

CUPE BC Executive Board
Report to Convention – April 2017

INTRODUCTION

At each annual convention CUPE BC's Executive Board reports to our members. Part of this report covers our work in delivering on the commitments made at last year's Convention described in the Action Plan. At the same time it identifies the issues that we believe our members will face in the coming year, and the challenges we need to be prepared for.

CUPE BC is the largest union in BC with over 85,000 members. It is our priority to support our affiliated locals and district councils. That work is as diverse and exciting as our membership. Our goals for the year are set out in the Action Plan, which is developed from the commitments made each year at convention.

Much of the work we have done in the past year and some of the most important work any of us will do in the next two weeks is to work towards sending John Horgan and the BC NDP to Victoria as the Government. On May 9th, British Columbians will go to the polls. With the BC NDP, we will have the opportunity to elect a government that is committed to addressing the issues most important to the majority of British Columbians – providing accessible quality healthcare, addressing underfunding so that our schools are safe and healthy learning environments, finding solutions to the housing affordability crisis, addressing child poverty and protecting the environment.

CUPE members will have an opportunity to vote for an NDP government that supports the public delivery of services and values the critical work that they do in their workplaces and communities. All workers in BC will have a chance to elect representatives who have fought the current government on its weakening of employment standards legislation, the tearing up of labour contracts and on its flagrant disregard for court decisions upholding the rights of unionized workers.

CUPE BC will continue to work in support of all of these objectives, both during and after the election, with elected officials and our labour and community partners. One important part of this will be continuing our discussion of tax fairness. It is through a fair and progressive tax system that all of these issues that contribute to healthy and strong communities can be pursued.

There will be many more things to keep us busy in the upcoming year, not least of which will be preparing for our move to our new offices in November. This new 45,000 square foot building will have the latest technology, a training centre, increased accessibility for meeting spaces for our locals, and is situated in Burnaby in very close proximity to skytrain access. Aside from being a new, purpose built facility, this building is owned by CUPE and is a legacy for future generations of CUPE members.

In April of last year CUPE BC launched the new website. The old site had become out of date and was no longer serving the needs of the Division or members as best as it should. The new cupe.bc.ca is built on the NationBuilder platform, which is a campaign-focused tool that will provide more interactivity and will also improve the Division's capacity to engage members and encourage activism.

BARGAINING

CUPE BC operates in a support capacity for bargaining across the province. Wherever needed CUPE BC and the Executive Board are present, applying political pressure, engaging allies and generally supporting local executives and bargaining committees. We also work with our allies in the labour movement in places where there are multi-union or provincial bargaining tables to ensure that CUPE members are getting the deal that they need.

Over the past year, through our work alongside National Servicing Representatives, we have helped to bring about agreements that are favourable to our membership

and continue to fight concessions to our agreements that would roll back workers' rights and compensation.

While we would like to see improvements to WorkSafe BC at the provincial level and other labour reforms, and despite attempts by the NDP opposition to bring forward proposed legislation that would see better working conditions for all workers, the current government refuses to recognize or endorse any such legislation. As a result, we are focused on supporting the BC NDP in the May 2017 election so that they form government and finally address issues important to working people.

We would like to thank all of the members who have taken the time and energy to work on their bargaining committees across the province. Without our members, dedicated to building fairer collective agreements and pushing back against employer concessions we would not have the success we have as a union.

POLITICAL ACTION

Political action work has been identified as a priority by successive conventions and we continue to work hard on this front to bring forward governments at all levels that have the interests of our members and workers at heart. We have worked hard to support candidates in elections from the local school board and municipal elections all the way up to federal election candidates.

For the past year CUPE BC has been focused on the May 9th provincial election and we are working on two main fronts to support a change in government. It is important to recognize that we lost the last provincial election by 8 ridings and 5700 votes. This left us with 4 more years of public service starvation at the hands of Christy Clark and the BC Liberals.

The first front is increasing voter turnout of CUPE members voting in British Columbia. Contacting members by mail, email, phone, social media, and the doorstep to motivate votes for BC NDP candidates is a key priority.

The second, and very important front is in working with Locals to recruit, train, and support members taking on leadership roles in BC NDP and working on campaigns. This year we have held a record number of training workshops in partnership with our affiliates and have trained over 400 activists, including 100 CUPE members.

All this hard work has generated significant results to date. A record number of CUPE members past and present have stepped forward to stand for election. These strong brave sisters deserve our gratitude and thanks and we would like to acknowledge them for their dedication to working people in this province and their willingness to stand up for change.

- Sister Lisa Beare – running in Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows
- Sister Judy Darcy – running in New Westminster
- Sister Natalie Fletcher (HEU) – running in Prince George-Valemount
- Sister Stephanie Goudie – running in Peace River South
- Sister Sylvia Lindgren – running Shuswap
- Sister Barbara Nederpel (HEU) – running in Kamloops-North Thompson
- Sister Tracey O'Hara – running in Chilliwack
- Sister Rachna Singh – running in Surrey-Green Timbers

THE COST OF GOVERNMENTS HOSTILE TO WORKERS

It is not without good reason that we are calling on CUPE members to hit the campaign trail. For the past sixteen years our members, and British Columbians in general, have felt the impact of a government that has consistently pursued policies that favour the rich and corporate interests at the expense of working and underemployed people in BC. Budget 2017's announcement of a reduction in MSP will only bring it back to 2002 levels and will in large part be offset by continued

increases in BC Hydro and ICBC rates. We have seen a decline in funding to healthcare and education, and privatization across sectors. More specific to CUPE members (and our labour partners), we have spent the last 16 years having to push back against an administration that does not value public services and is overtly hostile to unions.

It is no secret to anyone; the data is available through Elections BC, that the BC Liberal government is owned by the wealthy and the well connected. In 2016 alone the Liberals raised over \$12 million dollars. In the past 10 years five companies and one association have now each donated more than \$1 million to the party, including EnCana Corporation (\$1.1 million), the Aquilini Group (\$1.2 million), and Teck (\$2.3 million). The party's top 10 donors have given in excess of \$11.7 million. With the BC Liberals digging deep into those war chests it is more important than ever that we give as much financially to the BC NDP as well as get our boots on the ground to do the grass roots organizing that is at the heart of the labour movement.

This hostile government impacts CUPE and its members at every turn. In our locals we face more fiscally conservative policies that make life harder for our members and take away rights and benefits previously bargained. At the labour board we struggle to get new certifications approved and fair deals are getting harder to come by. In our homes, we are paying more and getting less, and increasing numbers of our members are getting priced out of the communities that they live and work in by growing unaffordability combined with the ongoing increase in low-paying precarious work.

There is every indication that such a trajectory will continue if the BC Liberals are re-elected, and Budget 2017 is all the evidence we need. The Christy Clark Liberals have shown that instead of reinvesting in the services they have spent the past several decades cutting, they are going to throw small amounts of money at big problems caused by the systemic underfunding of important public services and doing nothing to address crucial issues of affordability, the housing crisis and child

poverty. The BC Liberals' obsession with eliminating deficits is coming at a very high cost to those British Columbians who can afford it the least.

It's also becoming increasingly clear that if the BC Liberals are re-elected they plan to come after the municipal sector. Peter Fassbender, the minister responsible for local governments, has said that he wants to bring in provincial controls on local government employee compensation. If the BC NDP is unsuccessful in May, CUPE BC, along with progressive councils across the province, will push back on this stripping of responsibility from locally elected leaders.

Underfunding of the public K-12 sector has been substantial and chronic. Since the Liberals were elected in 2001 we have seen over 249 schools closed, and significant cuts to programming and staff. British Columbia ranks second last in all of Canada when it comes to funding K-12 education, but rather than commit to adequate, stable and predictable funding, the government's response to the underfunding crisis has been a series of ad hoc funding measures meant to quell public outrage in time for the election.

While the K-12 public education system in British Columbia remains significantly underfunded, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of public dollars directed to private schools. Funding for private schools has increased 61% in the last 10 years, and is soon expected to reach an increase of 93.8%.

The BC Teachers' Federation experienced an historic win at the Supreme Court of Canada late last year that has forced an unwilling and irresponsible government to fund the restoration of class size and composition limits to 2002 levels. While this is an important landmark win for the sector, it does nothing to address the many harmful effects of underfunding that reach far beyond teacher staffing levels.

Support staff in K-12 have been working harder than ever. Unrealistic workloads, insufficient hours, staffing cuts and staff working unpaid hours are far too prevalent

across the sector. And this says nothing of the increases in workplace violence many of our staff are facing.

BC remains the only province without a poverty reduction plan, and measures in the budget such as the elimination of transit subsidies for people on disability will only exacerbate insecurity and poverty for BC's most vulnerable. And while those on disability will see a very modest increase in their benefits, they are well below the cost of living increases since their benefits have been largely frozen for the past 16 years.

Revenue from tuition fees for post secondary education, which will see a rise of 6.1% annually, is one of the fastest growing sources of revenue for the Liberal government. The BC Liberal government continues to throw money at colleges for capital construction to build and buy equipment while at the same time, effectively cutting core funding transfers. During the Liberals' reign beginning in 2001, expenses for Colleges have increased by roughly 80%. In the same time period, core funding, the money to pay for programs and the staff needed to support them and maintain the infrastructure, has risen by only 40%. This 40% shortfall over 16 years is taking its toll on our members, the students they support, and the buildings they work in. Additionally, with cuts to programs like Adult Basic Education, Adult Special Education and English Language Training, the sector has seen considerable job losses as well.

The announcement of changes to the MSP tax will not change its regressive nature. Under the new plan an individual or family making \$51,000 per year will pay the same in fees as a family or individual making \$120,000. Further, a new and complicated system of applications for fee reductions that will involve employers and group plan administrators will be put in place to verify incomes prior to rate reductions being accessible to individuals or group plan payers.

On top of all of this, there have been notable reductions in the number of people delivering public services, with fulltime equivalent staff numbers reducing steadily since 2009/10.

Although the 2016/2017 budget has been touted by the BC Liberals as the “people’s budget” where the government gives back all its hoarded surpluses, there is very little that will build a more just and equitable society in BC included in the budget. There is something very wrong with a government that continuously asks citizens to pay for regressive healthcare fees and incur high levels of student debt. This is all while revenue from taxation as a percentage of GDP continues to decline. Moreover, the so-called prosperity fund, money that was supposed to be generated by LNG revenues but was entirely taxpayer funded is being drained to meet election budget promises and give back tax breaks to businesses.

It is simply unacceptable in a civil society for a government to continue to forecast and reap these kinds of surpluses while child protection, youth mental health and family support services face underfunding crises, there is an over-representation of Aboriginal children in care crisis, we experience a child care affordability crisis, student and family debt rises precipitously, health and education remain underfunded and stretched to the limit, child poverty in this province endures, and disabled citizens are stripped of affordable bus passes and handed out meagre offensive increases after years of starvation.

We need a serious conversation (and action) on tax fairness in this province. Pushing for this is something that CUPE BC is committed to do in the upcoming year.

While the budget indicated that Christy Clark’s government would maintain the status quo, favouring corporate interests over that of creating a more humane and equitable social climate, it is not the only indication of the government’s disregard for the majority of British Columbians. Perhaps one of the most egregious examples

of this was the contempt shown for notions of transparency and accountability and the public's right to information about government decision-making that came in the form of the "triple delete scandal." This event revealed a culture of circumventing freedom of information requests through the destruction of public records subject to BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Legislation.

Access to information is crucial to the work that CUPE BC, national staff, and many of you do, and it is a fundamental component of government accountability. Consequently, CUPE BC takes violations of this legislation and the right to information very seriously. We are long-time advocates of access to information, and this year we made a submission to the Special Committee to Review the British Columbia Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act advocating for the changes we think are required to improve British Columbia's access to information architecture.

DEFENDING PUBLIC SERVICES

It is in this context that we continue to resist the privatization of public services at both the provincial and local levels. Working with the BC Region through the Strong Communities Working Group provides us with an effective avenue to bring together CUPE BC officers and staff from across our sectors to oppose public private partnerships (P3s), Alternative Service Delivery (ASD), Core Service Reviews and cloaked privatization initiatives such as "shared services" arrangements.

The Strong Communities Working Group (SCWG) is a committee of staff created 17 years ago to support the political and strategic work of the Division. The group meets weekly, and is tasked with monitoring emerging issues and carrying out campaigns to support our members across British Columbia. They also help to implement decisions made by delegates at our conventions, including the Action Plan. Their energy and commitment is imperative to our success defending public services and supporting locals.

Currently, the SCWG is comprised of:

Nathan Allen (Election Coordinator)
Greg Burkitt (Education)
Lynn Falk (Administrative Support)
Jordana Feist (Research)
David Fleming (Organizing)
Jeff Lawson (Local Community Organizer)
Roseanne Moran (Local Government Liaison)
Trent Snickers (Anti-Privatization Coordinator)
Justin Schmid (Legislative Coordinator)
Clay Suddaby (Communications)

Division Officers, President Paul Faoro, Secretary-Treasurer Trevor Davies, Executive Assistant Sharon Prescott, Regional Director Robin Jones and Assistant Regional Director Meena Brisard also participate in the work of the SCWG as well as the GVPs who bring the voice of the membership to the table and advise on emerging issues.

Despite significant challenges we continue to work with locals in their communities to resist privatization. In addition to our support of fight back campaigns in 2016 we launched a proactive campaign wherein locals could apply to CUPE BC for support and funding for contracting in campaigns. CUPE BC received three applications to the “Bringing Work Back In-House” Campaign from Locals 399, 4879, and 7000 and work has begun with all three Locals.

For over more than a decade we have been working with CUPE Local 1978, Capital Regional District (CRD) employees, on a successful “Keep it Public” campaign, ensuring that sewage treatment options in the CRD are kept public. Even though not all the goals were met through this significant effort the majority of the project was kept public and we learned much from the campaign and how to structure future campaigns from this ground-breaking work.

Other successes include CUPE Local 608, which was also able to protect parking services in the City of Penticton despite significant challenges in that community with poor decision making by council and senior staff leading to financial difficulties. Nonetheless, 2016 saw a number of new and ongoing threats which will keep us busy in 2017.

The City of White Rock issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for solid waste collection early in 2015. We have been working closely with community members and CUPE Local 402-02 there and we have an ongoing campaign to keep these services in house. This has continued to be an issue through 2016 and into 2017. Building on our successful experience in Prince George, CUPE BC, working with national staff and locals, will continue our campaign surrounding the core services review taking place across the province. We will take every opportunity to work with locals to fight back against these “one-size fits all” reviews whose main aim always appears to be to find “efficiencies” by reducing the quality of services our members provide, reducing their compensation, or eliminating their jobs.

Similarly, we will support efforts to monitor and campaign against privatization threats emerging from shared services initiatives in the K-12 and post-secondary education sectors.

Working with Allies and Supporting Other Struggles

Working with our allies and supporting other struggles is one of the most important roles we all have in the labour movement. It is, after all, what makes us a movement, and allows us to fight for those things that not only improve the broader bargaining context for all unionized workers, but that improve working conditions for all workers, and the communities we work in.

There are many organizations that share our values with whom we work regularly or join forces with in issue-oriented coalitions. Such organizations share our concerns around fair and safe work, environmental protection and climate change, the value

of public services, addressing poverty and inequality, and justice for migrants, Indigenous and racialized people.

We are active participants in Pride parades and celebrations across the province. Many locals stepped up to provide significant support for these festive and important events last year. These have been excellent forums for us to show our support for our LGBTTTQI workers, and to bring together CUPE members in celebration of diversity. Similarly, CUPE BC's participation in Surrey's annual Vaisakhi Parade, an event with more than 250,000 participants, provides a festive way to connect with community partners and celebrate diversity.

We also support community groups aimed at making life better in a variety of ways for a wide range of British Columbians. We are active members of the Living Wage for Families Advisory Committee, we support the \$10 A Day Child Care Campaign, and Protein for People, a community partnership to address the shortages of protein at BC's food banks.

While it is impossible to name all of the allies and community groups with whom we work with throughout the year, it is worth highlighting some of our enduring working relationships. We work closely with the Columbia Institute and support the work they do with progressive School Trustees and Municipal Mayors, Councillors and Directors.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) is one of our most important allies when it comes to debunking methodologically flawed research from right-wing think tanks that continually attempt to vilify unions, unionized workers and the public sector. We are currently working with the BC Federation of Labour, and other affiliates, to provide additional funding to the CCPA for a research position dedicated precisely to this work. The new position will conduct in-depth public finance analysis and work on fair taxation.

We support the vital work that Pivot Legal Society does in pursuing legal reform with the aim of challenging law and policy that intensifies poverty and social exclusion.

We also support the more focused struggles of groups such as the BC Health Coalition to protect and expand public healthcare, and CoDevelopment Canada in their solidarity and partnership work in Latin America. Through the Colleen Jordan Humanity fund, we continue to support international solidarity and take many opportunities to support homegrown initiatives as well. In May, CUPE BC contributed \$20,000 to the Alberta Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund set up by CUPE National supporting the more than 2000 CUPE members who work in the Fort McMurray area.

Another key piece of the partnership work we do is actively supporting other unions in their struggles and community outreach. We continue to work closely with the BC Federation of Labour, supporting many campaigns and projects including the \$15 minimum wage campaign, Women's Lobby, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Working Group, Day of Mourning and issues concerning the broader labour movement in BC. The CUPE BC President, Secretary-Treasurer, and Executive Board members spend a significant amount of time working on behalf of CUPE members by participating on the BC Federation of Labour Executive Council and on other campaigns and working groups.

Sometimes the partners we work with are also our employers. Municipalities and school boards can share our values. Many municipalities have opposed free trade agreements and often share our concerns over investment and procurement provisions in these agreements. We make the same calls to other levels of government concerning funding for municipal infrastructure. Similarly, school boards share our concerns over the chronic underfunding of public education, and we support them in speaking out against the downloading of funding cuts to the local level. Friendly local governments reflect in large part the work we do

supporting and educating progressive candidates in local elections and supporting education and lobby efforts between elections.

Finally, we work with provincial groups that are outside the labour movement that share our concerns including the Union of BC Municipalities, the BC School Trustees' Association and the BC Library Association. These groups can make powerful allies in the community and our continued good relationship with them means we can access their membership through conferences and other events.

COMMITTEES

CUPE BC's committees are critical in reporting and advising the CUPE BC Executive Board around a variety of issues and concerns of our union and its members. We have 24 committees and over 250 members from across the province that participate in bringing a strong voice forward. Every two years these committees are reappointed with representation from across the province.

After convention this year there will be a call to locals asking for names to be submitted to sit on committees. This is an opportunity for locals to identify new and emerging activists and for those people to gain significant capacity working alongside dedicated trade unionists. It is important that we continue to engage members through committee work and get more members involved in and thinking about the union at a provincial level.

Our committees bring people together to work through issues that affect members and sectors across the province. By working together they often consolidate issues into concrete action items in the form of resolutions at Convention, as well as informing debate at Convention and on the Action Plan.

Our committees are often involved in campaigns, around critical issues facing a local or a sector such as contracting out, understaffing or precarious work. They also play a crucial role in connecting our work and our members with the broader community.

After 25 years of committee growth and branching out it is time to take a look at the committee structure and strengthen the parts and the processes that are fundamental to our union and prune back some parts to allow more resources and time to flow into the larger system and into the work we do supporting our affiliated locals.

CONFERENCES

Conferences are another way in which committees are critical to the work that we do. Conferences provide a forum for members to come together and share their experiences at the local level with the wider membership. They provide a dedicated space for members to have in-depth discussions about common struggles, to hear from speakers in the field, and to share useful information about successful and less successful strategies.

Last year we held an exciting Education Sector Conference, "A Better Future for All – Investing in Public Education", for our K-12, Colleges and Universities sector held in Vancouver at the Westin Bayshore on November 7-9. More than 200 members participated in workshops including; Workload and Unpaid Work/Creating a Crisis (K-12), Violence in the Workplace (K-12), Violence in Post-Secondary, College Board of Governor's Training, Accommodation and Attendance Management, Effective Communications/Presenting to Boards, Creating a Regional Education Forum, Building Relations with First Nations and What you need to know about *The School Act*. Speakers included Alberta Minister of Education David Eggen, Vancouver School Board Trustee Mike Lombardi, MLA Rob Fleming and MLA Kathy Corrigan.

As a result of the move to the new facility and the demands on staff time we are not hosting a conference in 2017. We are looking forward to CUPE BC conferences resuming in 2018.

WORKING WITH OUR NATIONAL UNION

We work closely with the National Union and this is an important relationship. They support us at every level, from walking the picket lines with striking locals to lobbying at the federal level for worker's rights. We would like to acknowledge the invaluable work of the people CUPE National employs to work on behalf of the members in British Columbia. Robin Jones as Regional Director and Meena Brisard as Assistant Regional Director provide ready support and advice to the Division. CUPE staff representatives, specialist representatives and support staff share their experience and expertise daily with the members and CUPE BC. We thank the representatives for their commitment to our members and locals. They recognize that this is more than just work, it's part of a movement.

The National Union supports us in our own local campaigns and political action and by developing large national campaigns such as that around renewing the Health Accord and the Unite for Fairness Campaign that benefit our members and members across Canada.

CUPE BC members are represented on the National Executive Board by CUPE BC President, Paul Faoro who sits as a Regional Vice-President of the National Union. We need to thank CUPE National President Mark Hancock, and Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury for their unflinching support for the work we do here in British Columbia and hope that our members will send delegates to National Convention October 2-6, 2017 and support the re-election of the team that has been supportive of CUPE in BC.

CUPE BC

Since our last convention we have lost three dedicated activists and long time community and social justice advocates who were active or retired members of the CUPE BC Executive Board. We would like to take a moment to remember Brother Owen Dykstra, CUPE BC President 1981-1986, Brother Michael Lanier, CUPE BC

Regional Vice President and Sister Brenda Coombs, CUPE BC Trustee (2003-2005)

At the 2016 Convention, delegates passed a resolution to add two new Diversity seats to the CUPE BC Executive Board. At this year's Convention there will be elections for those seats, one representing Pink Triangle (LGBTQI) Workers and the other representing Workers with Disabilities. With all four equity-seeking groups represented moving forward, the Union will better reflect the diversity of our membership while providing more balance on the board.

OUR EMPLOYEES

Finally, we say thank you to those who work directly for CUPE BC. It is their work that makes our work possible, and without whom we would be lost. Without Executive Assistant Sharon Prescott we would not be attending this convention today. Kristi Bounegru, Shirley Loftus, Wendy Monkhouse, Jolanta Osowska, Darci Schmid, Ron Stewart and Lori Watt are all invaluable to the smooth running of our office and many events. We would particularly like to thank Ron for his long service and dedication as he moves on from our organization and into his retirement. We wish you all the best!

Thank you all again to all our staff on behalf of the Officers, Executive Board and the delegates to this Convention.

April 2017

