

CUPE BC 2023 CONVENTION ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

The CUPE BC Environment Committee is thankful to be able to meet and collaborate on the unceded lands of the Coast Salish peoples. May we all walk softly through this land upon which we are uninvited visitors, respect it, and care for it as the Indigenous Peoples have done for centuries before us.

BACKGROUND

The Committee is responsible for proposing initiatives and activities that help CUPE members contribute to addressing climate change, as well as increasing engagement with members and communities on issues of environmental justice. The Committee also considers how CUPE BC can reduce its own carbon footprint and waste profile, to play a more significant role in fighting climate change as a prominent voice for workers in British Columbia.

As part of its work, the Committee makes space to consider the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Members read the calls to action that speak to them, and then in turn consider how to bring this knowledge into the business of the meeting, and back to locals.

All Committee meetings include the One Earth Statement, which Committee members encourage locals and district councils to adopt into their practices to help spread awareness and grow environmental action.

The One Earth Statement reads: CUPE members shall be mindful of their choices, and endeavour to make decisions that support the best practices to protect our environment. Please recycle all distributed documents, respecting the confidentiality of the material therein. Commit to walk, bike, carpool, or take Public Transportation when you can. Bring a reusable cup to your meetings. Our Union fosters awareness of reducing, reusing, and recycling. In this way, we respect our Environment, each other, and future generations.

2021-2023 OBJECTIVES

The Committee held roundtable discussions on many environmental issues and topics, including waste reduction, procurement of sustainable products for local and CUPE BC events, resistance by employers to transitioning fleets to carbon neutral technology, a just transition for workers, the importance of public transportation in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and many other issues.

The Committee also considered the role of CUPE BC as a labour union, the province's largest, and the juxtaposition of being a strong and well-respected voice but having a relatively low profile on environmental issues. Members considered how to be strategic, asking how best CUPE BC could take effective action to mobilize its strengths to the benefit of environmental issues.

After considering the pressing issues, and CUPE BC's assets, members came to the unanimous conclusion that addressing the climate crisis was its priority. The global climate emergency has become a dire situation that requires thoughtful and proactive long-term commitment from us as Leaders, our membership, government, and the public at large. Committee work over this term focused on this issue, addressing topics related to CUPE BC's existing public profile and reputation.

Guiding Document: CUPE National Environment Policy

The Committee's work was informed by a full review of the National Union's recently re-developed Environmental Policy, found at <https://cupe.ca/environment>. This policy helped the Committee narrow its scope to unified issues that speak to the diversity of members, workplaces, and environmental issues. The policy provided a solid grounding for the Committee's work over the term and reaffirmed the climate crisis as the single largest challenge facing humanity in terms of the environment.

WORK IN 2022-2023

Committee Meetings

The Committee met on November 8 and 9, 2022 at the One Big Committee Meeting (OBCM) where we finally met in person. Members participated in team building exercises and mapped out the plan for the remaining term. The Committee then met again at the BC Regional Office (BCRO) in January 2023, where turnout was unfortunately low due to the inclement weather and travel challenges.

Presentation to Think Tank

On behalf of the Committee, Chair Amber Leonard and Staff Advisor Steven Beasley facilitated a presentation to at the 2022 Think Tank on the contents, recent updates, and themes of the CUPE National Environmental Policy. The presentation fulfilled a goal of the previous year and helped grow understanding among the CUPE BC leadership about the need for the union to take a bigger role in fighting climate change.

Right to Operate a Clean Energy Vehicle

A successful resolution was served to the 2022 Convention that would see CUPE BC promote the idea that workers should have the right to operate clean energy vehicles and equipment, and to pressure governments to adopt this principle with funding for employer fleet conversions. This issue was incorporated into CUPE BC's Budget 2023 consultation strategy and formed part of the 2023 BC Budget submission. The Committee developed a proposal to create supporting materials on this issue, which are being prepared for Union of BC Municipalities meetings in 2023. Further, the Executive Board will serve a similar resolution to the National Union convention scheduled for October 2023. The 2023 Budget provided \$40 million for what it calls the *CleanBC Go Electric Commercial Vehicle Pilot Program*, which corresponds to this project of the Committee and provides strong support for continued advocacy on this topic.

Just Transition for Workers

Not as much work was undertaken in support of this successful committee resolution than the above noted on clean energy vehicles and equipment. For much of the past year, the federal government has signaled pending action on this topic, which would then change the political landscape on this issue. With legislation expected in early 2023, the Government of Canada released its Sustainable Jobs Plan, which asserts that the conversion to clean energy will be a net producer of jobs. This federal work on a just transition, plus the substantial funding for clean energy development in the 2023 federal budget, will prompt the Committee to consider the changing political landscape on this issue prior to further work in British Columbia. Just transition remains a central element of CUPE's National Environmental Policy, and work at the federal level continues to support the positive changes described herein and to pressure further action from the federal government.

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BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) Climate Justice and Jobs Committee

The [BCFED Climate Justice and Jobs Standing Committee](#) has now been elevated from a working group to a standing committee, and a BCFED Clean Transportation roundtable has been founded. This exciting work with government, union partners and other key voices provides an important venue for labour to unite behind an expanded role in the climate change fight. CUPE BC's representatives at this table include the Committee Chair, who connects the CUPE BC work to provincial-scale work on environment and climate justice issues.

2023 Environment & Climate Justice Award

This year's award has been refreshed with more of a diverse focus that includes district councils, locals, and members who have:

- demonstrated, through concrete actions, a deep commitment for the environment and climate justice as a civil rights movement;
- undertaken an initiative or innovation to provide a sustainable impact on the environment to support those in our communities who are most vulnerable to climate change;
- demonstrated activism through political advocacy and policy change; or
- contributed to their community by building a stronger environmental movement.

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The 2023 award winner will receive a certificate, and CUPE BC will make a \$1,000 donation to an environmental organization of their choice. Congratulations to the winner, Michael Pollard, and thank you for all that you do for the environment and future generations.

Reusable Materials from CUPE BC

The Committee discussed ways to make CUPE BC's own operations more sustainable, and this conversation focused on merchandise and branded materials. Members felt that items like zero waste kits and other sustainable options could be featured more prominently among the Union's branded options, and that unsustainable/single-use items should be discontinued. It was also felt that steps could be taken to add sustainable production to the Union's procurement priorities (in addition to union-made, and other such values). To highlight such options, the Committee is providing re-usable straws as part of its materials on the Standing Committee table and encourages delegates to visit the table to pick one up.

ONGOING AND FUTURE WORK

Sustainable Public Transportation

The transportation sector is among the greatest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in British Columbia, and a significant portion of these emissions come from passenger vehicles. There is already a better alternative—one that is publicly run, affordable, and addresses social and economic inequities—and that is public transportation. For public transportation to realize its tremendous potential to address climate change, it requires greater government support.

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CUPE BC has a strong relationship with this issue: CUPE members work in transit, and, in far greater numbers, CUPE members rely on transit for work and life. For CUPE BC, there is perhaps no better solutions-focused campaign on the climate crisis than one which advocates for improved public transportation in all parts of BC. Such a campaign addresses members' goals for climate justice, worker mobility, affordability, and a more fair and equitable society. As a public service that our members provide, CUPE BC has solid credibility on this issue and advocacy on transit makes the best use of our union's natural assets and abilities toward a critical solution to our climate crisis.

The Committee's 2022 resolution to Convention on public transportation did not make it to the floor, so members have served a revised version to Convention 2023 in the hopes that a campaign on this topic will be a member priority in 2023.

Focus on Climate Justice

The effects of climate change will not be borne equally and are likely to have a greater negative impact on equity deserving groups, particularly those from low-income communities, regions and countries. Consequently, an increasing focus within the environmental movement, one reflected in [CUPE's National Environmental Policy](#), is on the concept of climate justice. The United Nations summarizes climate justice as looking at the climate crisis through a human rights lens, including a focus on civil rights, with the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts at its heart. Increasingly, the Committee's own deliberations have reflected this principle, promoting members to propose a corresponding change to the Committee's name as a means to entrench this important principle.

CONCLUSION

Committee members stand with the many CUPE members, British Columbians, Canadians, and global citizens around the work calling for urgent climate action. As CUPE's National Environmental Policy clearly articulates, the time for action is now.

To be effective, CUPE BC's action on climate change must harness the Union's immense potential as an agent of change, directing its full capacity towards acting in a unified manner. This means working in solidarity through the labour movement, connecting with our communities, and evolving our internal culture to make climate change, climate justice and environment issues a higher priority. The work of the Committee in the past term has followed this model, working to elevate our Union's

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commitment to this work, developing practical actions, projects, and campaigns to engage members in making a difference in the greatest challenge facing our generation.

The Committee would like to thank the staff at the CUPE BC office who assisted us in navigating with grace and kindness through the operations of our Committee. Without them, this report would not be possible.

Respectfully submitted:

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March 2023

