

BRITISH COLUMBIA REGIONAL OFFICE

6222 Willingdon Avenue, Burnaby, BC V5H 0G3

Tel.: (604) 291-1940 Fax: (604) 291-1194 / cupe.ca / scfp.ca

Regional Director's Report – 2023 CUPE BC Convention

Introduction

With the gradual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and the development of new, post-COVID working arrangements, CUPE staff continue to support locals and members as we adjust to changed worksites and work conditions. Workers in BC continue to benefit from living and working under a progressive provincial government. We have seen improvements to the Labour Code, including changes that have shortened the certification process for organizing new workers, targeted employer interference with organizing, and protected workers in situations of contract flipping. In Spring 2022, the BC NDP government introduced card check (single step) certification, granting auto-certification in workplaces where 55 percent or more of workers sign a union card. This has created significant opportunities for organizing in our province, and CUPE staff have been working to identify, create and act on those opportunities to grow our union. We continue to see greater provincial government investment in public services and communities, and public delivery of these services. This has materially and directly impacted CUPE members and their communities for the better, demonstrating the importance of political action.

Collective Bargaining

The benefits of political action can also be seen at the table. We continue to see improvements in the collective agreements that CUPE locals have reached. This result reflects the willingness of provincial public sector employers to work collaboratively in bargaining to address and to fund healthy public services. Over the last year, we built relationships and solidarity both within our union and with our allies; coordinating and strategizing to achieve unprecedented monetary improvements across provincial sectors. Members saw wage increases with inflationary protections, improvements to hours of work and benefits, increased access to leaves, including sick leave, domestic violence leave, cultural leave, and leave for gender affirming care. Thousands of CUPE members in the community social services sector, among the most precarious workers in the province, achieved low-wage redress and 100-percent employer-paid sick leave. We saw historic funding for local tables in the K-12 sector, and Ambulance Paramedics overwhelmingly ratified a new collective agreement that begins reversing the systemic underfunding and 16 years of cuts by the previous BC Liberal governments.

In addition to huge gains at the provincial level, CUPE members achieved significant wins in their communities. In the municipal sector, CUPE members in south Vancouver

MARK HANCOCK

National President/Président national

CANDACE RENNICK

National Secretary-Treasurer/Secrétaire-trésorière nationale

PATRICK GLOUTNEY, FRED HAHN, JUDY HENLEY, SHERRY HILLIER, LEE-ANN KALEN

General Vice-Presidents/Vice-présidences générales

Island saw significant wage increases that included flat wage component, lifting up the lowest hourly wage earners. Bargaining in the metro Vancouver region continues to ramp up, as staff coordinated and supported efforts to achieve the best deals possible for our members. Through coordination and political action, we are bargaining collective agreements with significant wage increases and key improvements, such as funding for counselling services to better support workers' mental health needs, gains for auxiliary employees, and enhancements to job evaluation programs.

These important wins at the bargaining table demonstrate our members' resolve to do what's right and stand up for all workers. Solidarity, and standing up for fairness, security, and quality of life for all, is what makes us strong as a union. We are proud of the work we do in B.C. to build strength and support in our workplaces, and to protect the public services and public workers that build strong communities.

Tackling the affordability crisis

Given the difficult circumstances our members have been facing since 2020, the context for bargaining has been incredibly challenging. Not only have our members faced multiple climate emergencies over the past couple of years; we are also still very much feeling the impact of the global pandemic on our health care system, particularly in long-term care. The toxic drug supply crisis continues to needlessly take the lives of community members—our members, families and neighbours—putting added pressure on CUPE frontline workers already facing significant challenges. With increases in inflation impacting the cost of living, our members struggle to pay essential costs such as housing, food, and transportation. We continue our efforts to bargain inflationary protections and negotiate agreements that recognize the high cost of living. In addition to wage improvements, we seek benefit improvements, increased allowances and percentages in lieu, additional hours for part-time employees, and reduced precarity. Our members are concerned about the cost of daily living, with an alarming number reporting reliance on food bank use to feed their families.

Bargaining, alone, cannot sufficiently address the affordability crisis. We have been working closely with CUPE BC to expand our political action, both locally and provincially, to tackle affordability so that our members' wages go further. We continue to advocate for broad, durable, transformative change. Government policies supporting strong public services such as affordable publicly delivered childcare, high-quality accessible transportation, and free or low-cost mental health supports across communities, as well as affordable housing, benefit all British Columbians and leave more money in our members' pockets.

Our success in lobbying to improve childcare, transportation, and housing affordability, and to address the climate crisis and toxic drug supply emergency, turns on the engagement and activism of our membership. We continue to focus on outreach and education, creating and promoting inclusive spaces within our locals, and building solidarity within our union and with our allies across the labour movement and communities.

Political Action

Local government elections took place in October 2022. Supported by CUPE staff, our members took the lead in progressive campaigns for municipal and school board elections across the province. In addition to engaging in the labour council endorsement process and facilitating opportunities for members to meet and interview candidates, we focused our efforts on our internal member-to-member campaign to elect progressive mayors, council and school trustees. The importance of engagement in local elections cannot be understated: this is our opportunity to elect our employers.

In total, CUPE BC urged CUPE members to support 282 candidates for mayor, councilor, school trustee, park board commissioner, or regional district director. Recommendations were based on endorsements of the impacted CUPE locals or the regional CLC Labour Council, as well as our principle of supporting CUPE members running where no other candidates are endorsed. Thanks to our strategy and the hard work of activists, we were able to elect many progressive decision-makers with 187 labour recommended candidates—two thirds of those endorsed—successfully elected.

By building relationships with newly elected politicians, we can continue to educate decision-makers and their teams about the importance of strong public services, and the critical role CUPE members play in providing those services. In doing so, we inoculate against anti-worker austerity measures, cuts to public services, and contracting out. Following the 2022 local elections, we saw immediate improvements to labour relations where progressive candidates were elected. In Saanich, for example, the new progressive mayor was pivotal in resolving a difficult round of bargaining that was headed toward an impasse, instead allowing the parties to achieve a solid new collective agreement. In Langley, labour relations are improving after many years of contentious issues, thanks to changes to senior levels of staffing since a new council was sworn in.

Political action work is undertaken by our Strong Communities Working Group, who collaborate with and support CUPE BC in seeking those victories we cannot win at the bargaining table. The work done in this past year on 2022 local government elections, the campaign for public childcare, and to advocate for CUPE members' priorities in the 2023 BC Budget has made tangible and valuable gains for members. This group has also supported countless locals, working behind the scenes to support bargaining through government relations, communications, membership engagement, and community organizing.

Organizing

Since the provincial government introduced single-step certification on June 2, 2022, our B.C. organizing team has reported an influx of inquiries to join CUPE. During this period, organizing staff have been working hard on concurrent campaigns in post-secondary education, community social services, community organizations, and municipalities. During the fall, our team launched a campaign to organize thousands of Research and Academic Assistants at the University of British Columbia—a precarious group of student workers whose current pay is below poverty wages.

Member organizers have contributed significantly in growing our union. In the summer of 2022, we held virtual training for new member organizers to assist us on our campaigns. Member organizers are an asset for these campaigns, complimenting the work of our staff, and we will strive to match them with workers in similar workplaces.

Conclusion

Our members and their local leadership are our union's greatest strength. They inspire our staff, giving meaning to the work we do. They are why we show up every day and fight for what's right. Nothing that was achieved in this past year was possible without the solidarity and action of our 100,000 members across the province, and the tireless work of their local executives. On behalf of all regional staff, thank you to all members in British Columbia for their support and solidarity, and to CUPE BC's leadership and staff for their steadfast support of National work in our region.