



CUPE BC Political Action Committee Report to Convention – May 2019

Every level of government has an impact on every aspect of our lives. Every decision a government makes has an impact on our families, our communities and our workplaces. In a democracy, our power lies in being able to influence government decisions but more significantly, it lies in our ability to influence who forms government.

Political action is fundamental to the work of our union. CUPE BC, together with its Locals and the National Union, has the ability to advocate for fairness and equality, workplace rights, and better public services for our families, our communities, and ourselves. With 95,000 members across BC, we also have a critical mass of voters we can mobilize in an election.

Our committee works to engage CUPE BC members in political action, and particularly electoral politics. Our goal is to elect and support progressive representatives who care as much as we do for our communities and the public services our members deliver.

Community Elections

On October 20, 2018, elections were held across BC for school trustees, councilors, mayors and electoral area directors. In communities large and small we elected representatives to hold office and make decisions that will affect you and your community. There were 170 labour endorsed candidates elected as progressive trustees, mayors, councilors, and directors. Over 30 of these are current or past CUPE members and staff.

CUPE members participated in these elections, and many increased their activities to include phoning and knocking on doors of our members. Your efforts as volunteers to support candidates contributed to their success. We are proud of the work you and your locals did to contribute to these victories. We encourage you to build relationships

with the councils and boards we have elected, to help them understand our concerns and to support them to stand up for public services and the workers who provide them.

Community Elections Coordinator

We were fortunate that CUPE supported the position of the Community Elections Coordinator this past year. Nathan Allen, worked fulltime and all-out to ensure our locals across BC were doing everything they can to elect politicians who shared our values.

We targeted our efforts, focusing on communities where we have the opportunity and capacity to make a difference – by re-electing politicians we have established working relationships with, and defeating politicians who have made things difficult for our members and our locals over the past four years.

We worked together with the Canadian Labour Congress, Labour Councils, and other like-minded organizations to ensure that our efforts were more effective than ever before. We were more successful by coordinating our efforts and worked with you and your locals to ensure that there were progressive candidates on as many ballots as possible in communities throughout BC.

We challenged every local in BC to find new ways to participate in community elections – and we committed that you would have our support for these efforts. When the votes were counted on October 20, we celebrated numerous victories in communities across the province thanks to CUPE local activists and other union affiliates.

By-elections

There were two major by-elections in British Columbia since the last convention that resulted from the local government elections. In Nanaimo, NDP MLA Leonard Krog resigned from his seat following his election as mayor of that city, and Kennedy Stewart, formerly the NDP MP for Burnaby South, was elected mayor of Vancouver.

The Nanaimo provincial by-election was won by Sheila Malcolmson, former NDP MP for Nanaimo-Ladysmith. Her win ensures that the BC NDP maintains their narrow majority in the provincial legislature with the help of the BC Greens.

In the Burnaby South federal by-election, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh won with almost 40% of the vote and now sits in the House of Commons as a Federal Member of Parliament. He can now turn his attention to building a strong platform for the NDP in the upcoming Federal election. We are extremely proud to have the leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada join our NDP Members of Parliament in the House of Commons.

Thank you to all the volunteers who came out and worked in these by-elections. Election funding rules have changed to eliminate union and corporate funding, but our strength has always been our members and the hard work we are willing to put in to ensure that we elect people who support working people and our values.

CUPE Fights Back

From small locals to large locals, our strength is our solidarity. When an employer takes on one CUPE local, it is taking on **680,000** CUPE members. Below are two examples of CUPE fighting back.

Last summer CUPE Local 458 members from the Village of Harrison went on strike for almost a week. These 17 workers provide a wide range of services including water and wastewater, snow removal, public works and administrative services at the Village Hall. After a rejected last offer vote, and almost a week on strike, the Village agreed to come back to the table to negotiate with CUPE. These 17 workers were supported by CUPE members and labour in standing up for workers rights and free collective bargaining.

The new City Council in Dawson Creek is pursuing an austerity agenda, with the goal of decreasing reliance on funds received through the Peace River Agreement (formerly known as the Fair Share Agreement). A number of budget cuts that directly impact the

members of CUPE Local 2403, as well as a number of community organizations, have been announced with more to come in the near future.

On Monday March 11, CUPE BC sent a group of elected officers and staff to meet with Local 2403 and speak at a Public Budget Consultation meeting. Residents are starting to talk about the issues we raised, especially the targeted cuts of some of our longest serving members. This is only the beginning of a campaign to fight back, and we hope to win over public perception of the manufactured crisis at the City of Dawson Creek.

Political Education

CUPE BC will also ensure that political education opportunities are available to you in your community in whatever format fits the needs of your locals. They can work with your local to develop an action plan for the community election, speak to your stewards and members about the importance of participating in these elections, and provide political skills building workshops in an hour or over two days.

We encourage you to consider your local's political education needs and plan to take full advantage of these opportunities.

Provincial Government

It has been an exciting two years with our provincial government. The BC NDP government respects and supports public services and is focused on those that need the most help in our society. While the positive news list is long, we have tried to capture some of the key changes that impact union members and their families.

The dismantling of Liberal Government Bills 18 and 29 are examples of correcting of regressive decisions and we applaud these reversals. Bill 18 prohibited union executive board members from sitting on boards of governors in universities and colleges. This unfairly restricted union activists from a democratic right to be a voice for workers on boards. Under Bill 29, health authorities and private operators contracted by the government were able to fire workers when switching contractors, subcontracting or, in

the case of private operators, when ownership changed. While this won't prevent contracting out, it will restore the rights of health-care workers to keep their collective agreements and wages when their employer changes. It will also prevent new employers from laying everyone off. Care aides, food services and dietary workers; and maintenance, laundry, security, information technology and accounting staff working in health-care settings are all affected by this legislation.

Bill 9 "Worker's Compensation Amendment Act" passed in April 2018. The changes recognize post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental disorders as work-related hazards for first responders. We are very pleased our CUPE Local 873 members and others no longer have to fight for recognition for work-related mental health injuries.

The provincial economy is thriving. With a balanced budget, BC remains the only province with a AAA credit rating and has eliminated operating debt for the first time in 40 years. BC also leads the country with the lowest unemployment rate.

The provincial government is investing heavily in people. More than \$1 billion is being invested in child care, student loan interest will end, public education funding is its highest level ever and government will share about \$3 billion of gaming revenue with First Nation communities over the next 25 years.

The province has also eliminated medical services premiums and replaced them with a new Employer's Health Tax that has shifted the burden from workers to businesses. They are investing \$4 billion over three years on hospital and school infrastructure.

Climate change is also a key concern of this government. They have introduced the CleanBC program, which will put almost \$1 billion toward reducing carbon emissions.

The provincial government is also reviewing the Employment Standards Act, has looked at changes to Worker's Compensation Act and completed a review of the provincial Labour Code. They have also restored the Human Rights Commission.

Electoral Reform

A third referendum on electoral reform in British Columbia was not successful. CUPE BC worked with the Vote PR BC campaign and mobilized our members across the province. We supported the Make Every Vote Count campaign to change our electoral process from our current first past the post system to a system that would have given every British Columbia a vote that counts in every election. The change would have forced parties to work together and be more accountable.

Federal Election

This Fall, we will see a new Federal election and our committee will be working to inform and engage our members in getting involved in the campaigns. The Trudeau government made promises straight out of the NDP platform, and won on the basis that he was bringing real change to government, but as we have all seen, he has betrayed those promises and nothing really has changed. We will work to support NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh and elect a government that would truly represent working people.

To date there has been 13 NDP MP'S who have announced that they will not seek re – election next fall. We appreciate the work and dedication of all the NDP MP's and we also look forward to the opportunity of recruiting new dynamic and diverse candidates that will enhance our parties' profile and certainly result in more NDP seats in the House of Commons. We are confident that with the support of the 680,000 CUPE members from coast to coast to coast and with the hard work of our CUPE local activists in our province we will increase the number of NDP seats.

Our Volunteer power and member-to-member capabilities to get out the CUPE/Labour vote will ensure that we elect a Canadian Government that improves life for hard working Canadians and their families.

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 are stronger and more successful when we work together to achieve change. We need CUPE BC to have up-to-date contact information for all of your members. This information is vital to our ability to communicate with and mobilize our members. We encourage CUPE Locals to affiliate and engage with our CLC Labour Councils. We need you, the leaders of our union, to participate more fully in the political process, including joining the NDP and volunteering on election campaigns.

There is much hard work ahead, but if we work together to engage our members in political education and political action, we can make a difference in our unions, our communities and our country.

Our committee encourages you to support our resolutions to support CUPE activists who are interested in electoral politics and political action; to encourage locals and district councils to join and support the BC New Democratic Party; on creating a young worker and a retired worker seat on the CUPE BC Political Action Committee.

Respectfully submitted:

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