremely frustrated. Locals are holding strike votes and at the time of writing, members were showing up in huge numbers to exercise their right to vote. The early results are overwhelmingly in favour of strike action.

I headed to New Brunswick at the end of August to participate in CUPE New Brunswick's successful bargaining summit. On August 28, I walked through Fredericton with hundreds of activists, CUPE leaders, and community members in honor of frontline workers who received recognition for their work and dedication, especially over the last 18 months. These walks to show solidarity with frontline workers took place in 14 communities on August 28, with thousands of New Brunswickers. This is a monumental and historical undertaking of CUPE's collective power in the province.

While the Conservatives are pushing their austerity agenda and refusing to fix the recruitment and retention problem in public services, they are giving away over \$100 million in a secret deal with pulp mills. The industry got unnecessary subsidies through a power buy-back scheme that will hurt the province's economy, as well as workers and their families.

Atlantic Region

Nova Scotia

On July 17, 2021, the Rankin government in Nova Scotia called a general election for August 17. I was in Nova Scotia for meetings during the election and, along with CUPE NS President Nan McFadgen, made time to meet and campaign with five incredible CUPE members running for the NDP. Unfortunately, the election results were quite disappointing, with the Conservatives unexpectedly winning a majority mandate. On a more positive note, the NDP increased their seat count to six and the legislature is now somewhat more diverse, with four racialized MLAs elected.

Prior to calling the election, the Liberal government had signed a bilateral agreement on child care with the federal government. The Conservatives have not committed to the early childhood educator grants, nor have they indicated when the agreement will be implemented. Following the federal election, we will be pushing them to follow through on this agreement.

CUPE 8920 reached an agreement with government in early July for members in acute care. The agreement includes wage increases of 5.6% over three years, which goes beyond the government mandate.

Staffing levels, recruitment, and retention continue to be a challenge in the long-term care sector, as local issues are now being negotiated. The Long Term Care & Community Services Committee is planning a one day conference to be held mid-October to address issues in the sector.

Members of CUPE 933 who work as special constables held a number of information picket lines over the summer. They want their employer, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, to address wage inequities between them and other special constables in the province who perform the same or similar work yet earn considerably higher wages. The low wages have resulted in constant understaffing and increased stress among our members, which leads to the employer having to pay substantial amounts in overtime. CUPE is pressing the municipality to address this problem before it worsens.

Newfoundland and Labrador

The latest provincial budget in Newfoundland and Labrador made it clear that the Liberal government intends to implement many recommendations from the Greene Report, aimed at privatizing public services and implementing an austerity agenda. The Premier's Economic Recovery Team is planning cuts to the public sector that will have a huge detrimental impact on public services- their plan is called The Big Reset.

CUPE NL is ready to fight back, with the *Reject the Reset* campaign. The campaign is aimed at promoting public services and resisting privatization while at the same time building member capacity for mobilizing and supporting bargaining for the next round of public sector negotiations. A lot of work lies ahead for CUPE NL members, who will resist this government's right-wing ideology.

CUPE 488, representing laundry workers at Western Memorial Regional Hospital, is calling on the government to honour its commitment to maintain unionized services at the new acute care hospital in Corner Brook, where approximately 60 of our members are employed. Laundry services are at risk of being privatized at the new hospital, despite a commitment from former Premier Dwight Ball to preserve the work and the jobs in the public sector.

CUPE is determined that the jobs remain in public hands, with good wages and benefits that support the community, instead of the low-wage jobs that come with turning the laundry services over to the public sector.

Quebec Region

Negotiations at Université de Montréal have been very tense, to say the least, but CUPE 1244 was finally able to reach a satisfactory agreement after 26 long months of negotiations. The parties went back to the bargaining table after the membership rejected an offer from the employer. An agreement was also concluded with regard to temporary employees who have been hit the hardest with layoffs as a result of the pandemic.

The 80 members of CUPE 4574 who work at the École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP) have also signed a new collective agreement. The new three-year contract sets out annual salary increases of 2%. Other interesting gains were made in the area of vacation and parental leaves, and a clause on telework was also negotiated. This round of bargaining took place in a respectful and productive climate.

Back-to-school preparations in the university sector have kept the overwhelming majority of our members very busy this fall.

In the energy sector, our Hydro Quebec locals had to ask for the Labour Administrative Tribunal's intervention to compel their employer to negotiate the terms and conditions related to working remotely. The pandemic upended the organization of work, but this in no way justifies putting aside collective bargaining to deal with this key working condition.

Loto Quebec casinos reopened at the beginning of the summer and our members are finally back at work. Negotiations have resumed in several CUPE locals representing the Crown Corporation's employees.

A labour coalition has formed with a mission to denounce the offshoring of jobs in the telecommunications sector. The two largest unions in this sector, Unifor and CUPE, have joined forces to organize demonstrations and call upon the federal government to take action. The provincial Communications Sector Council also submitted a position paper on the matter during pre-budget consultations. During the federal election campaign, we proposed to the federal parties that Canada's legislative framework be modified so that foreign companies doing business in Canada via the internet be required to pay taxes on their profits, or a 3% tax on digital services. In addition, we're demanding that governments that subsidize the industry prohibit the offshoring of jobs.

CUPE 429 has reached an agreement with the City of Montreal. More than 1,700 members who attended a ratification meeting voted 79% in favour of the agreement which addresses the problem of anaemic wage rates at the bottom of the salary structure and guarantees a minimum salary of \$15 per hour for all members. The six-year agreement also includes salary increases of 10% for the years 2019 to 2023, as well as a minimum increase of 1.5% and a maximum, to be calculated based upon the evolution of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Montreal, of 2.15% in 2024 and 2.5% in 2025.

Ontario Region

On September 3, the Ford government prorogued the Ontario Legislature until October 4, 2021, citing a desire to see who wins the federal election before proceeding with the business of governing Ontario. Once again, they have shown a true lack of leadership in the face of surging COVID-19 cases and the start of a new school year.

Ontario has now entered its fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and on August 17 the Ford government made vaccination policies mandatory in high-risk settings, including hospitals, home care, education, and emergency services. This has left employers across the province scrambling to put in place their own vaccine policies, and left workers facing considerable uncertainty.

Throughout the summer, Premier Ford consistently refused to consider a "vaccine passport" program – only to backtrack and announce that individuals will be required to show proof of vaccination to access certain business settings and events effective September 22.

Following a fraught school year in 2020/21, our locals in the school board and university sectors are focused on a healthy and safe return to classrooms and campuses, with a focus on ventilation, masking, and vaccines.

In the municipal sector, bargaining continues to be challenging, as employers try to use the pandemic as an excuse for wage restraints. Our locals continue to fend off these arguments, and we are making some gains in the face of this adversity with agreements in a large number of our municipal, library, public health, and housing bargaining units.

Not all is rosy at municipal bargaining tables. Our members in CUPE 1542 who work at the Township of Wellesley, for example, are facing a very difficult round of negotiations where the employer has tabled numerous concessions and is seeking to rewrite a collective agreement that has a long history of working very well for both parties. The twelve members of this bargaining unit voted unanimously in favour of strike action and are hopeful they can reach a fair agreement with the assistance of a provincial conciliation officer.

CUPE Ontario released a comprehensive report on OMERS underfunding investments returns, which have significantly underperformed other major defined benefit pension plans and funds over the long term, both pre-pandemic and post pandemic, underperforming its own internal benchmarks over 5 and 10-year periods, facts which are not disclosed in OMERS annual reporting.

We will continue to call on OMERS to increase their transparency and be held accountable, by having an independent review of their investment failures. Achieving strong investment returns is an issue that unions like CUPE and employers have common ground and a shared interest in.

On August 11, CUPE filed a legal challenge with the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario (FSRA) about OMERS' (Ontario Municipal Employee's Retirement System) treatment of paramedics accessing early retirement options.

CUPE pension staff and CACO (CUPE Ambulance Committee of Ontario) have been working with OMERS to address these concerns. CUPE Ontario has advocated for years on behalf of paramedics to gain access to the same early retirement provisions available to other emergency services workers. There are real concerns that OMERS is violating the *Pension Benefit Act* (PBA) as well its own bylaws, leaving CUPE with no option but to file a legal challenge.

Manitoba Region

Persistent and consistent work by the Manitoba NDP caucus in the legislature resulted in five particularly problematic bills being stalled in the legislature last session, and "held over" for debate this fall. These bills were:

- Bill 16, *The Labour Relations Amendment Act*, which would prolong strikes and lockouts.
- Bill 35, *The Public Utilities Ratepayer Protection and Regulatory Reform Act*, which would have removed public oversight of public hydro rates.
- Bill 40, *The Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Amendment and Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act*, which would have further privatized liquor sales in Manitoba.

- Bill 57, *The Protection of Critical Infrastructure Act*, which would have targeted Indigenous protestors.
- Bill 64, *The Education Modernization Act*, which would have eliminated public school boards and forced union representation votes.

Because the NDP delayed passage of these bills, CUPE and our allies in labour and the community had time to mobilize fight back campaigns. In the meantime, general dissatisfaction and dismay with the lack of leadership shown by the government grew to the point where polling numbers forced Premier Brian Pallister to resign and force a leadership race within the governing provincial Progressive Conservative Party.

Following Pallister's resignation, the interim premier announced that all five of the offending bills will be withdrawn. While they could be brought back as new legislation in the future, CUPE is counting this as a major victory for workers in Manitoba.

Health care bargaining continues in Manitoba, a task understandably more difficult in a pandemic but our members are becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of progress at the table. Coordination is a key part of the strategic approach to negotiations in this sector, with a bargaining council comprised of our four health care locals: 204 (WRHA/Shared Health), 500 (Riverview Health Centre), 4270 (Southern Health-Santé Sud), and 8600 (Northern Regional Health Authority). Facing an intransigent employer, all four locals concluded strike votes in August, resulting in an overwhelming strike mandate of more than 97% across all locals. The employer still has not provided their wage mandate nor discussed monetary issues at the table, but we are hopeful a strong strike vote will help force their hand.

CUPE 998 is currently bargaining with Manitoba Hydro and the newly formed crown corporation Efficiency Manitoba (EM). The EM contract is a first contract and will incorporate CUPE 998 members who were transferred from Manitoba Hydro to EM. Both tables have been meeting since early 2021 but are awaiting a result in the contract dispute between the employer and IBEW to move beyond primary language and non-monetary items.

In August, the decision of the Manitoba Labour Board in that dispute established a general wage increase that again broke the government mandate, with wage increases of 1.5%, 0.5%, and 1.5%, over three years. The agreement also included a COVID stipend until February 2022 with retroactive payments of between \$5,000 and \$7,500 for IBEW members with annual earnings between \$50,000 and \$100,000. This decision sets the bar for our members and we are hopeful we can reach an agreement in line with this decision in coming days.

Saskatchewan Region

As is happening elsewhere in Canada, the fourth wave of the pandemic is upon the province. Unlike most provinces though, the size of that wave is driven by poor choices made by the Saskatchewan Party government in early summer when they removed all COVID-related public health orders. This, along with low vaccination rates, has caused infection rates and hospitalizations to rise, adding to the incredible stress and strain already faced by our health care workers.

I was meeting with the CUPE Saskatchewan Executive Board in early September when the government sheepishly announced that they would be reinstating several restrictions as well as the provincial state of emergency. At the same time, they gave health care unions an ultimatum to reach an agreement with the employer on staffing mobility and deployment within 72 hours or have one imposed – despite the fact that the parties were already discussing a new letter of understanding to address these concerns.

CUPE 5430, representing health care workers across the province, has reported over 425 formal workload complaints since the beginning of the year, mostly rooted in staffing shortages. As the pandemic has dragged on, many health care workers are retiring, leaving their jobs, or reducing their availability. Members are feeling overworked, experiencing burnout, and are reluctant to accept overtime or additional shifts. As a result, the employer is frequently mandating overtime and denying vacation and other leaves requests.

As a new school year began, our members working in education raised concerns about the lack of consistent safety protocols. The provincial government failed to show leadership on this file, leaving each school division to develop their own policies and procedures on masking, distancing, and cleaning, resulting in a confusing patchwork of protections for workers and students across the province.

Alberta Region

It is almost as if Premier Kenney and his Saskatchewan neighbour Premier Moe were in competition to see who could “open up” their province the quickest, only to find themselves locked in a battle to see whose decisions resulted in the worst pandemic statistics. They have both taken the lead in different indicators, and I think it’s safe to say that it was a draw for most of the summer. But as the last one to reinstate public health orders, which he only did on September 15, Kenney definitely wins for being the most stubborn.

Throughout the summer, Albertans gathered safely out-of-doors to call for protection of public health in the province. Led by concerned health care professionals, these rallies called on the provincial government to reverse their decision to cease asymptomatic COVID testing, contact tracing, and isolation measures. CUPE Alberta supported these rallies and called on CUPE members to join these grassroots efforts to restore public health measures in order to protect Albertans and their health care system.

As in Saskatchewan, the new school year started with a patchwork of protocols that varied by school district because the provincial government failed to provide province-wide guidance and direction, adding a high level of stress for our members working in the sector, as well as for students and parents. Some districts have even interpreted the (lack of) directives to mean they are not allowed to mandate masks and distancing inside schools or classrooms.

British Columbia Region

The BC NDP government announced it will recognize the new federal holiday on September 30 – Day for Truth and Reconciliation – for this year, for provincial sector employees. While not recognized as a general statutory holiday for all workers in the province, we are working to secure agreements with other employers to recognize this important holiday as a day for reflection and planned action toward truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

A funding agreement was reached with the federal government in early July that builds on the investments the Horgan government had already made in early learning and child care, with an additional \$3.2 billion over the next five years. This moves the province closer to their goal of achieving \$10 a day child care. It also makes our campaign for public early learning and child care delivery through the public school system even more important. Staff is working closely with CUPE BC and locals in the K-12 sector to ensure the success of the existing 24 “seamless day” pilot projects for before- and after-school care, to bring us closer to the goal of securing 10,000 new public child care spaces in public schools across the province.

CUPE 1004 continued its campaign to protect the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) from privatization. In early July, the local organized a day of action and a week-long radio ad that received national media attention. The provincial government has pledged one million dollars to support the PNE, but this falls well short of the \$8 million the organization requires for ongoing financial stability. Negotiations are ongoing between the PNE and senior levels of government. The PNE is one of the region’s most important seasonal employers, with more than 4,200 workers at the peak of the summer season. Most of the workers at the PNE are members of CUPE 1004.

Despite previous threats by some municipalities of lasting financial pressures due to pandemic impacts, we continue to achieve positive settlements in collective bargaining across the province in the municipal sector, with wage increases of 2% per year. Leveraging our strategic and coordinated bargaining approach, our locals have had great success in pushing back on any concessions tabled by employers. Over the next few months, we will be working with locals to move past temporary workplace adjustment agreements that were negotiated at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and reassess the needs in various workplaces with respect to remote work opportunities, extension of layoffs and recall, and protection of precarious workers.

Hospital Employees’ Union (HEU)

In 2002, the BC Liberal Government of the day introduced Bills 29 and 94. Sweeping and unprecedented legislation that reached into public sector health and social services collective agreements, ripping out anti-contracting out protections and allowing for sub-contracting. Public sector employers were replaced by multi-national corporations who slashed wages to half their previous rates and provided minimal health and welfare benefits and no pensions.

Over the next 17 years, HEU set about organizing and re-organizing the private sector workforce, as work was contracted out and contracts were flipped. After almost two decades, HEU represents the vast majority of workers in the contracted-out health sector.

On August 30, the BC NDP government announced that they were repatriating health authority owned and operated hospital and long-term care contracted out support services to the public sector.

After an epic battle, where support service workers still make less in 2021 than they did in 2002, this is a massive victory for the more than 4,500 mostly racialized and mostly women members who work in contracted support services.

Union organizers who worked so hard to sign-up these members will work alongside other HEU staff over the coming months, to implement the transition plan.

Meanwhile, HEU continues to work through issues related to the pandemic, including single-site orders, vaccine mandates and chronic short-staffing. Organizing and many labour relations matters were complicated by the wildfires across the BC interior throughout the summer.

Airlines

On August 14, members of CUPE 4070 ratified a collective agreement with WestJet Encore. The five-year deal includes wage improvements and momentum towards industry-standard scheduling and pay rules. CUPE represents 650 cabin crew members at WestJet Encore.

And on September 7, CUPE 4070 reached a tentative agreement with Swoop. This is also a five-year deal with improvements and wage increases. The next few weeks will be dedicated to presenting the agreement to the membership and organizing the ratification vote.

Pending ratification, this would mean that all three CUPE 4070 bargaining units will have achieved a first collective agreement. This would be a notable accomplishment at any time, but given the context in which the airline sector has operated in the last 18 months, this is a true testament to the hard work and dedication of the local leadership and staff.

Organizing

For the reporting period of July 1 to September 30, 2021, CUPE welcomed 1,262 new members in 23 bargaining units, including 526 in healthcare, 463 in social services, 232 in the municipal sector, 18 in the transportation sector, and 23 office and technical workers.

There are currently 107 active campaigns underway that, if successful, would bring 22,224 new members to our union.

In the Atlantic region, we continue to proceed with an organizing drive at Paladin Security. Two issues raised by the employer, concerning the inclusion of shift supervisors in the bargaining unit and an unfair labour practice complaint, will be heard and decided before the votes can be counted.

In the Maritimes, 14 active campaigns could, if successful, bring almost 3,000 workers into CUPE including 1,400 from the health sector and 1,000 from emergency and security services.

In the Quebec region, CUPE welcomed 127 new members to our union. We are actively pursuing 12 campaigns in the municipal sector.

The Ontario region has welcomed 250 new members into our union and currently has four active campaigns that could see over 8,000 new members join CUPE.

Manitoba region has 8 active campaigns ongoing in the education, health care, and crown sectors that, if successful, would see 1267 new members join our union.

In Saskatchewan we have 3 active campaigns, including one at the City of Warman which would bring 80 public works, parks and recreation, and city hall workers into CUPE.

The Alberta region welcomed 493 new members to our union, including 340 from social services and 153 in the healthcare sector. Four active organizing campaigns could bring in another 595 new members.

Organizers in British Columbia continue to be busy with 25 active campaigns across various sectors including social services, recreation, culture and entertainment, and the municipal sector, with the potential of adding close to 2,200 new members to our union. CUPE welcomes municipal workers from the Village of Granisle and social service workers from the WISH Drop-in Centre as newly organized members.

HEU has organized 373 new members in four certifications since our last report. There are two active campaigns ongoing at this time, one in long term care and the other in assisted living.

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

- Lisa Higginbotham CUPE Local 3730 – SK
- John Ivers CUPE Local 1000 – ON
- Mark Dennis CUPE Local 1334 – ON
- Emmanuel Fongwa CUPE Local 4655 – AB
- Jacquie Clark CUPE Local 1936 – BC
- Sam Basi CUPE Local 37 – AB
- John Michael Mingle CUPE Local 4400 – ON
- Rob Sagrati CUPE Local 2544 – ON
- Jeff Stewart CUPE Local 8911 – BC
- Karen Underhill CUPE Local 882 – SK
- Michael Direnzo CUPE Local 2544 – ON
- Cameron (Troy) McDougall CUPE Local 917 – BC

Retired Staff

- Thomas Chesterman National Representative
Comox Valley Area Office
- Germain Boudreau National Representative
Quebec Regional Office

In solidarity,



MARK HANCOCK
National President

:tp/ceu