



## **CUPE BC 2023 CONVENTION POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Why Political Action Matters**

Much of what a union achieves for its members happens in bargaining; however, some victories we seek for our members and workers everywhere cannot be won at the table. Expansion of public services and healthcare, improvements to the Labour Code and WorkSafeBC regulations, expansion of childcare, more funding for public transit, and measures to address the rising cost of living are just some of the goals we have that locals cannot negotiate with their respective employer.

Political action is the tool we use to win broad policy change, and to gain for members those things which no employer can grant. Political action is about building a better world for working people today and for future generations. Importantly for CUPE, as a union where most members work directly or indirectly for governments, political action is also about ensuring those who oversee our workplaces and direct management are progressive, support working people, and value the unions that represent them.

#### **Electing Decision-Makers and Holding Them Accountable**

Government decisions and actions, both good and bad, impact the lives of CUPE members every day. Our workplaces, communities, and even our families are shaped by the choices made by elected governments, and by those we elect to serve in public office.

Our ability to shape the world around us, to set a progressive direction for our communities, province, and countries, and to win public policy victories for members, is directly related to our ability to mobilize our power in relation to government decision-making. Our primary venues for this mobilization are provincial, local, and federal elections where our work focuses on ensuring every eligible CUPE member is voting for the progressive choice in their community.

We also exercise our power by holding elected leaders accountable as they govern, ensuring our voices are heard when decisions are made that impact the interests of working people, when promises are broken, or when emerging issues demand quick action.

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## **Engaging and Mobilizing Members**

With over 100,000 CUPE members across BC, we have a critical mass of voters who can be mobilized to effect political change. The margin of victory and loss in many elections, especially for local government, is often fewer than people think. Mobilizing CUPE members to vote in our communities can make the ultimate difference between elected anti-union, far right extremists who want to contract out our work, or electing a slate of progressive voices who will invest in public services, public workers, and whose decisions will build a better future for working families.

The role of the Political Action Committee is to maximize member engagement and mobilization in elections and other political campaigns so we can use our power to lead progressive change.

## **ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE**

### **Purpose of the Political Action Committee**

The Committee provides members with information about political choices and encourages them to participate in the political process. We work with the Executive Board and Strong Communities Working Group to consistently expand the number of CUPE members who are politically active and leading change in their communities.

Committee members support ongoing campaign work, and advise on regular improvements to campaign tactics, resources, and tools. The Committee also provides advice on emerging political issues, and directly brings the voice of CUPE members to decision-makers at all levels.

### **Building Capacity in Activists**

A central objective of the Committee is to build CUPE BC's political capacity as represented by the number of members engaged in political action, and the level of engagement achieved. Providing avenues for members to get involved in simple and introductory political actions is equally important to providing ways for activists to increase their skills and knowledge and work their way up slowly to a point where they feel comfortable running a campaign or running for office themselves. Developing these steps of engagement is a key priority of the Political Action Committee.

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## **Building Campaign Capacity**

Equally important to the activists who undertake political action are the tools and resources they need to be successful and win. The Political Action Committee is therefore equally focused on building the infrastructure and systems necessary to support activists, engage members, reach voters and build strong, winning campaigns.

## **2022/23 POLITICAL ACTION HIGHLIGHTS**

The past year has been a very active one for CUPE BC political action, and a full reporting of this work can be found in the Executive Board report. Below are some highlights that involved member coordination and Committee support.

### **2023 BC Budget Consultations**

The provincial budget consultation process occurred much earlier for the 2023 Budget, with hearings and submission deadlines in the early summer. With the support of the Strong Communities Working Group, a very robust engagement was conducted in the budget consultation process that saw more than a dozen presentations from CUPE members in communities across the province. The process, which included a fulsome submission by CUPE BC, saw CUPE members advocate on emerging issues identified only weeks before at the 2022 Convention, and progressive proposals that have long anchored CUPE BC budget engagement.

### **2022 Local Government Elections**

The local community elections were a major undertaking in 2022. Through a member-to-member engagement campaign, 282 candidates for mayor, councilor, school trustee, park board commissioner, and regional district director were recommended to members. Two-thirds of recommended candidates were successful, with 187 labour-recommended candidates elected.

Campaign work on the local government election would not have been possible without member engagement. The campaign saw Member Mobilizers participate in 276 shifts of 3 hours each of calling for a total of 828 hours of member contact to 23,967 unique phone numbers in priority jurisdictions. Live connections with at least 4,522 members and others received direct voicemails, texts and/or emails. Other actions included door knocking, worksite visits (including municipal hall offices, works yards, and school staff lunchrooms) with voter card distribution, and Zoom forums with candidates for members. This direct engagement was supported by a direct mailing to all members, a

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website to help members find the endorsed candidates for their community, and a non-partisan get-out-the-vote campaign conducted online.

### **Childcare Campaign and 2022 Lobby Week**

A major initiative of the past year was the province-wide campaign for public, universal childcare for school-aged kids. This campaign, cost shared with the National Union, is one of the largest campaigns in CUPE BC's history, and last year included online and radio advertising, member videos, a digital engagement site, and a government relations engagement strategy.

The communications component of the campaign had a far reach into communities across the province, with over 5.6 million digital impressions, over 12,000 radio spots, nearly 43,000 click-throughs to our engagement site, and over 85,000 website views. The lobby week, held in November, included general members who shared their lives as parents struggling to find childcare, as education assistants struggling to make ends meet, and private non-profit childcare workers who know the current model is failing. During the week, CUPE BC representatives met with all three parties represented in the Legislature, including nearly every BCNDP MLA.

### **BCNDP Leadership Change**

In June, then-BC Premier John Horgan announced his intention to step down as leader of the BCNDP. This decision prompted a leadership campaign that ultimately resulted in David Eby becoming our province's new Premier. CUPE BC was an early and enthusiastic supporter of Eby, becoming the first union to publicly endorse him for leader.

### **Changes to BC Election Laws**

Though not an event or campaign, changes to BC's election laws warrant reporting given their effects on CUPE BC's political action tactics. With the support of progressive organizations, CUPE BC included, the BCNDP government made the necessary changes to remove big money from our province's elections and political system. However, these recent changes made to election laws have greatly limited CUPE BC and other progressive third-party advertisers' capacity to support progressive candidates and parties. Caps to election and pre-election spending, a wider definition of what constitutes support for, or donation to, political parties, and limits to issues advertising, have collectively made public campaigning for progressive candidates a challenge. Consequently, CUPE BC political action work increasingly focuses on

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member engagement and mobilization, an element of our political action work that has remained protected in BC law.

### **2022/23 COMMITTEE INITIATIVES**

#### **Member Mobilizers**

Building on previous work, and in consideration of the resolutions passed at the 2021 and 2022 Conventions on re-establishing the zone coordinator system and election readiness, the Committee spent considerable time envisioning possible options for a framework for coordinated political activism across the membership. Given the new tools and technology available today, and the recent changes to BC election law, the Committee worked to update the past model for zone coordinators and opted for a system of member mobilizers. The concept of member mobilizers is not new but builds on experiences with member book-off during past election campaigns, and on the past zone coordinator structure that existed in-between elections.

Using the local government election as a venue to roll out the new model, more than sixty new member mobilizers from across the province were recruited, trained and highly engaged in the campaign. All member mobilizers reported gratitude for the experience, and most have committed to continued work with the union on ongoing political action efforts. We will continue to build their skill and capacity as we implement a plan for the provincial government election set for the fall of 2024.

#### **Member Survey**

A committee resolution passed at the 2022 Convention called for a system of biennial surveys of members on political action topics. Such a survey was conducted in advance of the 2022 local government elections and the results were used to shape the campaign. Data driven work like this improves our outcomes, helps tailor tactics to the members we intend to engage, and tracks our progress over time. The Committee is looking forward to the next survey, which would be rolled out in 2024 in support of a campaign to engage members in the next provincial election.

#### **New Political Action Staff Person**

The Committee has long supported CUPE BC's ongoing efforts to seek funding from the National Union for a full-time staff person devoted to political action. With the frequency of local government by-elections, the need to support the BCNDP government and push for deeper and more lasting progressive change, and the capacity for greater political action by members, there has been a solid argument for such an investment in political

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action staffing for some time. The 2023 National Union budget delivered on this request, and the new position of Political Action Coordinator is expected to begin in the Spring, joining the Strong Communities Working Group team as a key support to CUPE BC's political action and member engagement work.

### **2023 Convention Resolutions**

As the Committee's term concluded, members considered the successes of the past two years and goals for the future, as well as the ever-changing political and technological landscape in which our political action takes place. These considerations led to the submission of two Convention resolutions to improve political action capacity. The first calls for investment in technology and data, building capacity through resources and readiness to better enable swift political action, and better integrate campaigns pages with the CUPE BC main website. The second resolution encourages locals to better integrate political action information and training into local orientation and like structures.

### **LOOKING TO 2023/2024**

Looking to the next year, the Committee identified the coming events or possibilities that could shape 2023/24:

- Though a confidence and supply agreement that exists between the federal Liberals and NDP, there is always a chance that one or both parties will step back from this arrangement, triggering a federal election.
- The next BC election is not scheduled until the fall of 2024, and though there are no signs an early election will come, the election of a new Premier through an internal party process automatically opens the door to an early election.
- Recent resignations of MLAs in Vancouver-Mount Pleasant and Langford-Juan de Fuca means that by-elections will be called within the next six months.
- With the 2022 local government elections now in the rearview mirror, local government by-elections will soon begin. During the last term there were several dozen per year.

## POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

Respectfully submitted:

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