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NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT MARCH 2023 – JUNE 2023

Sisters, Brothers and Friends:

We have just wrapped up our division conventions, always a sure sign that spring is almost over.

With every convention held in-person for the first time since 2019, it was an important opportunity for members to reconnect with each other and their union. There was a great energy that came from that reconnection, along with enormous shows of solidarity and passion and respectful debate.

In my address to each convention, I acknowledged that our members, and workers generally, are tired, stressed, and frustrated. This is in part because our public services have been starved of resources and cannot keep up with demand, and because of staffing shortages caused by demographics and a lack of foresight and action by employers and governments.

Another key factor for the frustration, of course, is the cost-of-living crisis we are all facing.

CUPE is fighting hard to address this at bargaining tables across the country. We are strategically coordinating our negotiation efforts like never before and engaging our members in the process, so they know what to expect. And when we don't get what we need at the table, we are using our collective leverage as workers, taking strike votes and strike action when we are left with no other choice.

We are demanding the respect, and with that the compensation, that workers deserve. If there was any thought that the militancy our union displayed prior to the pandemic was lost, our members have shown the opposite is true. We are more militant than ever before, as displayed by the number of locals who have taken strike action in recent months.

This militancy, along with our clear progressive values and a lot of hard organizing work, is leading to more and more workers joining our union. CUPE is continuing to grow, and that is great news for our new members, for our union, and for the broader labour movement.

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

CUPE had a significant presence at the 30th convention of the Canadian Labour Congress in Montreal this May, with more than 350 delegates. Convention adopted six Action Plans on topics including affordability, the care economy, the climate crisis, and Indigenous action, dozens of resolutions, and a few significant constitutional amendments. Together, these decisions set a clear direction for the labour movement for the next three years and beyond.

CUPE delegates participated in debate with moving interventions and rousing speeches and supported the re-election of the four incumbent officers. I look forward to continuing to work closely with CLC President Bea Bruske, Secretary-Treasurer Lily Chang, and Vice-Presidents Larry Rousseau and Siobhan Vipond.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Once again, CUPE participated in the annual Federation of Canadian Municipalities conference, held in Toronto in late May. We hosted a workshop titled "*Difficult Conversations: How P3's Put Private Profit ahead of Public Interest*", where panelists spoke about the risks municipalities should be aware of when considering any form of privatization and discussed the possibilities for moving forward with a truly public model of funding and financing much needed municipal infrastructure.

At the trade show, we had hundreds of conversations with local government officials from across the country about the work our members do in their communities, the social, financial, and infrastructure challenges communities and the risks associated with privatization. It's always good to catch up with so many current and former CUPE members and staff who are serving their communities as elected officials.

Collective Bargaining/Strikes/Lockouts

PROVINCE	LOCAL	EMPLOYER	#OF MEMBERS	STRIKE BEGAN	DURATION
Québec	5454	Société Québécoise du Cannabis	300	May 17, 2022	Ongoing
Québec	2614	Société des arrimeurs de Québec (SAQ)	81	Lockout September 15, 2022	Ongoing
British Columbia	561	First Transit	213	February 27, 2023	Ongoing
Québec	301	City of Westmount	300	March 14, 2023	Rotating job action
Nova Scotia	5047	Halifax Regional Education Authority	1800	May 18, 2023	Ongoing
Ontario	4600	Carleton University	3652	March 27, 2023	9 days
Ontario	2276	Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet	91	March 31, 2023	20 days
Québec	3332	Société de transport de Longueuil	115	April 4, 2023	1 day
Ontario	233	Toronto Metropolitan University	110	April 17, 2023	18 days
Québec	2929	Société Québécoise des infrastructures	500	April 19, 2023	Rotating job action

CUPE 5454

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

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

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

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

CUPE 2614

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

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

CUPE 561

More than 200 transit drivers in the Fraser Valley, members of CUPE 561 began job action on February 2, 2023, by refusing to collect transit fares. Pressure tactics were escalated with a full withdrawal of service, excluding HandyDART services, for two days in February, beginning February 27, and another three days in March.

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

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

CUPE 301

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

On March 14, one month after waging a 48-hour strike, CUPE 301 members struck for another three days, with more rotating job action on the horizon. Negotiations had reached an impasse over work schedules and wages, given historic inflation and the rise of interest rates.

The parties have entered conciliation, where CUPE notes that there continues to be a lack of meaningful progress.

CUPE 5047

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

While these striking workers confront a hostile government and employer, their struggle for wage increases and improved working conditions has resonated powerfully with workers across the province. Members of CUPE 5047 include early childhood educators, library specialists, educational assistants and assistive technology support workers who assist students with special needs.

CUPE 4600

Members of CUPE 4600 commenced strike action against Carleton University on March 27, 2023. The two bargaining units within this local are employed as teaching assistants (TAs), sessional lecturers, and contract instructors at the university.

These members held the line for nine days in a strike that yielded significant gains. Improvements include new paid gender affirmation leave, improved parental leave provisions, anti-scab language, sick time for temporary TAs and historic new language recognizing intellectual property rights for contract instructors. Negotiated wage increases range from 14% for contract instructors, to 9% for graduate teaching assistants, as well as end-of-term premium pay for TAs.

CUPE 2276

This three-week strike was over the issue of being “stuck on shift”, a scheduling problem intensified by the staffing crisis created by the employer, an ongoing and significant concern for CUPE members within this sector. Workers are forced to remain at work doing double or triple shifts due to staff shortages. Our members remained resolute in their demands and on March 31 reached a two-year agreement that includes a 4.5% wage increase for all workers, language that protects workers from stuck shifts, and fairer compensation when workers are required to stay at work.

CUPE 3332

On April 4, 2023, more than 100 members from CUPE 3332 who work as administrative staff at la Société de transport de Longueuil held a one-day strike. Despite multiple bargaining sessions, including conciliation, they had yet to reach an agreement. With a strong strike mandate, they wanted to send a clear message to the employer. The main unresolved issues are wages, vacation, and pension matters.

CUPE 233

CUPE 233 members, employed as custodial and maintenance staff at Toronto Metropolitan University, began strike action on April 17, 2023. These members wanted fair wages and were pushing back against a unilateral change to the pension plan by the employer. CUPE 233 members remained steadfast in their resolve to hold the line until they reached a fair deal. Their new agreement includes a mix of percentage and flat rate increases that will result in a 10.5 to 11% increase over the three-year term. They also reached an agreement to discuss decision-making protocols related to their pension plan.

CUPE 2929

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

These workers are responsible for supporting public organizations in the management of their public infrastructure projects by ensuring the planning, execution, and monitoring of projects, and they also support ministries and other organizations by providing them with construction, operation, and property management services.

Collective Bargaining

Following extensive negotiations, CUPE 4875 announced on May 18 that a bargaining impasse had been reached with its employer. The local represents education support workers at North East School Division in Saskatchewan. The union and the school division will be entering mandatory mediation as per the *Saskatchewan Employment Act*.

Two tentative agreements were rejected by the membership, with wages and the recruitment and retention issue many classifications are facing as the main outstanding issues.

CUPE 4875 remains firm in their demands for fair compensation for education support workers. Over the past decade, these workers' wages have been stagnant. Between the rising cost of living and years of inadequate wage increases, these education support workers have experienced a 10% loss in purchasing power.

CUPE 2484, which represents workers at Selwyn Community Child Care in Toronto, achieved an 18% increase over 4 years for one of their child care units along with a \$1,000 signing bonus. Another unit secured WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board) protection and established a sick leave bank for their members. Firm pressure from an engaged membership was crucial in achieving this agreement. These are significant gains for these child care workers and CUPE 2484 intends to use this to establish a clear sectoral pattern when their other units bargain.

The Ontario Superior Court of Justice issued a long-awaited judgement over the *Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) Labour Dispute Resolution Act – Bill 150*, which became law in 2011 and stripped the right to strike from TTC workers. CUPE 2 and the Amalgamated Transit Union's (ATU) Local 113, subsequently filed a legal challenge. On May 10, 2023, Justice Chalmers found Bill 150 to be an infringement on the constitutional right to strike. We believe this is the first time since the 2015 Saskatchewan Federation of Labour decision that the right to strike has been successfully restored to a group of employees who had been declared an essential service. This is a major victory, and it is unlikely the government will appeal the decision.

Regional Updates

Maritimes Region

New Brunswick

In April, I joined CUPE New Brunswick leaders and members for their annual convention. This event marked 60 years of activism for the division. Delegates had important conversations and took the opportunity to celebrate the contributions of many trail blazers who have made significant contributions to the labour movement over the past six decades.

I also joined many CUPE members and activists at Moncton City Hall as they stood together in solidarity for the teachers in the province to let the government know that these workers deserve the respect of a fairly negotiated deal. Bright yellow fists were also waving in a show of solidarity for the PSAC (Public Service Alliance of Canada) members who were walking the line and fighting for a fair contract.

New Brunswickers are not only showing solidarity because they want to, they are doing it because they have to. Premier Higgs takes every opportunity to put up barriers for marginalized communities. Higgs has infuriated many with his blatant disregard for 2SLGBTQI+ youth with his plan to review Policy 713, which was intended to make schools a safe space for children to express themselves openly, without fear or shame.

This premier's disregard also extends to the rights of Indigenous Peoples as he tries to bypass the duty of consultation with First Nations about further natural gas development. Public healthcare faces its own risk with Bill 40, which legalizes shifting some surgeries in private facilities on the taxpayers' dime. These issues shed a bright light on the fact that nothing is safe at the hands of right-wing governments.

While New Brunswick PC's report a historic \$862.2 million budget surplus, workers in health care and long-term care are ramping up their call to raise staffing levels in the region. These workers, who take care of some of the most vulnerable groups, have among the lowest wages in the country in this field. CUPE NB has denounced the lack of real wage improvements in the sector.

Militant anti-privatization efforts in the province have kept school bus services public for the time being, but other parts of the education sector are under attack. In an undemocratic move, the government is reviewing the *NB Education Act* and has announced that it is stripping the decision-making rights of the anglophone District Education Councils (DEC). These elected boards which oversee public education will be changed from decision-making bodies to advisory councils.

Prince Edward Island

I was pleased to make my way to PEI twice this spring. On April 1, I joined CUPE members and activists at Confederation Landing in Charlottetown as they showed solidarity in a rally for fair wages. The cost of living on PEI has increased more than any other Canadian province, yet workers continue to fall behind without meaningful wage increases to combat the stress of inflation.

In May, I headed back to the Island for the CUPE PEI's 43rd Annual Convention in Brudenell. More than 130 delegates debated important issues, made constitutional changes, most notably voting unanimously in favour of adding a diversity seat to CUPE PEI's executive board. Congratulations to Ashley Clark on her election as President of the provincial division. Her commitment to advocate for fair wages, safe working conditions, and quality public services will benefit CUPE members and the communities they work and live in. I extend my congratulations to other newly elected representatives as they take on their new roles and applaud all candidates who came forward. A special thanks to Leonard Gallant for his meaningful contributions to CUPE and the labour movement during his tenure as division president.

Paramedics, members of CUPE 3324, will see significant gains with their new tentative agreement reached on May 16. These first responders' wages were below those of their counterparts in New Brunswick. The agreement includes parity with the NB workers, equal to a wage increase of between 26-29% over three years.

Municipal workers at CUPE 501 and CUPE 830 with the City of Charlottetown obtained a cost-of-living adjustment in January with a retroactive increase of 5.9% for 2022. Islanders need these increases to afford the elevated cost of living in the province.

Conciliation in March led to a deal that saw increases of 10% to 10.25% over three years for CUPE 1870 members working at the University of Prince Edward Island. The deal included a flat rate wage adjustment of \$0.50.

We welcome newly certified workers at the Town of Three Rivers to our CUPE family. Since then, the employer has implemented wage increases following an unfair labour practice complaint that we had filed.

Atlantic Region

Newfoundland and Labrador

I had the great pleasure of attending the Newfoundland and Labrador Division Convention in St. John's from May 1 to 3, 2023, where delegates adopted constitutional amendments aimed at building a more effective division. I'm proud to report that they voted unanimously to add diversity representation on the CUPE NL Executive Board. A more diverse CUPE is a stronger CUPE!

Members also adopted resolutions that address health and safety concerns in the region, and the impact of staff shortages and poor working conditions on workers' mental health.

On May 1, convention delegates took to the streets joined by activists from other unions and allied organizations, to remind the government and employers that worker solidarity is a powerful force in Newfoundland and Labrador. We gathered at Harbourside Park in support of PSAC's remaining bargaining unit still on strike. Standing in solidarity with these Canadian Revenue Agency workers (members of the Union of Taxation Employees) was a great way to add to the energy of the first day of convention.

Since my last report, the provincial government tabled its budget. Based on the government's revised financial figures from 2022-2023, which report an additional \$1.5 billion in revenues, it is clear that the province is no longer in an economic crisis. However, the 2023-2024 budget reinvests none of this revenue in public services, leaving workers in health care, libraries, housing, education, and transition and group homes to have their income further eroded by high inflation.

CUPE NL has been campaigning for years to increase spending on public housing. In its budget, the government promised to invest \$17 million to repair and renovate vacant units, but again, there are no workforce retention plans associated with this money. The reality is that wages aren't competitive enough to attract the labour force required to complete these improvements.

The good news in this budget is the investment in early childhood education. For years, early childhood educators have been expected to do more with less. The announcement of a \$64 million investment is a good start towards meaningful wage enhancements for these education workers.

Nova Scotia

CUPE Nova Scotia held its 59th annual convention from May 28 to 31, 2023, in Membertou. The convention centre is run by the urban and progressive Mi'kmaq community on Unama'ki – Cape Breton. I was happy to connect with delegates from across the province to hear about the division's accomplishments this year, and their priorities for the work ahead. Many resolutions were debated and passed, and over \$60,000 was raised on the convention floor as a hardship donation for CUPE 5047's striking members.

We heard from Kendra Coombes, NDP MLA for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, who expressed her deep gratitude for the vital work CUPE members do across Nova Scotia, including those in long-term care and community services, education, home support, municipalities, and highways. Kendra stood in solidarity with striking CUPE 5047 members and reiterated that the right to free and fair collective bargaining is fundamental. She pledged to hold the Houston government accountable for its commitment to be worker-friendly, one they have not yet made good on.

Free and fair collective bargaining means that workers decide if a collective agreement is good for them. It's not up to government to dictate what workers need, or to impose a wage settlement, but this is what the Houston government is trying to do to CUPE 5047 members. These 1600 members work as early childhood educators, student support workers, education program assistants, child and youth care practitioners, and other classifications who provide direct support to students at the Halifax Regional Centre for Education. The employer's offer did not address the specific concerns of these members, and they overwhelmingly rejected the offer and chose to exercise their right to strike. We're calling on the government to respond to our members' concerns and bargain in good faith.

I visited the picket line in early June. The financial insecurity of being on strike in this time of record high inflation is overwhelming. These members face even more instability as their communities are being devastated by the effects of climate change, in the form of unprecedented wildfires which have forced evacuations and destroyed homes.

Other school board locals ratified an agreement reached through conciliation in April. Through a process of wage harmonization, wage adjustments were achieved outside of the 6.5% increase pattern that government was trying to impose on them. Additionally, significant improvements were made to health and safety language that addresses workplace violence. Language was included to ensure pay and benefits continue in the event of a school closure due to health, security, or safety concerns, along with improvements to parental leave and pay guarantees for bus drivers.

Québec

SCFP-Québec held its biennial convention in May in Québec City and took the opportunity to celebrate CUPE's rich history in the province on the occasion of its 60th anniversary. I joined delegates for a march in support of the public sector bargaining committee's common front, under the slogan of "United with one voice". Convention delegates also paid tribute to CUPE 2614 (locked-out Port of Québec longshore workers) and CUPE 5454 (striking SQDC employees), by raising nearly \$275,000 in donations.

In May, SCFP-Québec appeared before a parliamentary commission with the FTQ to urge the government to be wary of reforms conjured by magic wand. Workers in the health and social services network have suffered enough from the shuffling and re-shuffling of their organizational structures, moves that were intended to solve all their problems. The message sent to Minister Dubé was clear: we need to include unions in these conversations and listen to the workers who provide front-line services. Our members have the expertise and know the issues that plague the system, so they are best positioned to propose solutions.

Employees of the Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk First Nation in the Lower St. Lawrence region have a new collective agreement. The fifteen or so blue- and white-collar workers represented by CUPE 5263 have made gains in paid leave, increased salary scales and allowances, and improved early retirement and deferred leave clauses. Finally, the employer will compensate for lost wages during a leave under the Québec Parental Insurance Plan.

The Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk First Nation, formerly known as the Malécite de Viger First Nation, is the only Wolastoqey Nation on Québec territory. Today, it has a small reserve at Cacouna in the Lower St. Lawrence, and its members form a diaspora spread across Québec, the rest of Canada, and the United States. Negotiations were conducted with mutual respect, and 92% of members ratified the agreement.

At the end of April, the province's labour board certified CUPE to represent 65 site nurses employed by Hydro-Québec, despite fierce opposition from the employer. These nurses provide health-related services on construction sites, including emergency evacuation operations. They generally work from site clinics or first-aid vehicles, and either receive patients or rush to their aid in the event of an accident. I'm happy to welcome these site nurses to CUPE, joining the more than 16,000 other Hydro-Québec employees we represent.

Some employers readily recognize the effects of inflation on employees' purchasing power and act accordingly, and it's important to recognize them. The municipality of Sainte-Marguerite-du-Lac-Masson has agreed to reopen the collective agreement with CUPE 2522, which represents about 30 unionized workers. The agreement provides for a general wage increase of 4.27%, retroactive to January 1, 2022. This measure offsets the gap between previously negotiated increases and the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The municipal administration recognizes the contribution of employees and the need to improve salaries for recruitment and retention purposes, for the good of the city and its taxpayers. A similar measure was adopted by the municipality of Labelle last June.

Locals representing staff at the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ) and the Laboratoire de santé publique du Québec (LSPQ) have concluded new collective agreements, which were ratified at the end of March by more than 95% of their 230 members.

Since March 2020, the INSPQ and LSPQ have found themselves in the midst of efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in Québec, which had slowed the pace of negotiations. Fortunately, the vast majority of bargaining objectives for each of the three locals were achieved, including wage parity with the Québec public health network. The agreement covers the period 2020-2026, with total salary increases ranging from 12.3% to 14.3%.

CUPE 3124, which represents the 110 drivers of the Société de transport du Saguenay, has signed an agreement that reflects the importance of public transport service in the Saguenay region. Fifteen full-time positions were added, and a new 4-day schedule was negotiated. Other major gains include the elimination of subcontracting and the development of transportation on demand. The new contract will better meet the needs of both users and members. Negotiations were respectful, and several joint committees have been set up to continue this work.

Ontario

More than one thousand CUPE members gathered in Toronto from May 31 to June 2 for CUPE Ontario's first in-person convention since the pandemic began. The convention's theme, "Celebrating solidarity, building power to make change" was a testament to achievements of the last year, including CUPE's victory in the rescinding of Doug Ford's anti-worker Bill 28. Delegates debated and voted on many resolutions and constitutional amendments, which will set the priorities for the year ahead, including organizing campaigns, and fighting austerity, privatization, and attacks on our democratic institutions.

Legal challenges in the province continue. Hailing frontline workers as heroes in one breath, while backing legislation that sets back wages in another, Ontario PCs have unsurprisingly appealed Justice Kuehnen's ruling that Bill 124 was unconstitutional. The bill, which capped public sector wages at 1%, was a blatant attack on workers' rights to free and fair collective bargaining. Ontarians would be better served if their government invested money where it is desperately needed, rather than wasting money fighting the working class in court. CUPE members across Ontario are standing up for their rights, refusing to accept less than what they need to keep up with the changing economy.

Doug Ford and his PC government continue to wreak havoc across Ontario. Now well into his second term as premier, it is obvious that he cares as little for the environment as he does for workers and our rights. He is using his official powers to help his friends develop the Greenbelt, while forcing municipalities to subsidize some of the costs. Communities are already tasked with providing many services without adequate funding. This move would further starve municipalities of resources, programs and infrastructure that residents rely on.

Recent announcements will have an impact on financial stability in the post-secondary sector. The general freeze on domestic tuition fees introduced by the provincial government in 2019-2020 will continue. Unfortunately, Conservatives didn't have the foresight to provide additional funding to these institutions to offset the freeze, resulting in continual cuts to university budgets, forcing them to do the same with far less.

An "expert panel" will be created to provide advice on recommendations about the long-term financial sustainability of post-secondary institutions in the province. Declining funding in recent years, along with lower tuition fees, have put pressure on the sector, as Ontario is reported to have the lower per-student university funding of any province – by a large margin. Although the review seems to be a step in the right direction, we believe a significant investment in institutions of higher learning would benefit everyone.

Almost 400,000 Ontarians cast their ballots in a province-wide referendum conducted by the Ontario Health Coalition. Of the more than 400,000 ballots cast, more than 98% voted no to the question "Do you want our public hospital services to be privatized to for-profit hospitals and clinics?"

The impetus for the referendum, Bill 60, allows more private clinics to offer various publicly funded surgeries, a strategy the Ford government claims will combat long wait times. Offloading certain procedures to private facilities could put further strain on the staff shortage in health care that the province is already facing if staff in the sector leave their jobs in public facilities to work in private ones.

Manitoba

The Manitoba government has announced that they will be using a public-private-partnership model to build new schools in the province. This announcement comes five years after the same government (albeit under a different premier) walked back a similar commitment after studies showed that P3 schools cost more, take longer to build, and provide worse learning environments for students. This is clearly a desperate ideological move by Premier Stefanson, who has ranked as the least popular premier in Canada since assuming the position in November 2021.

This is just one reason why the looming provincial election is so important to our members, and Manitobans. It's also an example of the significant differences between the current government and the vision the Manitoba NDP has for the province. While Stefanson is promising to privatize schools, NDP leader Wab Kinew is committed to putting a stop to this privatization, and to bring in P3 accountability and transparency legislation that will protect against future projects.

Wab Kinew made this commitment at CUPE Manitoba's convention in May in Brandon, where delegates voted unanimously to endorse the Manitoba NDP. The convention also heard from a panel of members who shared their experience in political engagement and organizing, providing delegates with ideas and inspiration for the coming election campaign. We are clearly ready to take on Stefanson and the PCs and elect a new Premier and an NDP government in October.

It was great to be in Brandon again, and to see more than 200 activists participate in debate on critical issues including the chronic underfunding of public services, ongoing recruitment and retention concerns, and the threat of privatization. It seemed like every second delegate who spoke was at a microphone for the first-time! My congratulations to Gina McKay who was re-elected as CUPE MB President, Mylene Holmes as the returning Secretary-Treasurer, and all the newly elected members of the CUPE MB Executive Board.

Saskatchewan

CUPE local leaders from across the province gathered in Regina for an All-Presidents' meeting hosted by CUPE Saskatchewan in May, where they shared their concerns about the ongoing crisis our members are facing because of the underfunding, mismanagement, and privatization of public services across the province. Despite the Saskatchewan Party government having a billion-dollar surplus, the services our members provide are facing chronic funding cuts and staff shortages. As a result, workers are facing burnout, made worse by rising costs and below inflation wages – and Saskatchewan communities are being starved of the services they rely on.

The meeting included a roundtable discussion with Saskatchewan NDP leader Carla Beck and NDP labour critic Nicole Sarauer, where leaders spoke about the eroding state of public services, the stress of the growing cost-of-living crisis, and the need to hold the Saskatchewan Party government accountable for their decisions. Local leaders also talked about the need to take these issues on at the bargaining table.

CUPE 5430 leaders have been touring the province to meet with members as they prepare for bargaining. Clear common themes have emerged, with short staffing topping the list. The ongoing recruitment and retention crisis across the health care sector is leading to service disruptions, especially in smaller and rural communities, and adding to the stress and strain on our members.

Despite a new Health Human Resources Plan, and a commitment to hire 300 more continuing care assistants (CCAs) in the last two provincial budgets, the government has recently admitted that there are only 17 more CCAs working in the Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Party government is clearly failing health care workers and their patients, and CUPE is calling on them to re-examine their recruitment strategy by reinstating the representative workforce program to engage Indigenous communities and to improve compensation and access to full-time employment.

This makes for a difficult bargaining climate and the employer isn't making it any easier. Despite having a common table with two other unions in the health care sector in recent rounds, and the creation of a union bargaining association, the employer continues to insist that they will negotiate with each union separately.

We continue to work with the Ministry of Education on the creation of the new Distance Learning Program being rolled out for the next school year. Nine employees of Sun West School Division, members of CUPE 4802, will be transferred to the new program. These transferred employees, along with approximately 100 newly hired online learning facilitators, will form a new CUPE local.

Alberta

I spent a long night on the east coast of the country anxiously watching the results of the Alberta provincial election slowly roll in. In the end, the United Conservative Party (UCP) has formed a majority government, with 48 seats. Albertan's health care, education, social services and pensions will continue to be threatened by a premier focused on austerity, privatization, and picking fights with the federal government. Working people, and the labour movement, clearly have a fight ahead of us.

Despite the bad news, there is some cause for celebration. The Alberta NDP elected the largest opposition caucus in the history of the province and has cemented themselves as one of two viable political parties in Alberta. With 38 MLAs, they will be a force to reckon with in the legislature, and important allies for us as we fight to protect public services and labour and human rights in the years ahead.

One of the fights ahead is in the K-12 sector. 38 of our 41 collective agreements in the sector are currently expired, and our education locals are preparing for difficult bargaining with a coordinated and united front. Most of our members in the sector have not seen a wage increase in years, as the provincial government has systematically cut education funding despite growing enrollment.

The 2023 provincial budget contained a light at the end of the tunnel, with the first real increase to school board funding in several years. It's still not enough to make up for the damage done, but it makes bargaining more viable than it was a year ago. And it shows that our locals did the right thing to hold firm in solidarity and wait to begin negotiations.

The Alberta Education Employees Committee (AEEC) is working to build solidarity among members and the public, including a new campaign to raise awareness about the challenges facing public education, to fight for better education funding, and for better wages for education workers.

British Columbia

CUPE BC's annual convention was held in Victoria this year, which allowed me to attend a ceremony on the grounds of the legislature, where a tree has been planted to commemorate workers injured and killed on the job. It may seem like a small measure, but it will be a lasting monument to the still-too-many workers whose lives are changed or lost because we still lack the necessary protections. It was also significant that the ceremony was hosted by Raj Chouhan, a former union organizer and leader who is now the Speaker of the BC Legislature.

Convention was kicked off by CUPE BC President Karen Ranalletta, whose address to delegates highlighted the gains our members and other public sector workers in the province have made in the past year, crediting a strong commitment from our members, a unified labour movement, and a government who is willing to listen. That commitment of our members was clear as they worked through the remaining three days of convention, sharing meaningful stories of our members and their workplaces during debate, and electing leaders to oversee the work of the division in the coming term. Congratulations to Karen, who was re-elected as President, to the returning Secretary-Treasurer Trevor Davies, and the entire CUPE BC Executive Board.

With the majority of our bargaining complete in the provincially funded sectors, the focus has shifted to the municipal sector. Our municipal locals are focused on strategic coordination to secure agreements on the heels of settlements achieved with local governments on Vancouver Island late last year which addressed inflation and work-life balance.

This is especially true in Metro Vancouver, where locals are either actively bargaining or ready to begin negotiations. Earlier this spring CUPE 23 secured agreements with the City of Burnaby and Burnaby Public Library that set the stage, and the bar, for the region with increases of 3% in 2022, 4.5% in 2023, 4% in 2024, and a one-time 3.5% one-time bonus on 2022 wages. Since then, CUPE 403 (Township of Langley) and CUPE 774 (Abbotsford) also reached settlements on par with Burnaby.

Municipal locals in the Okanagan are in the early stages of coordinating upcoming bargaining, which will begin later this year. Recent settlements in the Kootenays and North are following the provincial trends with wage increases between 3% to 6% per year. Our commitment to coordinated bargaining is clearly paying off.

Following an eight-month campaign, we are pleased to welcome more than 3,200 new university workers to our union. These graduate research assistants working at the University of British Columbia will join CUPE 2278, a local that already represents academic workers at the university. These workers sought union representation in search of better working conditions, fair compensation, and a dispute resolution process.

The Labour Relations Board found that more than 55% of all eligible employees had signed a union card, which meets the test for certification under provincial labour legislation. The employer has filed a number of objections, including one claiming these workers are not employees but students. If the board dismisses the objections, the union's application will be automatically granted.

Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)

HEU has successfully negotiated a template first collective agreement with two of the most prolific subcontractors in the health sector, with 38 HEU certifications between them. The template makes it easier to negotiate first collective agreements, meaning newly organized workers have the protections of a collective agreement more quickly. This supports our new members and has the potential to make organizing new groups of employees easier. It also defends against the potential for decertification drives.

With the pandemic-era single site order lifted and workers moving freely between long term care and assisted living sites, word of the template is spreading, and more unorganized workers are signing membership cards.

Looking ahead to 2024, HEU recently presented their priorities for the next provincial budget to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Their recommendations included: the building of more public long-term care homes; the establishment of common standards for working and caring conditions in long-term care facilities, with accompanying accountability and transparency measures, and; significant investments to address the ongoing recruitment and retention issue facing the health care sector.

Airlines

CUPE's flight attendants have had enough. They have ramped up efforts to put an end to being forced to work for free. The Airline Division's "Unpaid Work Won't Fly" campaign has highlighted the brutal reality that our workers in this sector face. An average of 34.86 hours per month go without remuneration. That's almost a full week of work performed without pay.

A National Day of Action was held on April 25, with events at airports in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal, to raise awareness about the injustices faced by flight attendants. These workers are tasked with keeping the public safe and comfortable on the ground and in the sky, and they should be paid for every minute they do so.

CUPE isn't the only union facing challenges in this sector. When WestJet and Swoop pilots issued a 72-hour strike notice, CUPE's 18,500 flight attendants solidarity actions were felt by these ALPA members. Congratulations to the pilots, whose team continued to bargain until a tentative deal was reached in the 11th hour.

On May 31, 2023, the Airline Division celebrated International Flight Attendant Day with a commemorative video highlighting the important work these workers do every day.

Organizing

For the reporting period of March 31 to May 30, 2023, CUPE welcomed 887 new members in six bargaining units, including 54 in social services, 29 in emergency and security services, 70 in energy, 34 in health and 700 new members in other sectors.

There are currently 159 active campaigns underway that, if successful, could bring 41,445 new members to our union.

In the Maritimes, there are currently 17 active campaigns which could bring 1,243 workers into CUPE, including 300 security guards at Paladin Security and 320 student employees at Mount Allison University.

Our Atlantic region currently has nine active campaigns in various sectors including health, social services, education, and municipal, which would see 1,177 new members join our union.

Quebec is working towards significant membership growth, with 27 active campaigns that, if successful, would see 6,340 new members join our CUPE family.

The Ontario region continues its organizing efforts, with 42 active campaigns in various sectors that have the potential to add 15,152 new members to our union, including 3,500 at the University of Waterloo and more than 6,551 members in healthcare.

Manitoba has 14 active campaigns, which could see 3,074 new members join our union, including 2,100 workers at the Winnipeg School Division.

Saskatchewan has 13 ongoing campaigns in various sectors, where we hope to bring 1,410 new workers into CUPE, 1,000 of which are Saskatchewan Health Authority workers.

The Alberta region was busy with 14 active organizing campaigns that could bring in 2,373 new members into CUPE. Six of the ongoing campaigns are in the education/post-secondary sectors where CUPE is hoping to add 1,248 members.

In British Columbia, there are 34 active campaigns across various sectors including social services, recreation, culture and entertainment, and municipal, with the potential of welcoming 10,676 new members.

In Memoriam/Personal

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

Members

Patrick Olson	CUPE 5430 – SK
Christy Storrs	CUPE 1825 – AB
Gérald Gauthier	CUPE 375 – QC
Ray Enns	CUPE 1719 – MB
Steven Seekins	CUPE 374 – BC – workplace fatality
Dennis Mol	CUPE 30 – AB
	Former CUPE AB President and NEB member

Retired Staff

Gilles Hamelin	Research and Legal Documentation Technician Quebec Regional Office
Beverley Buck	National Representative Alberta Regional Office
Gilles Giguère	Assistant Regional Director Quebec Regional Office

Active Staff

Shareen Witt	Administrative Support Professional Comox Valley Area Office
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In solidarity,



MARK HANCOCK
National President

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