

# CUPE Ontario Campaign Report

## March, 2009

### Health Care

#### *Hospitals*

We are in the midst of a major round of hospital cuts and restructuring across Ontario. A province-wide hospital campaign committee comprised of several hundred representatives from local groups and coalitions, municipalities, health professionals and unions has been formed (following the January 31<sup>st</sup> Provincial Summit held in Toronto) and are working together to protect our local public hospital services.



They are in the midst of organizing a series of town hall meetings with the message STOP THE HOSPITAL CUTS. Planning meetings alone are attracting hundreds of volunteers, many of them CUPE members. In Hamilton 900 members of the public attended the first town hall meeting held Monday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Aided by member book offs from CUPE, dozens more are planned (a partial list appears on CUPE Ontario's web site).

As part of this campaign the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC) has produced a series of materials for mass distribution including postcards, magnetic bumper stickers, buttons and posters. CUPE Ontario members have received notice of materials for order. To date 200,000 postcards have been ordered by groups across Ontario including Shopper's Drug Marts and municipal township offices. Billboards will start appearing next month. Dozens of municipalities are passing council resolutions to stop the cuts.

The idea for the provincial summit originated with OCHU as a way to get everyone working from the same page and it worked. With the support of CUPE Ontario, OCHU will continue to lead the way in the fight to stop the hospital cuts and save jobs, services and communities.

#### *Long-Term Care*

Our struggle to achieve a minimum care standard for residents of long-term care facilities continues. Members kicked off the current phase of our campaign by targeting the pre-budget hearings held in December.

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In Toronto members from CUPE Ontario, the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA), the OHC and the NDP gathered outside of Queen's Park to demand immediate action and attention on LTC in the upcoming budget. They were joined by Faith Nolan and the CUPE drummers. Inside at the committee hearings Brother Sid Ryan gave a presentation to the committee cautioning the government to steer away from any attempt to resolve the current economic crisis on the backs of Ontario's frail and elderly in nursing homes. Sister Susan Schmidt delivered a similar message in Niagara Falls where members also demonstrated in support of a minimum care standard.



A new shipment of buttons has been ordered, an action poster has been created – both have been sent out to all locals. Members are being encouraged to undertake multiple forms of action to push the government and employers for standards and accountability. Cathy Webdale a member book off will be following up with locals in the coming weeks.

CUPE Ontario is teaming up with CUPE National and the OHC to host a two-day event on LTC (March 30 and 31) in Toronto. The first day will be dedicated to discussing with CUPE Ontario's long-term care locals our LTC strategy including an update on the Sharkey process and our continuing campaign plans. The second day will be given over to the OHC and CUPE National. CUPE National is set to launch a cross country tour on LTC, featuring Dr. Pat Armstrong and sees this as an ideal way to begin their tour.

### *Home Care*

Bowing to pressure from corporations that employ home care workers, the McGuinty government has resumed the home care competitive bidding system and is now deliberately excluding home care workers from new legislation that would have provided them with severance and termination pay. Under proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act 2000 in Bill 139 – legislation that extends protection for other agency workers – home care workers are being denied termination and severance pay when they lose employment. Competitive bidding means that home care workers lose employment much more frequently than other workers because agencies and companies are always losing contracts. Bill 139 passed first reading in early December 2008.

Having secured a legal opinion from Sack Goldblatt Mitchell on the discriminatory nature of this Bill, OCHU/CUPE Ontario will be taking this issue on beginning with a press conference at Queens Park on March 12th where we will be joined by Steven Barrett, a labour and constitutional lawyer with Sack Goldblatt Mitchell where we will issue a call for public hearings around Bill 139.

We anticipate that the release of our home care video will help augment our call for public hearings the goal being to include homecare workers in this Bill. The first draft of a script for our home care video is ready and will be reviewed by the working group within the week.

The video will offer an overview of the problems that plague the sector because of the competitive bidding system as seen through the eyes of workers, recipients and family members. As noted previously the roll out plan for the video includes a series of town hall meetings to be organized in conjunction with the OHC. This will follow a launch at Queen’s Park, the goal being to pressure the provincial government to abandon the disastrous competitive bidding system.

## **Social Services**

### ***Child Care***

We continue to support the efforts of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and their “Waiting for Child Care” campaign through awareness raising, member mobilization, materials distribution and ongoing participation in a series of press conferences targeting parents, child care workers, agencies, and the broader public. The intent here is to encourage them to lobby the McGuinty government and their local MPPs to enact legislation to protect public, not-for-profit, affordable childcare and make substantial and sustained public investments to address the chronic under-funding in the current system.



At the same time we are moving forward with our own plan to fight privatization within this sector by strengthening our network of childcare workers and taking our message into communities around the province. The focus of our campaign is “The Economics of Child Care”. Material is being developed that will highlight the need to invest in public, not-for-profit, affordable childcare as a way to support working parents and the economy. A tool kit is being created for the campaign that will include fact sheets that address how the continued under-funding of childcare affects the economy in a negative way; information on concerns associated with the ECE Professional College; an update on how privatization hurts; and the need to address parents/workers concerns around issues of access and affordability with a view to reducing pressures on the system. The kit will also include template radio ads, letters to the editor, speaking notes for presentations to councils and/or meetings with MPPs. Through sustained contact with members via a member book off we will be able to identify areas most in need of our attention and spring into action.

Additionally a media tour with a high profile individual knowledgeable around the economics of childcare is being planned both in the run up to the budget and after. Communities include Ottawa, Kingston, Waterloo, Thunder Bay, Hamilton and Toronto.

The plan around Kids Concerts is still in the preliminary planning stages. More information will be shared as it becomes available.

## Universities



Ontario currently ranks last among Canadian provinces in funding post-secondary education (PSE). Predictions for this year include a \$511 million operating funding shortfall and across the board university budget cuts of between 3% and 5%.

The recent CUPE 3903 strike underscored the effects of provincial under-funding. Faced with a challenging bargaining climate, continued provincial government under-funding of our post-secondary institutions, an economic downturn and declining pension revenues, the OUWCC (P&P), CUPE Ontario and assigned staff recently met to develop an emergency strategy for the sector for 2009 that focuses on the need for adequate and sustained funding for our universities and colleges.

The strategy/campaign plan includes the following:

- On-going discussions with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to identify key CUPE

university sector issues and develop a PSE process similar to the process used in the CUPE school board sector with a view to moving to a provincial discussion table on university sector issues

- Detailed research on key sector issues, an example being how many PSE workers will be cut if university budgets are cut by 5%
- Development of consistent messaging for materials, media releases and advertising to support our campaign goals
- Media conferences in key locations focused on issues identified and to support units going into bargaining
- A lobby of MPPs where media conferences and bargaining are happening
- Planned actions with campus coalitions/community allies such as the Canadian Federation of Students to highlight the need for improved funding for PSE
- A campus tour that will take members of the OUWCC to each university to further strengthen coalitions, identify issues, support bargaining and promote the campaign

Timelines and a budget will need to be developed quickly so we can begin to move this campaign forward.

## Municipalities

CUPE municipal locals are dealing with a widespread push to contract out services and explore alternative service delivery models - included here is a renewed emphasis on tying dollars for municipal infrastructure to construction using public-private partnerships (P3s). Following from last year's Ontario municipal conference, OMECC developed a two part provincial plan to fight privatization in all its forms.



In 2008 OMECC and CUPE Ontario implemented an aggressive Phase One anti-privatization strategy that included: a series of regional meetings (day-long sessions) to raise member awareness about the impact of privatization; development and distribution of an anti-privatization lobby kit to be used by members to educate local councilors and MPPs about the negative impacts of privatization; and distribution of an early warning tool kit and a local fight-back campaign model for local unions to use.

The model for local fight-back campaigns was developed and tested during 2008 when CUPE Ontario and Ontario Regional staff responsible for the municipal sector waged campaigns with specific locals including: Welland (CUPE 1115); Picton (CUPE 2275); and Brockville (CUPE 115).

While a detailed plan vis-à-vis phase two of the campaign still needs to be developed there are a number of initiatives the member book off can undertake. These include: follow-up from our 2008 campaigns to determine if further actions are needed; follow-up from the regional meetings where detailed information was obtained identifying instances of privatization, threats and/or potential threats (Windsor, Sudbury, Durham and Brampton); work with the coordinator and the researcher to identify further areas where action is required; prioritize follow-up actions and campaigns; reschedule regional meetings that were cancelled or missed; begin work (in conjunction with the coordinator, researcher and legislative liaison) on a provincial legislative/policy/funding strategy.

## Partnering With the Council of Canadians

### *Water Tour*

The bottled water industry has worked hard to undermine our faith in public water. The industry sells water – a shared public resource – for huge profits. CUPE Ontario and the Council of Canadians decided it was time Ontarians got the facts, turned away from the bottle and tapped into clean, safe, public drinking water. In January, they teamed up to take the *Unbottle It!* tour on the road.

Sid Ryan, CUPE Ontario President and Maude Barlow, Senior Advisor on Water to the President of the UN General Assembly and National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians led the three-week long, 15-city tour across the province. The tour was greeted with enthusiastic crowds (close to 3,500 people in all), passionate, informative local speakers, and media interest in every city.



In Windsor we learned from city officials and CUPE municipal workers that municipalities are required to test water several times a day to meet provincial regulations while under the Canadian Food and Drug Act, bottled water is only required to be tested every one to three years. In London the tour learned that the cost for someone to drink 8 glasses of municipal tap water per day would be \$1.88 per year. The equivalent amount in bottled water costs consumers \$2,190 per year.

In place after place we heard about bans having been passed by municipal councils and school boards. We also heard about impending bans and/or vigorous attempts being made to bring in a ban. At each stop local community groups set up demonstrations and information booths. In Kingston Queen's University students held a taste test, challenging audience members to try and see which they preferred – the tap won out. In Toronto CUPE's own local 4308 drumming group, accompanied by Faith Nolan, welcomed the tour.

Media followed the tour closely. Mainstream newspapers, student papers, television and radio interviewed Maude and Sid all along the way. Headlines like: "Unbottle It!" Tour Leads to Possible Municipal Bans on Bottled Water Across Canada followed the tour. The "Unbottle It!" Tour continues to reap rewards as we hear about more communities who have banned bottled water since our tour stop.

The campaign inspired a new group of activists in CUPE who took the lead in their communities and organized a series of amazing events. A northern tour is now being planned again with CUPE activists taking the lead for April and May in the communities of Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury (April 15, 16) and Kenora and North Bay (May 6, 7).

### ***TILMA and other Trade Accords***

Preliminary discussions are underway between CUPE Ontario and the Council of Canadians to host a cross-province tour as a way to inform our members and the public about the dangers associated with the different provincial trade accords being floated. As a first step CUPE has been asked to participate in a press conference on March 31 with the Council of Canadians and other labour groups to demand a public debate in Ontario on the proposed Economic Partnership Agreement with Quebec. April 1 is the final implementation date for TILMA between Alberta and B.C. More will follow in the months ahead, information will be shared as it becomes available.