

CUPE BC Political Action Committee
Report to Convention – April 2017

In less than two weeks we will be voting on a new provincial government. After 16 years of BC Liberal rule, we are hopeful that a new government will be elected, one that respects and supports public services, one that does not cater to the rich and powerful, but instead focuses on those who need the most help in our society.

Over the last 16 years we have seen our schools suffer from cut-backs and school closures. School libraries and music programs were shut down. Important classroom resources were lost to budget cuts. An entire generation of students lost out – all thanks to Christy Clark.

As Education Minister in 2002, she ripped classroom size provisions that protected our children from Teacher's collective agreements and blocked them from being negotiated in subsequent contracts, allowing her government to redirect funding meant to support kids to the rich in the form of tax breaks for the wealthiest in the province.

The BC Teachers Federation fought these attacks through job action and continued legal challenges that ultimately led to the 2016 Supreme Court of Canada decision after only a few hours of deliberation that declared the government's actions unconstitutional.

Finally, our kids will get the funding that they deserve and need to be successful – not because the BC Liberals decided to support our children, but because they were told their mean-spirited cuts were illegal.

This was but one example of the kind of destruction the BC Liberals have wreaked on our province, but emblematic of their policies across all industries and sectors. While public services have been starved, we have faced higher fees across the board. In contrast to this, the BC New Democratic Party promises a very different British Columbia.

Building a Better Society

The BC NDP campaign promises, among others, pledges to create a better society, one that supports working people through:

Raising up the poorest: The poorest of working people are those who earn minimum wage. Over 120,000 people, predominantly women, only earn \$10.85 per hour, a poverty wage in this expensive province. John Horgan and the BC NDP have vowed to increase it to \$15.00 per hour by 2021, lifting over a hundred thousand working British Columbians out of poverty.

Investing in our kids: We are also a province with one of the highest childcare costs in the country. John Horgan and the BC NDP pledge to create \$10 a day childcare, something that the Liberals have said would be too expensive. In fact, a report commissioned by Early Childhood Educators of BC predicts that it would, by the year 2030, boost the province's GDP by \$5.8 billion, create 68,900 jobs and boost net revenue to government by \$184 million.

Fighting climate change: The biggest challenge our world faces is climate change and John Horgan and the BC NDP are committed to lowering emissions and developing clean energy jobs.

If this is the kind of province you would like to see, this is our biggest chance to make it a reality. Vote in the provincial election to build a better BC.

Raising our voices

We participated in a number of government consultations through last year, including providing input into the new provincial libraries strategic plan document and a violence prevention framework being developed in the health care system.

Our provincial President, Paul Faoro, also presented a submission on behalf of CUPE members to the provincial budget consultations advocating for proper funding of our public services.

We continue to expand our work reaching out to chambers of commerce and other institutions in our communities to ensure that CUPE's voice is heard and that we better understand the arguments being used against public services so that we can more effectively counter them.

Human Rights Win!

Following years of lobbying and advocacy by NDP MLA Spencer Chandra Herbert (Vancouver-West End), the provincial government finally amended the Human Rights Code to add gender identity or expression to the provisions for prohibited discrimination in the B.C. Human Rights Code. This is a great win for our transgender community and a win for human rights champions!

Electoral Reform

Prime Minister Trudeau promised in the 2015 campaign that it would be "the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system." Further, he promised that within 18 months of forming government, they would introduce legislation to enact electoral reform.

In the summer of 2016, the Minister of Democratic Institutions Maryam Monsef led an all-party committee to meet with experts and tour the country to hear from Canadians about electoral reform. Our members participated strongly in those consultations, supporting mixed member proportional representation. This was echoed loudly across the country by ordinary Canadians.

The committee consensus report advised that Canadians supported proportional representation, but the government put all that research and information aside to pursue a vague and ambiguous survey about electoral values. Not surprisingly, the results were vague and ambiguous.

We await the government's next move on electoral reform, hopefully to keep their promise and to deliver a true proportional representation electoral system to Canadians.

Campaigning and Running for a Better BC

Political Action Committee members are not only active in provincial election campaigns across British Columbia, but committee member Sylvia Lindgren is also running for office in the riding of Shuswap. We also have CUPE member Lisa Beare running in

Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows and CUPE National Representative Rachna Singh running in Surrey-Green Timbers. We wish them the best of luck.

We are all doing our part in this election campaign. CUPE is running a campaign to educate CUPE members about the importance of voting in this election. Committee members are volunteering and taking leadership roles in campaigns across the province. CUPE Election Coordinator Nathan Allen is educating union and community activists throughout British Columbia, building strength from unity. CUPE Legislative Coordinator Justin Schmid is connecting locals with their local campaigns.

Together, we are stronger and we can truly make a difference in this election.

In closing

Our Committee continues to work on the front line of political action, educating CUPE members about the importance of political action and engaging them in electoral process.

We have seen our province become one of the most unequal societies in Canada. Today, the wealthiest 10% of British Columbians hold over 56.2% of the wealth while the bottom 50% have only 3.1% of the wealth.

If we are to create a more just, a more equal society, we must vote this government out and build a better province with the BC New Democrats.

On Saturday this week, advance polls open. They reopen Wednesday to Saturday next week. Please go out and vote early so that you can take May 9th off as a vacation day and work on your local campaign to ensure that we elect a government that is dedicated

to public service and creating a balanced economy – one that will benefit all British Columbians, not just the rich.

Respectfully submitted:

Sarah Bjorknas, Chair
Marcel Marsolais, Co-Chair
Denice Bardua
Pam Catsirelis
Aman Cheema
Andrea Craddock
Sophia Georgas
Sylvia Lindgren
Michael Muller
Tracey O'Hara
Bruce Richardson
Keith Todd
Sharon Prescott – Staff Advisor
Justin Schmid – Staff Advisor

April 2017

