

PROGRESS THROUGH PANDEMIC TIMES

(2019-2021)



Just a few months after Strategic Directions were adopted at our 2019 National Convention, our world was turned on its head as we were plunged into the chaos of a global pandemic. But the turmoil and uncertainty of COVID-19 did not deter us from continuing our fight for better jobs, stronger public services, and a more just and equal world for everyone.

As the pandemic swept across Canada, our members kept their communities running – and their union was there with them every step of the way.

Our union continues to evolve to become a safer, more inclusive place for our members, and we have been a leading voice in communities across Canada in the fight against systemic racism and discrimination.

We have kept up our fight to bring the protection of union membership to thousands more workers around the country, and we fought back against governments trying to use the pandemic as a cover to attack workers' rights.

We remained vigilant in defending our members' pensions and retirement security against threats from privatization. We issued health and safety guidance on the ever-evolving situation with COVID-19, to make sure our members stayed safe on the job and after work hours were finished. We also maintained strong collaboration with our political allies, community organizations, and international partners throughout the pandemic.

Though it feels like we faced a lifetime's worth of challenges over the past two years, we believe we can look back with pride at what we were able to achieve for our members and our communities.

Now, as we begin to look at the future after the pandemic, we are setting our sights on what needs to be fixed in our society and seizing the opportunity of heightened awareness to make real and lasting changes. The work that CUPE has undertaken over the past two years has put us on the right path to build a better world.



BUILDING STRENGTH FOR THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Over the past two years, CUPE has continued our fight for equity and human rights, increased our strength at the bargaining table, and grown our collective voice in the workplace and our communities by continuing to organize non-unionized workers. We have also stood strong against attacks on our members' jobs, pensions, and benefits, and kept up the fight for good jobs and safe jobs for our members.

EXPANDING OUR POWER

CUPE held our first virtual National Human Rights Conference in March 2021, which focused on helping members build strong, inclusive locals, with panel presentations and discussion groups to share ideas and success stories. This virtual conference was attended by over 700 participants and focused on human rights in the time of COVID-19.

In the lead-up to the National Human Rights Conference, regional meetings were held across Canada to hear from Black, Indigenous, and racialized members on the development of an Anti-Racism Strategy for CUPE, following a resolution from the 2019 National Convention. The Strategy will be presented for discussion at this convention.

Collective agreements have been reviewed for progressive and inclusive language for Indigenous, racialized, and other equity-seeking groups. CUPE is coding these new provisions to better track, promote and share inclusive language.

We continue to develop new anti-racism online education modules. We have also adapted the Steward Learning Series module *Challenging Racism in the Workplace* for online delivery.

Given the virtual environment for meetings and conferences over the course of the pandemic, we have developed guidelines on ensuring accessible virtual meetings. The guidelines were developed with input and advice from the National Persons with Disabilities Committee and released during National AccessAbility Week.

INCREASING OUR BARGAINING STRENGTH

The pandemic has put CUPE's 2016 bargaining policy to the test, and nationwide, employers and governments alike have seen the depths of CUPE's commitment to no-concession bargaining.

In regions across the country, we continue to coordinate our efforts in bargaining, as we fight layoffs and austerity demands from governments and employers. Where employers have pushed for redeployment, CUPE made sure our members' rights were respected.

Throughout the pandemic, bargaining continued in many sectors and regions, and we have resisted efforts by employers who tried to use the pandemic as an excuse to diminish our members' wages and working conditions.

We worked to ensure pension and health benefits coverage continued during the pandemic, and continued our fight to secure benefits for precarious, part-time and casual CUPE members.

We also worked to develop strong work-from-home language to protect the rights of members who were asked to work remotely due to the pandemic.

We continued to prioritize bargaining training, by adapting workshops for online delivery. These include preparing for bargaining, bargaining role play, team building, mobilizing for bargaining, strike preparation, a new strike planning session, and picket captain training. A new bargaining tool kit is also now available.

We have been working on bargaining and interest arbitration across the country. We have developed a reporting strategy that will allow access to more current collective agreement information data. We have also updated a First Collective Agreement template and created an accompanying guide that will be a resource for newly organized locals.

ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZED

Despite the challenges of reaching out to unorganized workers in the context of the pandemic, including remote work and physical distancing, we have continued our work of bringing the benefits and protections of union membership to non-unionized workers.

Even during the pandemic, across Canada, CUPE was approached by dozens of groups looking to organize their workplaces. Over the past two years, we have had 142 successful organizing drives and brought over 7,300 new members into CUPE.

The pandemic had a disproportionate impact on workers in precarious jobs, and CUPE's organizing efforts were especially successful in workplaces where jobs are mostly casual or part-time.



Organizing is never easy, and even in the middle of a pandemic we were confronted with aggressive anti-union campaigns by employers. However, some developments over the past few years have enhanced our ability to organize new members. In British Columbia and Ontario, for example, labour relations boards adapted their policies to accept digitally-signed membership cards. We have also taken advantage of digital meeting services like Zoom to allow more workers to attending virtual information meetings without fear of being identified by their employer.

DEFENDING OUR MEMBERS

Even in the middle of a pandemic, right-wing governments and employers have been unrelenting in their attacks on our members and the services they provide. Over the past two years, CUPE has fought hard to defend our members' jobs, benefits, retirement security and, in the case



of Alberta's Bill 32, their ability to organize and speak as one voice through their union. We have also fought to ensure our members and their families are protected against the unrelenting health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Tens of thousands of our members faced layoffs during the pandemic. We have supported locals through this crisis, working with employers to mitigate the impact, redeploy members where possible, reduce the duration and number of layoffs, and ensure the public is aware of the loss of service and impact these cuts will have on communities.

CUPE prepared documents and guides to help our members navigate federal income support programs like the CERB. In fact, our website contained some of the best information available during the early months of the pandemic. We had more web traffic on cupe.ca in the first two weeks of the pandemic than we would normally see in a full year. We continue to work tirelessly to ensure our members on the frontlines of health care, long-term care and emergency services have the information they need to demand better protection. This work includes online resources, sector-specific right-to-refuse guides, and other COVID-19 related health and safety material.

As public health measures allow some workplaces to reopen, we continue our work to safeguard our members' health and safety, and the safety of the public.



PROTECTING AND EXPANDING OUR PENSIONS

CUPE has worked across the country to defend our pension plans against attempts by employers to convert them to “shared risk” plans.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, CUPE is leading the fight against the provincial government’s plan to cancel enhanced CPP benefits for 34,000 workers. In Alberta, CUPE has joined a coalition of unions challenging the Kenney government’s attempt to assume unilateral control over the pensions of 400,000 public sector workers. We are also working to challenge the Ford government’s changes to OMERS in Ontario. Nationally, we have taken a lead in the labour movement to challenge changes being proposed by the Public Sector Accounting Board (PSAB) that would severely threaten defined benefit pensions in Canada.

We have been vigilant in ensuring pension contributions continue during various paid and unpaid leaves imposed on CUPE members across the country because of COVID-19.

Throughout the pandemic, we have lobbied governments to protect pension contributions and continuity. Wherever these rights have been under attack, we have provided research, analysis, communications, and advice to defend our members’ pension plans.

CUPE has launched a pension and privatization toolkit, titled *Keep our pensions out of privatization*, to provide information to activists and pension representatives about the dangers of pension funds investing in public-private partnerships (P3s) and other types of privatization.

CUPE has also made a new Steward Learning Series pension module available, titled *What Stewards Need to Know about Pensions*. In addition to learning about public pensions and the different types of workplace pension plans, stewards will also be able to explore how to support members in protecting their pension rights.

A Pension Summit was held this past October to share strategies about how to improve access to pensions for all workers. CUPE pension activists attended this one-day virtual summit to learn and discuss the need for better pension plan options for precarious workers.

FIGHTING FOR SAFE WORKPLACES

The pandemic has added new emphasis to the importance of workplace health and safety, and CUPE continues to provide updated research and guidance about the increased challenges to health and safety that COVID-19 poses. We updated our respiratory health materials to reflect the challenges our members face, and new resources are regularly added to our website to advise our members as they navigate this crisis.



We also prepared regular updates on the “right to refuse”, mental health supports, and documentation about COVID-19.

CUPE supported efforts for a “presumption” for workplace injury or illness claims for COVID-19 exposures and has prepared “leading practices” to negotiate safe return-to-work protocols. We also provided sector-specific advice about protections from COVID-19 and checklists to ensure a safe return to physical work locations.

Given the increase in intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 crisis, CUPE’s work on domestic violence in the workplace remains crucial, particularly with requirements to work from home. We continue to participate in the federal level project developing policies and training material on the issue of domestic violence at work.

CUPE partnered with Egale Canada and Carleton University in a research project on safety in public services for LGBTQ2+ older adults and workers. The research examined what measures and approaches make public services accessible and safer for LGBTQ2+ older adults and for LGBTQ2+ workers.

CUPE is partnering with the Montfort Hospital in Ottawa on a research project to study the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of environmental service workers and housekeeping workers in acute care settings.

FIGHTING FOR GOOD JOBS

Over the past two years, CUPE has succeeded in improving working conditions for temporary and part-time workers and addressing disparity between full-time workers and their part-time and temporary counterparts, at many bargaining tables.

During the pandemic, we saw an increase in member participation through digital technologies, which allowed us to turn strong mandates from our membership into concrete gains for our members, including part-time workers.

CUPE continues to fight to harness the power of new technologies to improve working conditions and health and safety for our members. CUPE is actively supporting automation of work where the



goal is to reduce and prevent injuries in the workplace. For example, we have pushed municipalities to invest in automated equipment for garbage collection, which has led to a significant reduction in workplace injuries for our members.

The changing nature of work is also threatening stable and permanent public sector jobs. Automation, advances in artificial intelligence (AI), and the growing reach of digital networks threatens our members’ work and their privacy. CUPE members in many sectors are already experiencing the impact of AI in their workplaces.

In October 2020, CUPE launched an awareness campaign called “I Support My Library, I Support My Library Workers”. This campaign addresses several issues including fighting back against the rising use of checkout technologies that are leading to the loss of good jobs in libraries across the country.

In the post-secondary education sector, CUPE has been pushing back against automation that will reduce the work of teaching assistants in the online learning sphere, negatively impacting the ability of students to connect with their educators.

We also continue to fight for our many members whose jobs are being affected by employers looking to automate call centres and clerical work, for example.

Many new technologies also represent a real threat to the privacy and human rights of workers and citizens. CUPE participated in consultations held by Canada’s Office of the Privacy Commissioner (OPC) on a list of proposals to regulate AI, arguing that workers, unions and the public need to be made aware of the data being collected, how it is being used, and the right to withhold or withdraw consent without being deprived of a service.



BUILDING A CLASS BASE OF POWER

Over the past two years, CUPE has been a leading voice in our communities for equity and justice. We have strengthened alliances with dozens of community organizations involved in Indigenous issues, LGBTQ2+ rights, anti-racism, and disability rights, to name just a few. We have also kept up our fight for strong public services, highlighting the vital role that public services played in fighting the pandemic, and continuing our work to stop privatization of services and infrastructure across Canada. We have also continued our strong political engagement in electing progressive, worker-friendly representatives at all three levels of government and maintained our presence on the international scene as a voice for solidarity and justice around the world.

BUILDING STRENGTH IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The pandemic has underscored inequalities in Canada and around the world and given new importance to fighting all forms of racism and discrimination. We recognize that the fight for social and economic justice is interwoven with the struggle for justice for equity-seeking groups. Over the past two years we have renewed our commitment to fighting alongside our community allies, including Indigenous organizations, women's organizations, disability rights organizations, racial justice, migrant worker groups, LGBTQ2+ organizations, and other human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.

CUPE has marked and commemorated a number of important events over the past two years, including National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, World AIDS Day, the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, the National Day of Remembrance and Action to End Violence Against Women, International Human Rights Day, Black History Month, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, International Women's Day, the Green Square Campaign, Have a Heart Day, and World Water Day.

We renewed our support for allies in communities across the country, including provincial health coalitions, the Canadian Health Coalition, Rabble.ca, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Broadbent Institute, Mayworks, the Canadian

Association for Work and Labour Studies Conference, the National Indigenous Survivors of Child Welfare Network, and local memorial marches for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

CUPE mourned the discovery of mass grave sites at former residential school sites across the country this year, and we join with Indigenous communities in calling for the protection of these burial grounds and a thorough investigation of these human rights crimes. CUPE continues to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21 each year, and marked the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. A new guide on bargaining language for the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation was issued to support locals on how to observe the holiday and to support reconciliation efforts. CUPE also supported the creation of a new online resource for the Sixties Scoop survivors, titled *In our own Words: Mapping the Stories of 60s Scoop Survivors Diaspora*. CUPE continues to join with Indigenous communities demanding long-promised action from the federal government on the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. On the international level, CUPE presented at a meeting of PSI's Regional Committee to fight against racism and xenophobia about the residential school system.

CUPE has remained a strong ally for the LGBTQ2+ community across Canada. With the cancellation of many Pride events across Canada, CUPE developed virtual resources for members to celebrate Pride, and worked with Pride organizations to support local events. We partnered with the Dignity Network and local Pride organizations to hold a number of online panel discussions across Canada entitled *Global Queer and Trans Rights in a COVID-19 World*, featuring panelists and activists from across the world. We endorsed a new report condemning conversion therapy practices and promoted the campaign calling on legislators across Canada to take action against these practices. CUPE also bolstered our international solidarity work for LGBTQ2+ rights, participating in a World Pride event hosted by Public Services International in Copenhagen by providing a presentation of CUPE's LGBTQ2+ advocacy work.



CUPE has voiced our solidarity with the movement for Black lives, condemning the police violence which resulted in the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many other Black people in Canada and the United States. CUPE provided guidance on combatting anti-Black racism and all forms of discrimination in the workplace, and released a video, narrated by our Diversity Vice-Presidents, condemning anti-Black racism and other forms of racism, and outlining ways members and locals can stand with Black communities and against racism.

As services for people with disabilities come under attack by provincial governments, CUPE continues to fight for these rights. CUPE participated in the National Disability and Work Conference, organized by the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy and the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, focusing on employment discrimination and gaps in employment experienced by persons with disabilities.

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC SERVICES

Canadians are proud of our strong public services and social safety net, and as Canada's largest union, we take our role to heart in defending and expanding those public services.

The tragedy that occurred in long-term care homes across Canada during the early waves of the pandemic brought a national spotlight onto the dire situation in long-term care that CUPE members have been calling out for years. Since

before the pandemic began, CUPE has been advocating for the elimination of the profit motive in the provision of long-term care to elderly and vulnerable populations, the creation of national standards for the sector, and a drastic increase in public funding to boost staffing levels and quality of care. Since the pandemic, we have turned up the pressure. CUPE has presented in front of House of Commons committees and participated in provincial inquiries and reviews about how the long-term care system failed residents, staff, and communities. We also held demonstrations and launched a national campaign to put pressure on the federal government to fix long-term care by bringing it under the *Canada Health Act*. Our efforts have received widespread media coverage and CUPE is seen as a leader in the push to fix this broken system.

For decades, CUPE has been at the forefront of the push for national, affordable child care. After a 50-year battle, child care activists won a federal commitment for universal child care that began with a federal-provincial agreement with the NDP government in British Columbia, and has grown to include agreements with every province except Ontario and Alberta. CUPE will continue to push provinces to ensure child care workers and all children benefit from this new universal program, and that universal child care is public and non-profit.

CUPE continued to fight for transparency over public-private partnerships (P3) that take public money to deliver public services with almost no accountability. We also supported calls for increased corporate transparency so we can easily search corporate structure and records.

Key to our anti-privatization work was our work opposing the new Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB), which was established by the Liberal government to expedite the corporate takeover of public services and infrastructure. We were heartened to learn that Mapleton, a small municipality in southern Ontario, rejected a risky P3 project despite the backing of the CIB.

CUPE supported several locals facing privatization threats and assisted with bargaining surveys and a pan-Canadian survey about the depth of public ownership of municipal water infrastructure. We also launched the second edition of *Asking the*



right questions: A guide for municipalities considering P3s, to help municipal governments understand the risks of using P3s for public services and infrastructure projects.

We participated in the CLC privatization task force regarding the public sector and brought attention to “blended financing” that promotes public-private partnerships and shared information with our members about this new form of privatization, which exports privatization to poorer nations.

Our Education branch also launched a new online workshop in the Local Executive Training series, titled *Preventing privatization at work: Protecting public services during the COVID-19 pandemic*.

USING OUR POLITICAL POWER

As Canada’s largest union, we are a strong and important voice in the national political conversation. Over the past two years, CUPE has worked to help elect worker-friendly representatives and governments, and lobbied hard for stronger public services.



In February 2020, CUPE National had a strong presence at a CLC Lobby Day on Parliament Hill, which focussed on universal, single-payer pharmacare, protection for workplace pensions, establishing a federal minimum wage of \$15 per hour rising with inflation, and the ratification of International Labour Organization Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace.

In the early months of the pandemic, CUPE worked closely with our friends in the federal NDP, the labour movement, and other progressive allies to advocate for better supports and protections for workers and everyday people. CUPE was a leading voice for strengthening income support programs for workers whose jobs had been affected by the pandemic, and we helped successfully increase both CERB and CEWS. We advocated for better access to personal protective equipment, and better access to vaccines for frontline essential workers. We also fought alongside our allies and successfully won access to paid sick leave for workers at the federal level and at the provincial level in many jurisdictions.

CUPE fought hard for our 15,000 members in airlines, the overwhelming majority of whom were laid off at the start of the pandemic. We also supported the Airline Division's successful "Mayday" campaign, which put pressure on key federal ministers in their ridings for urgently needed federal support to secure jobs in the airline sector.

CUPE had boots on the ground across Canada to support progressive candidates in elections at the local, provincial and federal levels. We welcomed the re-election of John Horgan's NDP government in British Columbia in October 2020, with a record-breaking NDP majority, a result that was helped by our successful member-engagement campaign. While the NDP did not win government in the Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador elections, these elections provided opportunities to raise awareness of our members' work and impact in the community.

The recent federal election showed a clear mandate from voters for a progressive economic recovery from COVID-19, including strong supports for workers and people still suffering the economic impacts of the pandemic, and a national affordable child care program. CUPE will continue to work with the federal NDP to push the Liberal government to ensure a worker-centred recovery and make good on their campaign promises.

SOLIDARITY ACROSS BORDERS

CUPE continues to be an active voice in the international realm, and that is reflected in our vocal international advocacy and ongoing collaborative work with several international partners and coalitions.

In December 2019, we joined with progressive voices from across the world in Amsterdam to talk about strategies to fight privatization and bring public services back in-house. We continued to raise awareness about Blended Finance for Development and supported the development of materials that highlight the danger of exporting and imposing privatization on communities in the global south.

The context of COVID-19 has escalated violence and repression against trade unions and social movements in several countries. We have given special attention to the repression in Colombia and Palestine and continue to respond to requests for solidarity from Burma, Haiti, India, and the Philippines, where labour and human rights activists are under increasing threat for their political work.

Over the past two years, we have worked collaboratively with international partners to assess urgent needs related to COVID-19, and provided urgent support to organizations in Bangladesh, Honduras, Palestine, Philippines, Zimbabwe, and to migrant farm workers in southern Ontario. We also helped coordinate support to the relief effort in Lebanon following the devastating explosion at the Port of Beirut.

CUPE continues to support the campaign to bring CUPE 4600 member Cihan Erdal back to Canada from Turkey. Cihan was conditionally released from prison in July 2021, after he was unlawfully and arbitrarily detained in September 2020 for

circulating two Facebook posts considered critical of the Turkish government.

CUPE has actively pressured the federal government to support a COVID-19 vaccine patent waiver at the World Trade Organization (WTO) that would temporarily suspend pharmaceutical corporations' monopoly on vaccine production.

We also worked closely with PSI in a campaign to expose and oppose the planned investment by the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) in Iguá Saneamento, a private water company seeking to bid on the privatization auction of the public water utility in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

We are pleased to have new projects with the trade union movement in Haiti and migrant workers in Canada. The relationships we build through these projects become even more important when countries face a crisis and need support and solidarity, such as the recent earthquake in Haiti and the political mobilizations in Colombia over the past year.

