

REGIONAL DIRECTOR
Report to Convention – 2017

For CUPE members in BC this past year has been a rather challenging one in many sectors.

The continuing agenda and far right views of the Liberals have, in many sectors, effectively eliminated free collective bargaining. We have a chance next month to defeat the Liberals and replace them with an NDP government under the leadership of John Horgan. Improvements in the minimum wage, hospital wait times, education funding and other initiatives promised by the NDP will go a long way in improving the quality of work and living for far more British Columbians than that at the hands of the Liberals.

The fight to restore free collective bargaining will require ongoing coordination and cooperation between CUPE Sectors/Locals, and a much closer relationship with affiliates in the House of Labour. CUPE BC leadership continues to forge alliances with sister unions, and we are relentless in our fight for a more united front in dealing with provincially funded sector bargaining. Increased cooperation and coordination is crucial to restoring free collective bargaining and to ensure every union can get the best deal possible for its members.

The concept of increased cooperation and solidarity is a center-piece of the December 2016 'National Executive Board Policy on Collective Bargaining: Resisting Concessions and Two-Tier Proposals, and Defending Free Collective Bargaining—Moving Forward'. We are working with staff to create a BC Region plan to implement the requirements of the Policy. We hope to increase our communication with District Councils and solicit views of CUPE members.

A review of the NEB's policy sets out the history of CUPE actions in defending free collective bargaining. Never however have we faced such a coordinated right wing attack; there will be wage controls in the municipal sector if the Liberals are re-elected.

Five year collective agreements seem to be the new norm. This is coupled with low wage increases and strong resistance to collective agreement amendments. Most employers are making a concerted attack on our hard fought benefits coverage.

Many municipalities go to, or are at the bargaining table this year. There is increased scrutiny by several right wing business backed organizations challenging public sector collective agreements. Particularly wages. We should not be surprised if the Clark government attempts legislative intervention in municipal budgets and continues, with rare exception, the appointment of anti-labour LRB appointments. One only has to look at the difficulties BC school districts are having in balancing budgets due to serious under funding. The impact on our K-12 workers is going to be severe in some districts.

Our K-12 staff and sector coordinators continue to work closely with the Division Officers to ensure the recent victory by the BCTF in restoring collective agreement language that was stripped from collective agreements by Clark recognize the important role CUPE K-12 support personnel play in education.

Our structure in CUPE with local autonomy makes us strong. True coordination requires a degree of loss of local autonomy for the greater good. We have some work to do on that front. It is sometimes a long process for presidents and other leadership to educate members in the benefits of strategy changes in support of each other and sister unions as needed.

We will continue with such efforts to impress upon members the need for an understanding of the economics of collective bargaining and the need for coordination. All in all we were very successful at most tables this past year, and I thank the staff sector coordinators, staff and membership for their hard work.

The Strong Community Working Group (SCWG) continues to meet regularly, and is attended by CUPE BC leadership, the Assistant Regional Director and CUPE staff sector coordinators as needed. The positions of Local Government Liaison, Local Community Organizer, Provincial Election Coordinator, Anti-Privatization Coordinator,

Legislative Coordinator, and Organizing Coordinator currently comprise the SCWG. They are supported by Communication, Research and UDD staff at the meetings.

All Locals are encouraged to seek the assistance and resources of the SCWG in appropriate situations through their assigned Servicing Representative.

CUPE in BC is the largest union in the province; and in the country. As we continue to grow, we enjoy a highly functional relationship between the BC CUPE Region staff and the Division. We have political capacity that is second to none and we are well placed to provide leadership for members, locals and sectors, and in working with sister trade unions in BC.

BC's Health Sector continues to see continued reorganization by the various health authorities in Community Health. The formation of a Joint Community Benefit Trust (JCBT) in the CBA has run into challenges and has recently hired a legal advisor and actuary to advise the CBA flowing from concerns that not all employers are participating in the JCBT.

The Provincial Job Evaluation Committee is up and running in the K-12 sector. Brother Peter Coombes will be assisting Locals and staff with this long term project.

Colleges and Universities have for the most part concluded collective bargaining. All settled with the government imposed mandate.

Municipalities continue to face strong pushback from employers on benefits. We are seeing for the most part wage increases in the 1.8%-2% range. Despite the pushback, we are seeing improvements by many Locals in benefits.

We have been focusing our anti-privatization efforts on several privatization issues across the province.

Delegates to National Convention 2015 adopted Strategic Directions 2015-2017 for CUPE. Several important initiatives are identified, not the least of which is organizing. Meena and I will be working closely with our Organizing Coordinator and the Division to identify workers at CUPE worksites that are non-union. We intend to up the ante in our organizing efforts.

Organizing surveys and letters to locals have been sent encouraging all to help identify groups of workers that may benefit from being organized by CUPE. We are seeing the emergence of CLAC in the BC municipal sector. Allowing a 'rat' union to set bargaining trends in the municipal sector is definitely not a good thing, and will have a negative impact on many workers. We've got to redouble our organizing efforts, and I urge all to contact Tracey Mathieson with potential organizing opportunities.

In the past, we have found most of our interactions with the current government unproductive, as the BC Liberals continue to attack workers and cut funding to the public sector, as seen in both K-12 and post-secondary education. We have however, with the assistance of our Legislative Coordinator, opened a few doors to government. CUPE BC Officers and CUPE staff have met with various Ministers over the past few months and we are forever optimistic that our access to government may improve. Less optimistic anything concrete will come from it, however it never hurts to be able to talk to government.

Staffing remains unsettled as retirements, illness, postings and leave of absences take a toll on staff ranks. I thank you for your patience as we bring in new Representatives and get them orientated to the job.

The National Officers met with BC staff on February 1st. Their presence and the information provided by them is greatly appreciated, and we look forward to working closely with National in the future. Many initiatives in BC would not be possible without the ongoing support of Brothers Charles and Mark. Their support for the Division and CUPE staff in BC has always been there and we appreciate it.

It continues to be a pleasure working closely with the Division. BC enjoys the most active Division in Canada, with Brothers Paul and Trevor working tirelessly to improve the working lives of not just CUPE members, but all workers.

I thank all staff, both National and Division as well as CUPE Locals for their patience and advice as we work through a most challenging agenda at times. Particular thanks are extended to Sisters Barb Dafoe and Allison Hill who ensure there is some semblance of order and that deadlines are met. They are extraordinarily helpful in keeping the regional and area offices running smoothly, and special thanks are extended.

It is a pleasure to work with Sister Meena Brisard as Assistant Regional Director, and I look forward to meeting a very challenging agenda with her this year.

On the CUPE BC side, Sister Sharon Prescott continues as an invaluable source of information and assistance in many areas. It is a pleasure to work with her. Lori, Darci, Shirley and Kristi are also valued members of the team. After long service with CUPE BC, Ron Stewart will be retiring. We wish Ron a long and healthy retirement.

Wendy Monkhouse and Jolanta Osowska will assume the responsibility of working with Trevor in managing the finances.

I wish you all well in your deliberations. Have a successful convention.

Robin Jones
BC Regional Director
CUPE