

Counterpoint



BARGAINING FORWARD WHEN GOVERNMENTS ARE BACKWARD

**PROFILE: MYLENE
HOLMES FIGHTS
FOR HEALTH
CARE AND HER
COMMUNITY**

**Shaping anti-
violence policy
in Edmonton
schools**

**A decade of deep
cuts in Saskatchewan**

**Big win for BC health
care workers**

“My dad was always a strong supporter of his union and he still loves his members. Maybe I got that attitude from him.”

Mylene Holmes, member of CUPE 204 and CUPE 500, p. 3

CUPE helps Winnipeg elect ‘most progressive city council in a generation’

CUPE 500 scored a major victory in municipal elections this past November.

The local, which represents over 5,000 employees working at the City of Winnipeg, called on the city to become a living wage employer, and then elected a city council who would get the job done. A “living wage” is the wage needed to provide the minimum income necessary to pay for basic needs based on the cost of living in a specific community.

With financial support from CUPE National, CUPE 500 ran a campaign that urged the city to adopt a living wage policy for all municipally paid workers, including contractors. CUPE combined the campaign with a strategic electoral effort to defeat right-wing candidates

and elect progressives.

In the past, private contractors could bid on work performed by CUPE members and offer minimum wage labour as the basis for their cost savings. With a living wage policy in place, private companies would no longer be able to pad their bottom line at the expense of front-line workers, and CUPE would be on even footing.

“We know that when the private sector isn’t allowed to cut wages and create a race to the bottom for workers, the public sector will be the more efficient option every single time,” says CUPE 500 President Gord Delbridge. “We are proud to stand on side with keeping our work in house.”

With the support of partners across the pro-

gressive spectrum—from labour unions to community organizations—CUPE 500 mobilized progressive city council and mayoral candidates to endorse the policy, and then supported those candidates with thousands of hours of door-knocking, phone-calling, leaflet-dropping and fundraising. The local used targeted polling and on-the-ground intelligence to focus efforts where the races were closest.

Ultimately, CUPE helped elect two new progressive city councillors in tough races, defended six of our incumbent allies, and beat back a right-wing challenge to Winnipeg’s centrist mayor.

Of course, the end of the municipal election is just the start for CUPE 500. The local plans to work with the new city council to find more opportunities at contracting in, to develop a living wage policy to prevent future councils from contracting out, and to advance a progressive agenda throughout the council’s term.

“We are proud to be working with the most progressive city council elected in a generation,” said Delbridge. “We won’t waste this opportunity to push a progressive agenda.”

■ Dale Edmunds



CUPE 4948 members getting the message out on staffless libraries.

Toronto library workers sound alarm on ‘staffless libraries’

A dangerous new experiment is currently underway at the Toronto Public Library.

Two of the library’s branches will now be open and operate without staff on site during hours they would otherwise be closed. A risky proposition given there has never been a “staffless library” in a large urban centre like Toronto.

The Toronto Public Library (TPL) is no stranger to innovation. Libraries are often early adopters of technology, and TPL was one of the first places in the city to offer public access to the Internet. But in its rush toward automation, the library is jeopardizing the personal security of its patrons—and the job security of its workers.

Rightfully, library workers are fighting back. CUPE 4948 is mounting a campaign to warn the public about the potential health and safety hazards of staffless libraries. The local believes staffless libraries will hurt services, reduce security and safety, and threaten jobs. More open hours at the library is a good idea but doing so without trained professional staff is not.

One of the local’s chief concerns with TPL’s experiment is safety and security.

“The security measures are wholly inadequate,” says Brendan Haley, president of the Toronto Public Library



CUPE members out campaigning for progressive candidates in municipal election.

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Like father, like daughter

Mylene Holmes is no stranger to the labour movement. Her father was a union man and activist back in the Philippines, working for the Marcelo Steel Corporation for 37 years.

Workers Union, CUPE 4948. “If a patron is being harassed by someone, how does she signal the lone security monitor who is kilometres away? And then what? We sometimes work with people in crisis, and many patrons can be anything but predictable. You need staff, on the ground, available on-site. It is a question of safety, both for staff and the public.”

Another major concern is the quality of services to the public. Library workers play a critical role in building community, delivering public programs, and connecting patrons to vital resources like computers and Internet access.

“It’s first and foremost society’s most vulnerable that need the services, assistance and programs our members provide. An empty building is hardly a step up in public service,” says Haley. “On the one hand, technology and technological advances have allowed us to find, organize and store our information better. On the other, it’s put up barriers to those who are not technologically savvy. Only real people, real humans, can help patrons with their questions and concerns.”

Finally, there is a serious concern about protecting jobs. In an effort to cut costs, the temptation might be high for employers—libraries and others—to use technology to replace workers. That would literally take humanity out of the equation.

Technology can be a useful tool. But it cannot and should not replace the human face—and beating heart—of our public services.

For more information, check out our online edition at cupe.ca/counterpoint.

■ Pierre Ducasse

“I remember when I was six or seven, there were always people in our house. There were always rallies,” Mylene says. “My father tells his friends, ‘When I was young, I was involved in the union and now my daughter is retracing my footsteps.’”

Twenty years ago, Mylene was one of the first immigrants to arrive in Winnipeg under Manitoba’s pioneering Provincial Nominee Program. The program was the first of its kind in Canada and is credited with attracting 130,000 people to the province. Winnipeg now has one of the largest Filipino communities in the country.

When Mylene arrived in Canada, she had a degree in



accounting and was leaving behind a cushy job in finance, but she came here to help her sister raise her two young nieces.

After working a mix of full- and part-time positions for a few years, Mylene decided she wanted to work at the local hospital for better job security. So, she studied to become a Health Unit Clerk and got a job at the Grace Hospital, where she stayed for three years before finding an opening in their finance department.

Mylene has now been a CUPE member for 16 years. She belongs to two locals, CUPE 500 and CUPE 204, where she serves on the executive as Secretary Treasurer. CUPE 204 represents over 7,000 health care workers across Winnipeg and Manitoba and has been fighting against government cuts to health care funding, restructuring and layoffs, emergency room closures and more.

“I thought that if you worked under the provincial government, your job was secure. But I guess I was wrong,” Mylene says.

In May of last year, the Pallister government also proclaimed that it would force health care workers into disruptive votes on union

representation—creating uncertainty and stress in an already burdened workforce.

Mylene says CUPE Manitoba and local 204 have been working hard to connect with the Filipino community about the representation vote and attacks on health care. Filipinos represent a large segment of health care workers in the province, and CUPE has been consulting with the community, producing campaign materials in Tagalog, supporting cultural events, and making sure members know what is at stake.

Supporting the Filipino community was one of the reasons Mylene got involved with her union in the first place. And in her case, union work is a family affair—five of her relatives are in the same local, working at the Health Sciences Centre. “I really want them to know that CUPE is a good organization. There are people behind them that will support them and help out when they need it,” she says.

Mylene’s dad is now 92 years old and living in Canada. Sometimes he still talks about his life in the union. “He was very proud when I told him about what we’re doing, about fighting for health care,” she says.

“My dad was always a strong supporter of his union and he still loves his members. Maybe I got that attitude from him.”

■ Emily Turk

NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

Bargaining forward in 2019 and beyond

It’s no secret: 2019 is going to be a big year for CUPE.

We’re up against a wave of newly-elected right-wing governments who are determined to undo a generation of progress on issues that matter to working people.

We’re going to be in difficult rounds of bargaining across the country, as we push back against governments and employers who want to take away our pensions, our benefits, and the job security we’ve fought so hard for.

But we will be ready.

Two years ago, CUPE renewed its collective bargaining policy. We now have a blueprint for national solidarity in the face of austerity agendas and attacks on workers’ rights across the country. It lays out expectations for our local unions when it comes to difficult rounds of

bargaining. And it is our commitment to members that we will have their backs at the bargaining table.

The renewed bargaining policy focuses on equipping our locals with the planning and tools they need to resist concessions and two-tier contract language. It focuses on presenting a strong, unified front against employers and governments looking for cracks in our armour. It also lays out expectations that our locals will look to bargain improvements in two specific areas: precarious work and workplace violence.

Two years on, we’ve seen some incredible results. We’ve seen locals across regions and across sectors negotiating strong new language to protect and extend new rights to vulnerable workers. We’ve seen locals and bargaining councils in sectors like health care and education get strong commitments at the bargaining table to prevent and address workplace violence. And from coast to coast to coast, our members have held the line against concessions and two-tier contract proposals.

In March, at our National Bargaining Conference, we’ll continue to roll out new tools, training and supports for our members to fight back against attacks on their hard-won rights.

Working together, we can meet the challenge of right-wing governments and austerity-obsessed politicians head-on. We will fight back and protect our hard-won rights— and we will bargain forward for the kind of future we want.

MARK HANCOCK ONLINE twitter.com/MarkHancockCUPE





Fighting austerity at the bargaining table

The last recession in Canada ended almost ten years ago, yet provincial governments across the country are still asking public sector unions to ‘tighten their belts.’ CUPE’s senior economist Angella MacEwen explains why public sector workers’ wages have barely budged in a decade—despite a healthier economy—and why the battle against austerity will be fought and won at the bargaining table.

A decade of slow economic growth

The 2008-2009 recession was milder in Canada than the U.S. largely because global demand for oil and other natural resources remained high. Strong wage, employment, and economic growth in the three oil-producing provinces masked a weaker recovery in the rest of Canada.

The collapse in oil prices in 2014 was felt nationwide. But by 2016, economic growth across Canada had normalized, and by the end of 2017, unemployment rates were starting to reach 40-year lows in almost all areas of the country.

Given the strength of these economic indicators, wages should be rising faster, but average wage growth is stuck at 2.5 per cent. Public sector wages are growing even slower than private sector wages, and in most provinces aren’t keeping up with inflation.

Where is the end to austerity?

The last recession in Canada ended almost ten years ago, yet provincial governments across Canada are still asking public sector unions to cut costs and accept a variety of concessions. In almost every case, these governments are failing to address their

real problem, a revenue shortage, and in some cases, they are making it worse by cutting taxes.

Here’s a brief overview of provincial government attacks on public sector wages:

- In March 2017, the Saskatchewan government asked public sector unions to take a 3.5 per cent wage cut. By the end of 2018, 34 of 39 bargaining units in Saskatchewan had expired collective agreements, and the government had not persuaded a single one to accept the rollback in wages, prompting

the finance minister to announce that the wage cut was off the table.

- The Manitoba government introduced legislation in 2016 which would freeze public sector wages for two years, followed by 0.75 per cent and 1.0 per cent in years 3 and 4. While unions are taking the government to court, the wage freeze may go ahead in the meantime. The province has reduced funding to school boards citing poor economic conditions and expects the shortfall to come out of wage growth.

- In Nova Scotia, the provincial government used the *Public Services Sustainability Act* to limit an arbitrator’s ability to set wages higher than guidelines provided by the province. They used this legislation in 2017 to set a wage pattern that froze wages for the first two years, and then increased wages by 1.5 per cent and 1.0 per cent in years 3 and 4.
- Successive governments in New Brunswick have held public sector wage increases to an average of one per cent per year over the past decade, not even enough to keep pace with inflation. The recently elected coalition government has promised to reign in public spending, hinting at cuts to post-secondary education and health care. Many expect to see further privatization and cuts to services.
- Ontario’s Fall Economic Statement in 2018 painted the picture of a large deficit and unsustainable debt. Instead of looking at ways to increase revenue, the Ontario government took the opportunity to provide tax cuts to the wealthiest. Public sector workers in Ontario are braced for further privatization, cuts, precarity, and two-tier contract offers.



Before the 2008 recession, governments were already pushing privatization and squeezing the public services that we all rely on. Public sector employers were increasingly shifting secure positions to temporary and precarious ones—the share of public sector workers on temporary contracts is up by more than 50 per cent since 1997, and one-quarter of CUPE members are employed in precarious jobs.

Ten years of austerity have only made matters worse.

Bargaining forward

How can we fight back against provincial austerity and a decidedly anti-worker agenda? In two words: collective bargaining.

Bargaining is one of CUPE's best tools to improve wages, working conditions and benefits for our members. In 2017, CUPE's National Executive Board announced an updated bargaining policy, focused on fighting austerity, precarious work, and

privatization. This policy included concrete strategies to fight concessions and two-tier contract provisions. This strategy recognizes that the key to successful bargaining is building worker power. Economic conditions are irrelevant if workers haven't built up the capacity to hold firm against austerity.

The Bargaining Forward strategy goes beyond collective bargaining to include building political support for public investment in the work and services performed by CUPE members. Strong public services benefit the broader community, but higher wages for public sector workers also have a multiplier effect that helps to support local economies.

Ultimately, when unions make gains in bargaining, it sets the standard for all workers. The benefits and wages that we all enjoy today were fought for first at the bargaining table.

■ **Angella MacEwen**

Economic conditions are irrelevant if workers haven't built up the capacity to hold firm against austerity.



Q&A

with Angella MacEwen



In September, CUPE welcomed Angella MacEwen as our new economist. Angella comes to us from the Canadian Labour Congress, where she worked as the economist for six years. A leader in her field in the progressive community, Angella's also well-known in the national media for her insightful analysis and ability to put right-wing pundits in their place on programs like CBC's *Power and Politics*.

Why did you decide to study economics?

I had to take an economics elective for my international development studies—and that class, “Women and the Economy,” changed the way I thought about economics. I learned that you could use economics for good! I also learned how some people have more economic bargaining power than others based on their networks, their class, their race, their sex or gender identity, and why we as a society value some kinds of work more than others.

You spoke about intersectionality at the National Sector Council Conference. Is intersectionality related to bargaining?

Absolutely. We can't fight against one kind of oppression (like class or gender) and ignore others (like race or religion). Doing so makes it harder to build solidarity among our membership and in our communities. To advocate for an economy that respects all workers, we must understand the barriers facing our members and allies, and we must build solidarity across movements.

Examples of barriers that we have fought for and continue to fight for at the bargaining table include pay equity and employment equity, and taking action against two-tier contract provisions. It could also include requiring accommodation for workers with different needs such as childcare, physical accessibility of buildings, or translation of important materials into a worker's first language. It might include measures to ensure workers are protected from racism, Islamophobia, or transphobia on the job.

What one thing about economics would you want to share with CUPE members?

I always tell people that they know a lot more about the economy than they think. What's important about the economy is how well it is working for us as a society. And if it's not working, we can change it!

Right-wing economic policies try to place the blame on individuals, saying we should “just work harder.” As a result, their solutions are focused on the individual, for example offering student loans instead of free postsecondary tuition. There is a power imbalance in capitalist economies, but too often that power imbalance is hidden or ignored. It can be easy to focus on the individual instead of uncovering how power imbalances have created broad, system-wide challenges. That's why we need an intersectional analysis—to see the barriers, to change the economy and make it work for all workers.

Austerity cuts deep in Saskatchewan

For over a decade, the people of Saskatchewan have lived under the shadow of austerity—enduring ruthless attacks on public services, job losses and contempt for workers' rights. In this feature, we take a brief look at how life under the Sask Party has made things harder and more expensive for Saskatchewan workers and their families.

Saskatchewan is the North American birthplace of social democracy. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the precursor to today's New Democratic Party (NDP), was established in Saskatchewan and founded many of the social programs the labour movement champions today: universal health care, strong crown corporations, and occupational health and safety legislation.

For a long time, the CCF/NDP dominated Saskatchewan politics, winning 12 out of 19 elections. But the creation of the Saskatchewan Party and the election of Brad Wall in 2007 shifted the political landscape in the province.

Since 2007, the Sask Party has won three consecutive terms in government with a decisive majority. In this time, they have set the clock back on many of the gains we made under the NDP.

To begin with, the party has lowered taxes for its corporate friends while raising taxes on working people. They have increased the regressive provincial sales tax on children's clothing, on insurance premiums and on restaurant meals—tax changes that disproportionately impact women and low-income families.

The Sask Party has also aggressively pursued a privatization agenda—contracting out hospital laundry, building a swathe of P3

projects, and selling off crown assets. They have allowed use of user-pay MRI and CT scans, despite the program's inherent contradiction to the principles of universal health care and the *Canada Health Act*. In 2017, the government uni-

laterally dismantled the Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC)—stranding seniors in rural Saskatchewan, eliminating 250 well-paying jobs, and forcing low income people to hitchhike or pay through the nose for private transportation.

The 2017-18 provincial budget instituted deep, devastating, and irreversible cuts to public services such as health care, education, and social services. Post-secondary institutions had their budgets cut by over 5 per cent and tuition fees have skyrocketed as a result. Over 50 million dollars were cut from K-12 education, forcing school divisions to lay off support staff, reduce hours of staffing, and increase class sizes. The government stopped providing key public health care services, including hearing aids, podiatry services, pastoral care, orthotics and equipment

for sleep apnea, parent mentoring, and travel immunization clinics. They also increased fees for long term care, while shutting down almost 200 public long-term care beds across the province. Funding was also cut for municipalities resulting in tax increases, service cuts and new user fees.

The majority of CUPE members, and all major public sector locals in the province are now in bargaining—which is protracted and difficult—and many of our largest locals are fighting concessions.

Through all of these cuts, the Sask Party has remained wildly popular. Recent polls show that Scott Moe is the second most popular premier in Canada.

With the 2020 provincial election approaching quickly, CUPE members have their work cut out for them.

■ Tria Donaldson



Reasons to be hopeful: CUPE members stand strong

CUPE has an uphill battle to prevent further cuts to public services. But we are building awareness and resistance—and winning. We asked two CUPE members about the lessons they have learned under a decade of Sask Party government, and why they remain hopeful.



Scott Barrett is president of CUPE 8443, which represents support staff for the Saskatoon Public School Division.



Stacey Landin is president of CUPE 9, which represents municipal workers in the City of Moose Jaw and surrounding rural areas.

Counterpoint: *After 10 years of the Saskatchewan Party in government, what do you see as the biggest challenge facing the labour movement?*

Scott Barrett: The obvious answer is the austerity budget. To my mind, the biggest challenge has been the attack on labour and the philosophy of giving money to corporations instead of public services.

Stacey Landin: The Sask Party made it clear from the outset that they felt a big part of their role was to attack labour. The Premier at the time said publicly that they were at war with Labour and this is clearly the case. This right-wing government has made many disastrous changes for workers, while removing “challenges” for employers.

Counterpoint: *What, if anything, keeps you hopeful?*

Scott: When I go out to our schools and talk to people, I'm hopeful. People have been sold a bill of goods by this government, and now they realize that they've been lied to. People are starting to get riled up and they are ready to take action. People are waiting to be engaged by their union, and they're ready to stand up when the call for action comes. Provincial budget cuts to education and health care really make an impact on people's families, but it has taken time for people to see that. It takes a lot of work to make people see through the government lies.

Stacey: Activism, sometimes from where you least expect it, makes me hopeful. The fact that people in Saskatchewan are willing to stand up to employers, governments and right-wing ideals, keeps me going. When thousands of everyday people can tell a government that cuts to libraries are not acceptable—by showing up at “read-ins” at their local library branches and MLA offices in small towns and large cities—and actually see the government walk back the cuts, there's a reason to be hopeful!

Interviews have been edited for brevity and clarity.

B.C. repeals discriminatory health labour laws

A 16-year-long battle by the Hospital Employees' Union to restore justice for its members has ended in victory.

Last November, the province's NDP government repealed discriminatory legislation (Bills 29 and 94) brought in by the former Liberal government. Those laws stripped health care workers' collective agreements of critical job security provisions, excluded them

from the full protection of provincial labour laws, and facilitated privatization in hospitals and long-term care homes.

The NDP's *Health Sector Statutes Repeal Act* was introduced into the B.C. Legislature during HEU's biennial convention in November. Delegates and guests watched by livestream and, within minutes, erupted into thunderous applause. Following the announce-

ment, convention delegates lined up at the mics to talk about how their lives had been impacted by the Liberal's anti-worker laws.

As a result of Bill 29, thousands of health care workers—mostly women—were fired as health authorities contracted out hospital cleaning, food services, laundry and other support

services. And Bill 94 facilitated the layoff of thousands more, by nursing home operators who subcontracted care and support staff to keep wages low and bust union collective agreements.

In 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled provisions of Bill 29, including those that nullified job security protections against

contracting out, were unconstitutional. In doing so, it established collective bargaining as a charter-protected right for all workers.

However, both laws continued to exclude health care workers from key provisions of the *B.C. Labour Relations Code*, including successor rights and common employer declarations.

The repealing legislation will be implemented early in the year through regulation after consultation with sector stakeholders.

When it comes into force, health workers will regain access to successorship protections under the *Code*, which ensure workers don't lose their collective agreement or union membership when a business is sold or transferred from one owner to another.

The union also anticipates the NDP will introduce legislation this spring that may include an expansion of successorship to cover instances where "contract flips" take place in health care and some other settings.

And as Counterpoint goes to press, HEU members are voting on a tentative agreement that includes guidelines and a process by which government and/or employers will look at the potential of returning contracted-out services to the direct control of health authorities.

■ Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)



HEU convention delegates react to live-streamed announcement that punitive health worker legislation will finally be repealed.

CUPE-Québec holds its first ever human rights conference

This past December, CUPE-Québec organized an important and engaging symposium on human rights, a first ever for the division.

Members of CUPE-Québec's Women's Committee, Pink Triangle Committee, Human Rights Committee, and the Conseil québécois des autochtones du SCFP were applauded for the quality and diversity of the sessions on offer to participants.

"Supporting marginalized people requires understanding their reality," said

Josée Aubé, a CUPE-Québec representative in the Human Rights Branch. "For example, in order to grasp the problems affecting Indigenous communities, we welcomed Natacha Tanguay, who worked as a researcher with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It was a moving experience."

Conference participants also marked December 6th, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women and the 29th anniversary

of the École Polytechnique massacre. The symposium welcomed Nathalie Provost, one of the survivors of that tragedy.

The feminist activist's remarks were moving, but most of all, inspiring. She beautifully reminded participants that survivors must rise again to fight for a better world.

Following the speech, one of the women in attendance, who was only 13 years old when the Polytechnique tragedy rocked the country and the entire world, declared that she "personally

became a feminist on December 6, 1989!"

Finally, the symposium wrapped up with an engaging discussion on how to reach out to equity-seeking communities within our union ranks.

"Their place is by our side, and together we will be able to improve the lot of thousands of workers," said Josée Aubé.

Interestingly, this symposium marked the first time a CUPE-Québec event attracted more women than men (60 per cent).

■ Lisa Djevahirdjian

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY

Locals want more staff to better support our members and CUPE National delivers

In today's bargaining and political climate, our locals and chartered organizations face complex new realities.

In many regions, locals are merging into big provincial locals, and we have more central and provincial bargaining tables. This requires much more team work and provincial coordination. Small locals are a big part of our union, and we needed to look at how we could service them better.

The National Task Force on Staffing was launched after our last National Convention precisely so we could find out how to best meet everyone's needs.

I presided over the taskforce, which included members from our National Executive Board and directors from large and small regions. I also consulted with locals across

the country: the clear priority was to increase the direct servicing staff, so we can better support our members.

The Task Force heard the message loud and clear, and providing better support was front and center in our 25 recommendations approved by the National Executive Board last September.

The priority was also fresh in mind when we put together the union's 2019 budget last fall. Thanks to careful financial oversight, strong membership growth and the new revenue that comes with it, we had approximately three million dollars for new spending for 2019. We put most of the new money into staffing to provide direct service to our members. I am extremely proud to say that our 2019 budget includes 17 new staff positions—much better than two years ago when we could only announce one new position across the whole country.

This a concrete start and we will continue to implement the Task Force recommendations in the months and years ahead. As we come to the end of this decade, we have an opportunity to look at how CUPE is supporting our members and our locals, and take the necessary steps to do better in the decade ahead.

The National Task Force on Staffing report is available online at cupe.ca/staffing-report.

CHARLES FLEURY ONLINE twitter.com/CUPENatSec



CUPE members take frontline stories to Parliament Hill in fight for universal child care

For Lee-Ann Lalli, November 20th, 2018 will always be a day she remembers with pride.

“It was amazing to share my story,” said Lalli, an early childhood educator with CUPE 1936 in Vancouver. “I was able to use my own voice to lobby the government to do a better job in supporting parents, children and child care workers.”

In November, Lalli and the other members of CUPE’s National Child Care Working Group took to Parliament Hill, along with 100 early childhood educators, parents, grandparents, and activists to educate parliamentarians about



the need for affordable universal child care and decent wages for child care workers.

The crowd went to the Hill in search of “child care champions”—decision-makers willing to commit to a publicly funded and managed child care system, and who would support

more directed federal spending on child care over the next decade. Currently, Canada spends about 0.3 per cent of GDP on child care, far short of the widely accepted international benchmark of one per cent.

The lobby day was over a year in the making and was the largest the sector

has seen in over a decade. Advocacy group Child Care Now organized the event with support from CUPE National. Activists met with over 60 MPs and senators, including members of every party and several cabinet ministers. Ministers heard first-hand accounts of the child care crisis in Canada from frontline workers and concerned families.

For some of the activists, it was their first experience speaking directly to government. “I was a bit intimidated to go to the parliamentarians’ offices,” says Paule Turgeon, an early childhood educator in Quebec with SCFP 1296. But thanks to a special motivation, Turgeon found her nerve. “The kids I care for are at the centre of everything I do, so I knew I could do it.”

According to lobby day participants, the response

to their efforts was mixed. Some politicians were supportive of the issue but waived off the funding requirement, saying that one per cent GDP “is not going to fly.” Others, like NDP Member of Parliament Brigitte Sansoucy, took our members’ message straight to the floor of the House of Commons.

No matter the outcome, the lobby effort helped many find their voice and renewed the hope and enthusiasm of child care advocates across the country—some of whom have been at this for decades.

“I’ve worked as an early childhood educator for over twenty years and have been a child care activist for over 35 years,” says Shellie Bird, member of CUPE 1979. “Being part of this lobby effort was a real honour.”

■ **Emily Turk**

CUPE is the largest union in Canada and we keep on growing

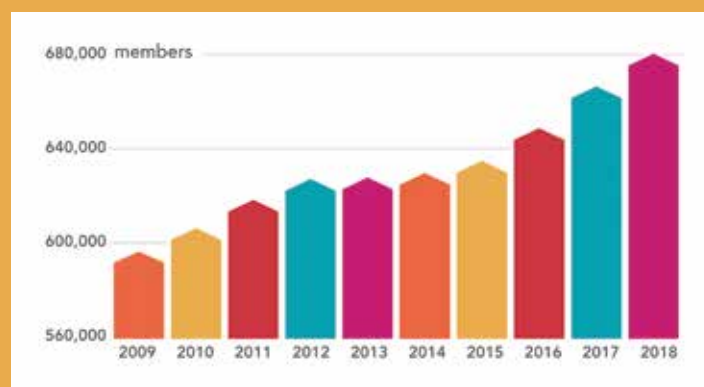
Canada’s largest labour union keeps on growing as we announce our membership has reached 680,000 workers nationwide.

The latest figures come following a year of organizing successes across the country. Together in 2018, thanks to the hard work

of CUPE staff, member organizers and activists, over 7,800 workers from a diversity of sectors joined the union. There is so much to be proud of.

CUPE represents workers in every province, working in sectors like child care, communications,

education, emergency and security services, energy, health care, libraries, municipal, post-secondary, social services, and transportation. CUPE was founded in 1963 with 57,000 members.



Educational assistants shape anti-violence policy in Edmonton schools

Gloria Lepine had had enough.

“I need danger pay,” Lepine told her employer, Edmonton Public Schools. That comment got the employer’s attention.

Chief Steward for CUPE Local 3550, Lepine, along with hundreds of other educational assistants (EAs), was getting more vocal about the ongoing violence in their workplace. As a member of CUPE’s National Executive Board, Lepine was instrumental in her local’s decision to work with the employer to create a policy to stop the violence.

CUPE 3550 represents over 3,000 support staff workers (including educational assistants, library and

office workers, technicians, and food services staff) who support thousands of Edmonton students every day.

Support staff workers were filing incident reports on a weekly—sometimes daily—basis. The violence that educational assistants and other staff faced from students—including biting, hitting and kicking—got so serious at one school that four EAs invoked their right to refuse unsafe work.

There were claims to the Workers’ Compensation Board, and physical and psychological injuries were common, Lepine says. “We said, this is crazy. We need a policy on violence in the workplace.”

Adding to the pressure was Alberta Education and Edmonton Public Schools’ policy of “full inclusion” in the community schools. This meant that kids with different learning needs were all placed in the same class as the “mainstream” kids. However, the employer wasn’t always providing the level of support needed to ensure a productive learning environment for all students.

Lepine points out that the problems weren’t always coming from the “inclusion kids.” The vast majority of the kids acting out, she says, were mainstream kids. “We’re prepared to take care of the needs of the special needs kids,” Lepine says.

CUPE 3550 worked

with all Edmonton Public Schools staff groups (including the Alberta Teachers’ Association, CUPE 474 Custodians, and CUPE 784 Maintenance) to press for a joint committee with the employer to develop a policy on violence in the workplace.

To their credit, Edmonton Public Schools saw the wisdom in making schools

safer and engaged with the unions to create a policy. The process took 3.5 years but was ultimately successful. Lepine says the concerns of workers are at the centre of the new policy.

“We’re happy with the outcome,” Lepine says. “The policy helps ensure safety for our members.”

This joint approach may not work at every workplace. But unions can play a role in shaping policy for the better, if employers are willing to listen.

■ **David Robbins**

Workplace violence is a serious hazard that many CUPE members face every day. That’s why we’ve recently launched CUPE’s national response on workplace violence and harassment. We’re providing locals and members with the tools they need to educate their members about their rights on the job, and to tackle the issue or violence at work with their employer. If you are looking for resources on workplace violence, visit cupe.ca/violence-prevention-kit.