

Counterpoint



NDP ELECTED IN BC

**CUPE CELEBRATES:
NEW BRUNSWICK SAYS
NO TO CONCESSION
BARGAINING**

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Saskatchewan

PEI plebiscite
favours mixed
member
proportional
representation

“They wanted to use fear of a lockout situation and our feeling of isolation to their advantage, and use a clause that would, with new temporary employees, weaken the union from the inside.”

Pamela Hicks, p. 4

CUPE members help elect BC NDP government

These are very exciting times in British Columbia as the NDP was victorious in ousting the BC Liberals. After 16 years of right-wing BC Liberal government, the NDP will form a minority government led by Premier John Horgan, and supported by the three-member Green party caucus. The province has been infused with renewed hope for meaningful change.

Three of the MLAs in that government have strong CUPE ties. Lisa Beare, elected in Maple

Ridge-Pitt Meadows, comes from the airline division and has served as vice-president of CUPE 4078. CUPE National Representative Rachna Singh was elected in Surrey-Green Timbers, and former CUPE National President Judy Darcy was re-elected in New Westminster.

In addition to those victories, five other sisters from the CUPE family ran as candidates for the BC NDP—CUPE members Tracey O’Hara, Sylvia Lindgren and Stephanie Goudie, along with HEU

members Barb Nederpel and Natalie Fletcher. All five ran strong campaigns that helped the central campaign win government.

Election 2017 also saw the strongest member-to-member campaign in CUPE BC’s provincial election history. With support from CUPE National, the Division engaged more members to volunteer on local constituency campaigns than in previous elections, leading to a significant CUPE presence in key ridings.

The new government is



From left to right: Sylvia Lindgren, Rachna Singh, John Horgan, Judy Darcy and Lisa Beare.

expected to bring in significant changes. It will establish a \$10 per day child care plan, restore public education funding, increase the

province’s minimum wage to \$15 per hour and is committed to having a referendum on electoral reform.

■ Clay Suddaby

Fighting austerity in Manitoba

The Progressive Conservative government under Premier Brian Pallister has spent their first year in power using every tool in their right-wing toolbox to dismantle Manitoba’s public services.

The government passed Bill 28, which unilaterally freezes public sector wages, and Bill 19 which carves out important pieces of

Manitoba’s public hydro. The government has cut 900 hydro jobs, 200 health care managers, and has recently announced four new P3 schools along with the introduction of Social Impact Bonds.

The government is completely restructuring health care. They have already closed emergency rooms and cut funding which has

resulted in serious staff shortages.

But CUPE members have been fighting back. CUPE and other unions, through the Manitoba Federation of Labour, have filed a court injunction against Bill 28 because the government has refused to negotiate. In Brandon, CUPE 737 held a public town hall against P3 schools,

and CUPE health care members across the province have been fighting back, holding rallies and info-pickets from Flin Flon to Winnipeg. CUPE 998 has been pushing back against cuts to hydro, and CUPE members province-wide have been speaking out against privatization.

The battle against Pallister’s austerity is just

getting started in Manitoba, but partnerships with community organizations are already taking form. Coalition work with Indigenous groups, anti-poverty advocates, and environmental groups is critical to the success of our efforts to protect public services. The Communities Not Cuts coalition has been on the front line in fighting Pallister’s austerity agenda, and CUPE is proud to be an active member of this growing movement.

■ David Jacks

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A matter of principle

In 1988, Pamela Hicks started working for the Town of Sackville, New Brunswick. Twenty years ago, she became a CUPE member and is now recording secretary with the municipal workers of CUPE 1188. For the last 14 years, Pamela has held the position of accounts payable clerk with the town.

Hicks’s career has been marked by a clear penchant for activism. “I was born in Sackville, lived and worked here all my life. I’ve always had a soft spot to help co-workers, not only because of my natural attachment to the community, but also because of my personality: I just can’t stand injustices,” said Hicks. “In a sense, it’s also my employer’s actions that led me to get active in my union,” she added.

Hicks is known by her co-workers as a woman who fights for deeply held principles. “I have never held a ‘spokesperson’ position with the union, but have often been either recording secretary or treasurer. That certainly never stopped me from speaking my mind – even during those times when I was not on the executive,” said Hicks.

In late 2016 and early 2017, Hicks was involved in the difficult negotiations that led to the “Seniority Matters” campaign.

“That is certainly one of my proudest moments with the union. It was sure as hell stressful, but the outcome was great. I rallied right along with my brothers and sisters. We stood up for what was right, and we won,” said Hicks. “Standing up for our future members’ right to seniority felt good.”

She attributes the campaign’s victory to the strength of the local’s membership and community involvement. “When we had the first big rally in front of the town hall, when I saw all those people, with their flags, who came down just for us... that was the tipping point for the campaign. Sure, we had already put signs up all over town and gathered hundreds of signatures for our petition, but it was seeing all those people that made the most hesitant among us ‘get it,” said Hicks.

“Having an informed and united membership makes the difference when you ask

the community for support. We had a good mix of younger and older activist members. That helped us connect with different groups in the community.”

Her advice to other locals facing concessions is clear: “Once you find strength within your membership – at least a good majority of it – everyone should put their egos behind and share the grunt work. Then, there is no shame in asking for help from your immediate allies – family, friends, but especially other locals – who recognize what ‘concessions’ can really mean. If they see that you really want to win and will stay true to your principles, you will never stand alone.

■ Simon Ouellette



From private banks to secret talks – Liberal promises evaporate into thin air

When Parliament adjourned for the summer, Members of Parliament returned to their ridings to hit the barbecue circuit, with little to celebrate. In the 2015 election, Justin Trudeau and his team of Liberals made a tall list of promises to Canadians. Two years in, people are asking, were they being honest and realistic with Canadians?

Let’s take a quick look at the parliamentary session that was.

Trudeau promised to provide municipalities with access to low-cost financing for infrastructure projects. Fast forward to today and we can see that promise has been turned on its head. Despite criticism from across the political spectrum, the Liberals rammed through the legislation, in an omnibus bill no less, to create the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB). The whole process has been shrouded in secrecy and runs counter to pledges about open and transparent government. The infrastructure bank opens the door to privatization which in turn will leave us paying more for the services that we rely on.

With the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations coming as early as August, the silence on the matter from the Liberal government is deeply unsettling. The government has yet to announce a credible plan to protect Canadian jobs and protect market access for Canadian industries. Given how this government sold us out on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), the future looks uncertain.

Despite sunny language from the prime minister that a new era of nation-to-nation relationship building exists, the denial of basic services in Indigenous communities continues. In the past year, the Liberal government has ignored four rulings by the Human Rights Tribunal to end the systemic discrimination against First Nations children. Surely, Canada can do better than this.

But it can’t all be gloom and doom. After more than 12 years of the Trans community and its allies fighting for equal rights, Parliament has finally put gender identity and gender expression into the Canadian Human Rights Code and the Criminal Code.

■ Charlie Branchley



NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

More perspectives for a stronger union

CUPE members from across the country will gather in Toronto in October for our 28th constitutional convention. There, we will report on the work we have undertaken since our 2015 convention and establish, together, our priorities for the next two years.

We will debate and adopt our Strategic Directions, dozens of policy resolutions, and a new organizing plan. And we will consider changes to our constitution – the document that sets out how we govern ourselves.

Over the years we have had many important convention debates about our governance. Some have focused on our finances, and others have focused on representation on our National Executive Board.

This year, your National Executive Board is submitting a constitutional amendment that seeks to add four additional seats to our board – Diversity Vice President positions to represent workers with disabilities, LGBTTI workers, young workers, and women.

Right now, the bulk of our board is based on regional representation, and I think it serves our regions incredibly well.

In my years on the NEB, I have always valued the perspective brought to our table by the two existing DVPs, especially (but not only) on matters relevant to racialized and Indigenous workers. And I recognize that crucial voices have been missing from our discussions about the state and the future of our great union.

Across the country, some of our most important struggles are focused on sectors and communities with some of the most marginalized and precarious workers. And many of those workers are women, racialized and Indigenous workers, LGBTTI workers, young workers, and workers with disabilities.

We have a chance to better understand and fight for these members, by ensuring there are representatives on our National Executive Board who are mandated, by convention, to represent them.

As National President, I know it is important that our union’s governing body is closer to a fair representation of our membership. More, and more diverse, perspectives will enrich our discussions and allow us to make better decisions, for everyone.

It’s time to make this change. Together, we can make our great union even stronger.

MARK HANCOCK ONLINE  [twitter.com/@MarkHancockCUPE](https://twitter.com/MarkHancockCUPE)





CUPE CELEBRATES

The art of bargaining forward

CUPE 1188, representing 34 municipal workers in Sackville, New Brunswick, has certainly changed in the last year. This transformation has been one of attitude and resolve. The once quiet and timid local has learned how to fight, campaign and proven to be cause for concern for town councillors and their re-election.

This shift did not happen on its own. It took a crisis – one produced out of thin air by an overzealous employer – to force the local to unite and stand together. In 2016 and 2017, the employer’s negotiator, backed by the town council, tested workers by attacking their seniority rights.

CUPE Town

With 5,500 residents, Sackville is not like every other small town. It is a small union-friendly place, and could rightfully be called a “CUPE Town”:

with one CUPE member for every seven residents. You will find CUPE members at the hospital, in schools, at the university, in the nursing home, the municipality, the liquor store and more.

Although Sackville residents possess a strong sense of community and enjoy the advantages of high union density, this in itself did not guarantee strong locals. Struggles for fairness – because they contain elements of education, solidarity and mobilization – are what keeps our locals strong. In Sackville, the overwhelming majority of CUPE 1188 members

had not experienced much labour tension, or work disruption for over 35 years.

Private sector-style management

When the Town of Sackville hired a new Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in 2013, the work climate changed rapidly. The union noticed the private sector style and management techniques of the CAO. But even with those early signs, CUPE 1188 was not expecting the hard-ball bargaining that was to come.

After several bargaining sessions in 2016, it became

clear that the town was not dropping its demand for concessions on sick leave, hours of work and seniority.

The town negotiator was unyielding on another of his proposals: non-full-time employees should bypass the principle of seniority on full-time internal job postings. That meant that an employee’s years of service would not be taken into account for full-time applications.

Marcos Salib, CUPE’s national representative for the local, called for help and resources from other CUPE staff, and met with the executive of CUPE 1188. Leafleting citizens and lobbying councillors started in December 2016 to get seniority off the table. Member engagement and support were high.

Meanwhile in Ottawa, a fortunate coincidence was happening. CUPE’s National Executive Board was adopting a policy on resisting concessions and two-tier proposals. This policy stressed the importance of having CUPE staff and the division work closer with locals to fight concessions. It also reminded us about the importance of getting community support and strengthening our links with allies.

Strike preparations versus the rumour mill

In January, strike education and preparation had begun. The “Seniority Matters” campaign was rolled out along with CUPE regional action committees – composed of regional presidents – with support from the CUPE NB Division.

For their part, the employer was playing the

waiting game. NB labour law requires unusually long procedural steps to be completed before a strike or a lockout can be called. With CUPE 1188 in conciliation, the town delayed meeting the union, hoping to use the procedural wait times to remove the threat to snow removal operations should a strike occur.

Support for strike action among members of 1188 was increasing, so council tried to make the attack on seniority less controversial. In its final offer to the union, the town modified the clause to apply only to new hires: “They sweetened the deal. No current worker, only new workers, would be affected by the concession,” said Corey Johnson, CUPE 1188 acting president. Many who were close to retirement had no big appetite for a drawn-out strike or lockout. Morale dropped when the employer fed the rumour mill by talking about a potential lockout and having private contractors contacted for prospective work. The employer was going around saying to employees: “You have to take the deal.” At the lowest point of conciliation, a few were contemplating signing this two-tiered concession contract.

“The council and CAO must have thought we were weak enough to accept anything,” said Pam Hicks, recording secretary of CUPE 1188. “They wanted to use fear of a lockout situation and our feeling of isolation to their advantage, and use a clause that would, with new temporary employees, weaken the union from the inside,” said Hicks.



Mobilizing the community to win

In February and March 2017, CUPE NB Division intervention and mobilization efforts were kicked into high gear. Outreach to the community was increased along with petitions, lawn sign delivery, radio ads and a Facebook page. The Regional Action Committees engaged other CUPE locals in the area and gradually reached beyond immediate supporters. Members convinced some private sector businesses to take and display the “Seniority Matters” signs in their stores.

“For CUPE 1188 it was an opportunity to remind each other of the importance of bargaining forward, not backward.”

In March and April, big rallies in front of the town hall were organized, with hundreds of members packing the room at the town’s monthly meetings. “The rallies did a lot of good. The local really saw the level of support they had from their community, their feelings of isolation dissipated. Members’ fear developed into anger, then indignation turned into resolve,” said Daniel Légère, CUPE NB Division President.

Firefighters, bakery workers, nurses, retail workers and others including the New

Brunswick Federation of Labour came to demonstrations and flew their flags in Sackville.

Residents asked more and more questions to the town’s councillors, as awareness and support grew. The few union-friendly individuals on council were being heard and they pressured the town/employer’s negotiators to come to a deal.

Within six months, from December 2016 to May 2017, CUPE 1188 had escalated pressure, through a campaign that included lobbying, leaflets, petitions, strike education, radio ads, lawn signs, public rallies, town hall meetings and more.

At the very last minute of conciliation talks in May, and as a big rally was being planned for the coming week, the employer agreed to make a decent proposal to the union. A tentative agreement was reached. In the end, the town ratified a six-year contract with the union. The deal contained no concessions, included wage increases for all and specific adjustments for precarious workers, improved clothing and tool allowances - and most importantly - maintained all seniority rights.

The NEB Bargaining Policy as an education tool

CUPE 1188 and the CUPE NB Division have followed the principle of community unionism contained in the NEB policy: earning and maintaining community support is key for victories. The union was not as isolated as many thought it was. It simply had to tap into the collective strength that existed in their community.

Interestingly, the NEB policy has also been used as an education tool for members. “For CUPE 1188 it was an opportunity to remind each other of the importance of bargaining

forward, not backward,” said Johnson. Members knew the policy could also be brought to the employer’s attention to show that the union would not back down from its fight against concessions. “CUPE 1188 members understand they are part of a big movement. Being in a union comes with many benefits, but also many responsibilities towards our fellow workers – including future workers,” added Légère.

“Sackville was a test, and workers succeeded. We won a battle, but the war is not over: we know that more municipalities will try to put their employees to the same challenges,” said Marcos Salib.

Nonetheless, a good victory always makes a difference. It motivates other groups who can then learn from mistakes and build on demonstrated strategies and tactics.

“The ‘Sackville Fight’ is a reminder for us, as a movement, to stay in shape. Raising CUPE locals’ capacity and resolve to take on fights won’t eliminate the possibility of facing bullies and unreasonable employers. It will, however, dramatically reduce it and raise our chances of success,” said Légère.

■ Simon Ouellette





Strikes and precarity in Ontario

Knock on wood. There are currently no strikes or lockouts in the province of Ontario. When the members of CUPE 1600 ended their strike at the Toronto Zoo on June 11, it marked the first time since June 25, 2016 that there were no CUPE members on strike or lockout in Ontario. We have seen a wave of increased work stoppages in public and social services sector workplaces over the past year.

At the root of this wave of strikes and lockouts is the ongoing corporatization of social services and successive austerity budgets for public services.

Stacey Connor, president of CUPE 2073, led Canadian Hearing Society workers across Ontario on a nine-week strike during the spring. Connor said that “many social service agencies have changed the make-up of their boards to include more people from the business community. This has led to a shift in thinking and an attempt to make social service providers run more like businesses. What this means for our members is direct attacks on sick-leave benefits, vacation time and a refusal to address workload issues in the interest of the bottom line, while directors’ and managers’ pay continues to rise.”

In the public sector, workers are facing increased precarity and minimal (if any) pay raises, while consistently being told that the money is just not there.

Uniting these recent struggles is the fact that most of these workplaces are predominantly female and most of the locals that have been locked out or forced out on strike have been led by women.

At a time when Ontario’s premier has said she is putting women’s issues front and centre and making the gender pay gap a priority for her government’s ministries, the experiences of our members show that the negative effects of this government’s economic policies and austerity budgets disproportionately impact women.

While it is encouraging to see the members of CUPE respond to the erosion of the province’s public and social services with strength and solidarity, we also recognize that to truly turn this tide we need a government that recognizes the impact its economic policies has on women. “To truly address women’s issues, we need a government that will end austerity budgets and stop the attacks on our social and public services,” said Connor.

■ Matthew Stella



Labour law changes make life better for Alberta workers

The first major overhaul to Alberta labour laws in three decades has made it easier to form a union, and provides a range of new workplace rights to non-union employees.

It’s the third time the Notley government has improved the life of Alberta workers since the last election. The Alberta NDP brought agricultural workers under the protection of workplace laws in 2015, and the province is in the midst of raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2018.

The latest update to Alberta labour law comes in the form of the *Fair and Family Friendly Workplace Act*, passed on June 6th. The legislation changes employment standards rules to allow workers to take time off work without pay for illness, to take care of critically ill children, to mourn the death of a family member, or to flee domestic violence.

Amanda Jensen of Lethbridge was fired from her job when she took leave to care for her son, Jake, after he developed leukemia. “Three weeks after we were released from the hospital and came back to Lethbridge, I received an email from my employer terminating my position,” said Jensen. “I made a call to Employment Standards and was quite incredulous to learn that I would be offered no protection.”

“A thousand thoughts went through my head about supporting my family financially,” said Jensen. “I knew then that I wasn’t going to be able to just focus on Jake’s recovery, and on his life-saving treatments. I knew that part of my mind and energies would now be directed elsewhere.”

Other changes to employment standards include the elimination of rules allowing employers to pay less than minimum wage to disabled workers, extended maternity and parental leave, and better provisions for overtime, vacations and holidays. Most of the changes brought Alberta up to standards long ago adopted by other provinces.

The legislation also made changes to the Labour Relations Code, which sets rules governing how workers join unions, and how collective agreements are managed once they do. Workers trying to form a union can now avoid a disruptive vote if 65 per cent of the employees in a unit sign union cards or a petition asking to form a union. When votes do occur, loopholes have been closed so employers can no longer push a vote beyond the first week after the application is made.

Unionized employees trying to get a first contract with an employer (often the hardest deal to negotiate) now have the option to apply for an imposed contract, allowing a period of stability for the union to take hold.

■ Lou Arab



It's time to end precarious work in BC hospitals

In BC, more than 4,000 hospital housekeepers and dietary workers in privatized jobs face a precarious and insecure future in health care.

Even though these HEU members provide a critical public service, funded by public tax dollars, they are denied basic job security protections afforded other workers in health care.

When BC's health authorities contracted out these

critical health services to multinational corporations starting in 2003, they effectively abandoned responsibility for the workers.

Suddenly, these health care workers found themselves in economically marginal and insecure jobs.

Wages were slashed, benefits were cut and pensions were axed. The number of jobs were reduced. And when health authorities change contractors, these

workers are fired.

Forced to reapply for their jobs, they have no guarantee of employment. If an individual is hired back, they start at the bottom with lower wages, fewer benefits and no seniority.

This happened two years ago when BC's Vancouver Coastal Health Authority changed its cleaning contractor from Aramark to Compass Group Canada after a decade. At that time,

more than 900 workers were fired and forced to re-apply for their jobs at facilities throughout the region.

But there is another way. Health authorities have the ability to require companies who bid on these services to keep the existing workforce with their current wages, as well as their seniority and collective agreements intact.

Most recently, when another publicly-funded

institution in BC – Simon Fraser University – changed its food services contractor, the new contractor was required to hire the entire workforce at wages that were the same or better than what the outgoing contractor was paying.

HEU is demanding BC's health authorities do the same. It's time to ensure the province's hospitals are staffed by a stable experienced workforce with fair wages and job security. After all, if a public university can respect its contracted workforce, why can't our public hospitals?

■ Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY



CUPE backs its members

Over the years, CUPE has built up national resources to support you in the many challenges you face at the bargaining table, to help you fight back against concessions and two-tiered agreements. With these resources, a strong plan, smart campaigns and members on our side, we can work together to increase your chance of winning.

We have two important tools we can use: CUPE's National Defence Fund and CUPE's National Strike Fund.

Every local can apply to our National Defence Fund for campaign funding for a 50-50 cost-shared campaign between CUPE National and the local.

To be approved, your campaign must involve member mobilization. You must work closely with national communications staff to plan it. Once it is approved by the National Executive Board, the spending can start.

This year alone, CUPE will dedicate \$6 million to cost-shared campaigns to promote and protect our services and our members.

The National Strike Fund has \$95 million in reserve. This is dedicated money that can only be used for strikes and interest arbitration-related issues.

When it looks like your local is in trouble, when bargaining is not going in the right direction, your local can apply for a strike averting campaign, 100 per cent funded by CUPE National.

This can be done when you are near the end of bargaining, your members have taken a strike vote, your issues are clear, you are in conciliation or if you need to involve your members and your community to put pressure on the employer.

When there is a strike or a lockout, CUPE's National Strike Fund is there to support you. The fund covers strike pay, benefit premiums if the employer stops paying them, or emergency benefit coverage. It also covers strike support campaigns, strike-related legal costs, and many costs of interest arbitration for those who don't have the right to strike, including 100 per cent of the local's share of the cost of the arbitrator.

CUPE is strongest when we all work together. With these tools, together, we will continue to bargain forward, not backward.

CHARLES FLEURY ONLINE  [twitter.com/@CUPENatSec](https://twitter.com/CUPENatSec)

A tale of two budgets – Alberta and Saskatchewan

There is no better example of budgets being about political choices than a comparison of the Alberta and Saskatchewan budgets.

Alberta's budget invested in infrastructure and public services while Saskatchewan went with cuts and tax hikes for everyone except corporations (who got a tax break).

Alberta's reliance on revenue from oil and gas has had a 'boom and bust' effect on government revenue for decades. When oil and gas prices were high, the province racked up huge surpluses, and when prices dropped, deficits appeared. During the 44-year reign of the Alberta Conservatives, the approach to low resource prices was to slash public services and raise user fees and taxes. The Ralph Klein government cut public sector wages by five per cent, laid off public sector workers and privatized public work, and cut funding to health care and education. Health care premiums were hiked, alcohol taxes raised, and Albertans faced a wide

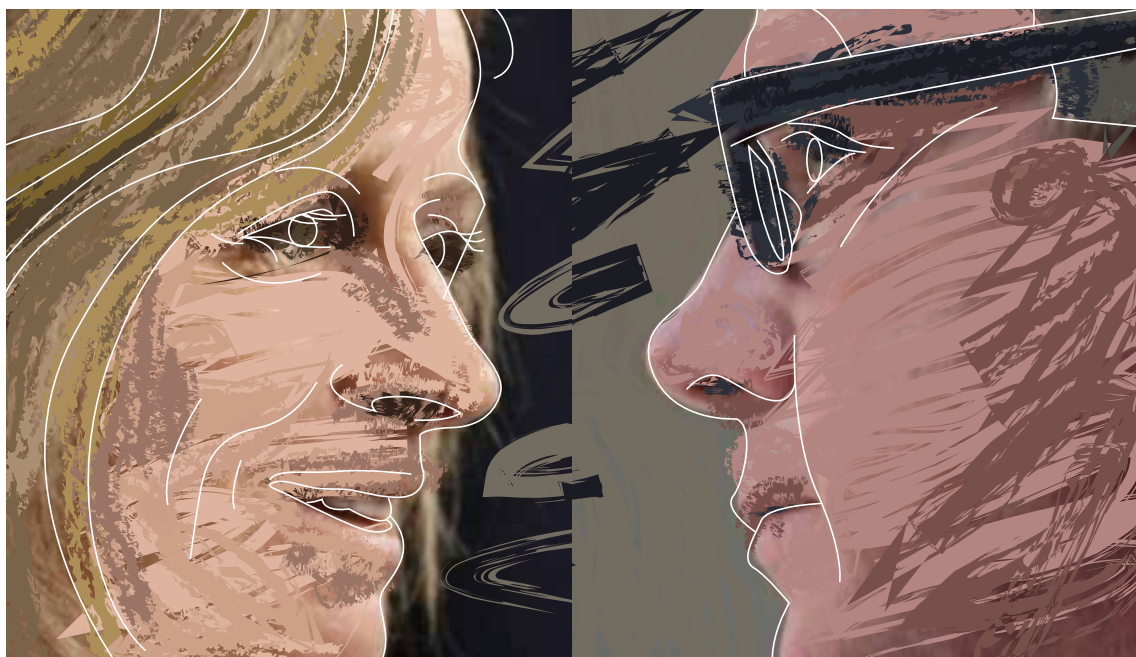
range of new user fees.

Following the 2015 collapse of oil prices, conservatives of all stripes are again calling for cuts to public sector wages, reduced spending, and slashing the programs people depend on.

But in three budgets since forming office, the Alberta NDP has taken the opposite approach, holding the line on spending, and protecting public sector workers from cuts. The NDP increased infrastructure funding – spending on the construction of schools, hospitals, roads and other assets. Spending was largely cut in the last decade of rapid growth in Alberta, and Alberta Premier Rachel Notley argues the province has a lot of catching up to do.

Notley and the NDP argue that following the route of the Wildrose and Conservative opposition would lead to thousands more unemployed Albertans, lower levels of public services, harm to the most vulnerable citizens, longer hospital wait times, and more crowded schools.

The 2017 budget from



Saskatchewan backs up Notley's claims.

Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall has gone in the opposite direction from Alberta, choosing to cut deeply with a harsh austerity budget. The Wall government increased the provincial sales tax from five to six per cent and widened the number of things the tax is charged on to include food and children's clothing. Municipal grants have been slashed (meaning more cuts to come), and a rural bus service in place for decades has been shut down. Education and health care have seen reductions in their budgets, meaning longer wait times and more crowded hospitals. Fees for long-term care have increased, farmers now pay more for fuel, and alcohol taxes are going way up.

"We're maintaining a steady hand because we believe that keeping money

in the economy is the way to ensure that we come out of the recession faster. And, we think our plan is the more measured approach," Premier Notley told Post-Media news.

And the Alberta plan is working. While Saskatchewan suffers massive cuts and tax hikes, Alberta is seeing an economic turnaround that is getting attention. Alberta is projected to lead the country in economic growth in 2017 and 2018, while Saskatchewan lags. Jobs numbers have increased in Alberta for each of the last six months, with tens of thousands of part-time jobs being replaced by good paying, full-time employment. The TD Bank has credited the Notley government for the turnaround, saying the stimulus spending by the province has led to a quicker turnaround.

Both Alberta and

Saskatchewan are reliant upon energy resources. In both cases, Conservative governments failed to save during good times and argued for austerity measures in bad times.

In Alberta, services and the people who deliver them are protected. In Saskatchewan, public services are crumbling and public employees are filing for Employment Insurance.

Budgets are about political choices, Alberta is growing their economy by choosing to support public services and invest in infrastructure. Saskatchewan went with cuts to services and tax hikes for everyone except corporations; they didn't have to inflict so much pain on the people of Saskatchewan by cutting public services, and giving corporations a big tax break – they chose to.



Pacific Blue Cross locks out workers

An already heated dispute between CUPE 1816 and the benefits provider Pacific Blue Cross (PBC) in British Columbia turned bitter during the month of June.

PBC management informed CUPE that it would henceforth deny paid leave to sick and disabled employees, refuse family emergency leave, and cancel vacation leave. It would also refuse to collect and remit union dues. Three days later a mass rally to support CUPE 1816, held outside PBC's main office in Burnaby, drew several hundred participants and the support of the BC labour movement.

Immediately after the rally, the employer advised CUPE 1816 that it would lock out any members who engaged in further job action until the week following that job action. CUPE 1816 has filed an unfair labour practice complaint with the BC Labour Relations Board.

■ Daniel Gawthrop

PEI's fight to end 150 years of first-past-the-post

In November 2016, the people of PEI voted to change their electoral system with a clear majority of 52.4 per cent voting in favour of mixed-member proportional representation (MMP).

The governing Liberal MLAs have now backtracked on their agreement to act on the plebiscite. The Liberal party – which holds 100 per cent of the power in the provincial legislature, despite gaining only 40 per cent of the vote in the last election – chose to vote against the 'Honour the Vote' motion calling for the government to respect the results of the plebiscite.

"The Canada 150 celebrations are opportunities for the Coalition to remind politicians that the 'birthplace of Confederation' should, 150 years later, become the birthplace of democratic renewal in this country," said Leo Cheverie, long-time CUPE activist and member of CUPE 1870.

■ Simon Ouellette