

CUPE BC Municipal Committee
Report to Convention – April 2017

Nationally, nearly a quarter of all CUPE members are those in the Municipal sector, and here in BC, it's a nearly a third, making it CUPE BC's largest sector. The work CUPE members do in the municipal sector touches the lives of BC residents every day. The cities we work and live in are the building blocks of our community, and the public services we provide lead to good paying union jobs. But we are in tougher economic times than we have been in before. Many families across the province continue to struggle - with increases in gas prices, electricity, food, MSP premiums, property taxes, and house prices. Our provincial government has repeatedly ignored calls from middle working class families, and it is up to us as union members to stand up and fight for the public services we all need and want.

Toward the end of 2016, we saw many locals ratify their collective agreements in Metro Vancouver, including CUPE locals 15, 402, 387, 23, and 454. Wages and benefits were the two main issues - a pattern we have seen time after time. Employers want to take more of what we fought for, and will continue to fight for. We must all stand together in solidarity and never bargain concessions. Thank you to all those members who worked tirelessly on the bargaining committees, and those who are still continuing to fight without a collective agreement.

Due to the dedication and efforts of our members, many cities across Canada are realizing the true cost of privatization. Whether it is a city owned arena in Langley or a water distribution system in White Rock, cities are deciding to bring back services in house. After much fighting, we have won in the Capital Regional District with a plan which includes a publicly owned, operated and maintained wastewater treatment plant to be built in Esquimalt, and P3 biosolids treatment facility to be built in Saanich. We must continue to fight against privatization. The true goal of privatization is profit before people, while the liability remains public. If we can get this message across, more and more cities will move in a direction of bringing back services in house.

Many of our front line workers in this province have had many new challenges, particularly those dealing with the opioid health crisis. Fentanyl is 100 times stronger than heroin, and even a single grain can be lethal to life. In 2016, there were 914 people in British Columbia who overdosed, making it the deadliest year recorded in our history. And now a new drug is emerging called carfentanil, making the work our brothers and sisters do even more dangerous. Carfentanil, is primarily used as an anesthetic and tranquilizer for large animals such as an elephant, and now we are seeing this drug appear in our communities. This is a public health emergency that our provincial government has ignored.

Public services needed to respond to this health crisis were, and are still, provincially mandated services. However, instead these services are being downloaded to municipal governments around the province with no funding. Our local governments already have problems raising revenue, and keeping up with the demand of increasing services, which results in shortfalls in revenue and makes responding to issues like public health emergencies challenging.

To make things even worse we have a provincial government wanting to control municipal raises, for all municipal workers in the province. That would essentially be the start of a zero percent pay raise mandate by the provincial government. We must continue to support local and progressive politicians to resist provincial government interference in free collective bargaining.

The municipal sector also continues to see attacks from the CTF (Canadian Taxpayers Federation) regarding its alleged high wages, premium benefits, and “golden” pension plans. The right wing media continues to promote these views and we must continue our efforts to respond to these attacks of misinformation and distorted facts. These campaigns of misinformation only further deteriorate the relationship between public service workers and the citizens that we provide services for.

Brothers and sisters, 2017 is going to be different. On May 9th we will elect a new Premier for this province, and his name is John Horgan. After 16 years of Liberal cuts,

we can change the downward cycle and give support to middle class families like us. Education, health care, natural resources, transportation, or whatever Christy Clark can get her hands on, she cuts! Overcrowded schools, and hospitals with patients in hallways have become the norm for this province. So with just few days to go, get in touch with your political action committee, or representative, and let's elect a government that is willing to put workers and communities first!

As important as Provincial elections are, we must not ignore municipal elections. Municipal issues touch our lives more than any other issue. Cities maintain and provide water distribution, sewer and storm collection, garbage pick up, roads, parks, community centers and much more, and these are all delivered through municipal services. In 2018 we can elect progressive candidates in cities where we live and raise our children. It is never too early to start planning for the next election!

With a strong financial footing, cities and towns can deliver public services that build unique and steady communities, tackle issue that matter the most, and meet the needs of the public. Together, we can build these communities we all want to live in, so lets go out together and do it!

Respectfully submitted:

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