

University workers challenge government: Where's the funding?

On a bitter Wednesday morning in January, members of CUPE locals 229, 254 and 1302 were heating up chilli and rallying students and the public around high-quality services at Queen's University.

"Our members provide the services that keep universities open – cleaning, maintenance, lab and research support, food services and much more," said CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn. "They deserve better from the administration and from the province." Members at Queen's University in Kingston are raising the profile of their services as university departments are squeezed by the administration and provincial underfunding. Pensions, benefits and hours of work are under attack, and the university has been contracting out work to low-wage temps with no benefits.

The situation is not unique and fighting for fairness at University bargaining tables is happening across the province. CUPE Local 3902 Units 1 and 3, representing academic workers at the University of Toronto are standing up for adequate funding and job security, with members turning out in record numbers for a historically high strike vote.

At York University, CUPE Local 3903, is also standing strong at the bargaining table, mobilizing its members and the student community with their A Better York is Possible campaign. Check out the university sector page at cupe.on.ca to see some of their amazing videos, profiling hard-working members on campus.



Academic and support staff at universities across the province are working hard to show students, administrations and their communities exactly why their work is so important and how it affects the quality of education. At the root of the problem is provincial underfunding, which has led to service cuts, the increased casualization of work on campus and rising tuition fees for students. This underfunding is compounded by a lack of transparency requirements for university administrations. Fighting back, the CUPE Ontario University Workers' Coordinating Committee has launched the Where's the Funding (WTF) campaign.

Touring the province, this public roadshow educates university communities about the lack of transparency, and takes people on campus tours to see where funding for operations, academics and general maintenance clearly are not going. Find out more at cupe.on.ca/wtf.



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Supreme Court upholds right to strike

In a historic decision, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled the right to strike is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The ruling came from a case brought by unions in Saskatchewan, who challenged a 2008 provincial law which limited the right to strike by public sector workers.

“This decision confirms what we have always believed: The right to strike is a basic, Charter right that is vital to a system of fair collective bargaining,” said CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn. “When the Liberals brought in Bill 115 to strip school board workers of their right to strike, we told them it was unconstitutional. We filed a legal challenge. This ruling sends a clear message – you can’t legislate away workers’ fundamental rights and when unions fight these laws, we can win.”

In a 5-2 ruling, the Supreme Court found Saskatchewan's 2008 “Public Service Essential Services Act,” put unjust limits on which public-sector workers could strike in that province, violating workers’ Charter right to freedom of association. It is an important and far-reaching victory for workers in Canada.

The ruling closely follows on another decision by the Supreme Court just a few weeks earlier, that reaffirmed workers’ right to organize unions. Together, with these decisions, the Court has once again recognized that workers' collective rights are basic human rights that must be respected by government.



Time for moratorium on privatization projects

A report from the provincial auditor general in December exposed at least \$8 billion extra spent on privatization projects over the last decade, clearly demonstrating Ontario needs an immediate moratorium on public-private partnerships and other privatization schemes.

“The report makes it clear: Privatization doesn’t save money. In fact, they have cost the public billions that should have been invested in public child care, keeping hospitals and schools open, and dealing with huge shortages of affordable housing,” said CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn. “We keep getting told there’s no money for services, there’s no money for poverty reduction, we have to cut

everything to reduce the deficit. Turns out we could have tackled poverty, improved public services *and* lowered the debt, if the Liberals hadn’t gone P3-crazy and also slashed corporate tax rates.”

The auditor general’s report stated that the assumptions government makes to support the case for contracting out are not based on any empirical data. Her report follows similar auditor’s reports in British Columbia and Quebec that were likewise scathing indictments of the public-private partnership model.

Standing up to SAMS



Despite persistent calls from CUPE Ontario to stop the development of a new, privately developed software system that workers knew would cause turmoil at Ontario Works, the government introduced its Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) in November.

Predictably, the quarter-billion-dollar system failed, leaving thousands of families without funds while sending overpayments to others that were clawed back, all right before the holidays.

Against this backdrop of client misery and workplace stress, CUPE Ontario members publicly challenged the government's characterization of the SAMS failures as "glitches," and brought public attention to countless flaws in a system that is continuing to fail social assistance recipients and workers alike.

By the end of November, more than 1000 CUPE members completed our online SAMS survey, painting a frightening picture of a service in chaos. The results were profiled in many media stories and in discussions with government.

Hundreds of Ontario Works members joined a telephone town hall mid-December, pledging support for a post-card campaign directed at the

Minister of Community and Social Services. Locals pressured MPPs about the crisis in Ontario Works and lobbied their municipal governments, which find themselves on the hook for extra overtime costs.

This persistence paid off: CUPE Ontario leaders had two meetings with the Minister and MCSS staff in late December; ten CUPE members were invited to an upcoming Ministry-led meeting with the SAMS project team; and the Ministry has now ordered an independent review of the system.

Such progress couldn't have happened without the concerted action of CUPE members dedicated to the high quality of the services they provide. But the issues caused by SAMS for Ontario Works recipients and workers continue, and CUPE Ontario members won't stop fighting until the chaos caused by SAMS, for recipients and workers alike, are fixed.

Locals are encouraged to keep up the political pressure: meet with their MPPs, make deputations to municipal government committees and invite MPPs to visit their local Ontario Works office. Learn more about this important campaign by visiting cupe.on.ca/SAMS.

A victory for developmental services

A landmark agreement reached by labour, government and community living agencies will see \$180 million delivered to stabilize front-line care and improve wages for developmental service workers.

“This is funding for front-line workers, not managers,” said CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn. “It exists because of the advocacy of our members – political advocacy on the ground that won us a seat at the table and ensures that developmental services will no longer be forgotten services.”

The funding is one part of an envelope included in last spring’s budget, and CUPE spent months negotiating with government, agencies and other unions over how best to use the \$180 million earmarked to improve continuity of care and services for people with developmental disabilities. Tackling low wages in the sector will help to address concerns about staff shortages, high staff turnover and difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff.

Workers in developmental services – the great majority of whom are women – are often low-paid and are frequently in part-time and precarious positions.

“Developmental service workers support some of the most vulnerable people in our society, but in Ontario that important work is too often undervalued and underpaid,” said Jim Beattie, chair of CUPE Ontario’s Developmental Service Workers Coordinating Committee. “Properly distributed, this funding has the potential to transform the lives of people who work in developmental services and, as a consequence, the lives of the people they serve.”

CUPE Ontario has long advocated for more funding for developmental services, including during the



The newly elected members of the Developmental Service Workers Coordinating Committee, at the Developmental Service leadership conference held at the Sheraton Parkway North Hotel in Richmond Hill, January 2015.

lead-up to last year’s provincial budget. Grassroots mobilization in the sector helped generate the media attention and political will to get a Parliamentary committee to study developmental services and, ultimately, to provide funding that begins to address the long-term funding crisis in the sector. Much more is still needed and the political advocacy for that funding continues.

Leading the charge for women's rights



On March 8, thousands of women, allies and community members across the province will gather to celebrate International Women's Day and honour the struggles of women in their fight for equality and justice.

The end of this year's CUPE Ontario Women's Conference, taking place at the Sheraton Centre, March 4-7, coincides with International Women's Day events in Toronto, including a rally, beginning at 11:00am at OISE (252 Bloor Street West), march at 1:00pm and fair at Ryerson University at 2:00pm.

This year's theme is "Our Bodies. Our Territories. Our Communities." CUPE Ontario sisters will travel together from the Conference to participate.

"Leading up to this year's federal election, International Women's Day is an opportunity to build a national conversation on issues that impact the lives of women", says CUPE Ontario Secretary-Treasurer Candace Rennick. "Good paying jobs, pension security and quality, accessible public and not-for-profit childcare are critical issues for

women and we need to elect a government that will make meaningful commitments to improve the lives of women in our workplaces and communities."

Through organizing, bargaining and political advocacy, CUPE has a proud history of achieving real economic gains for women in Ontario, such as pay equity, benefits and pensions. These include recent victories for workers at SPRINT Senior Care (Local 4308) and COSTI Immigration Services (Local 2221), where members stood together through difficult bargaining to secure pensions for members, mostly women, who had previously not had access to a workplace pension.

We encourage CUPE Ontario members who identify as women to register for the 2015 Women's Conference. It will feature inspiring speakers and hands-on training aimed at increasing our capacity to take action for women's rights and equality.

To register for the Conference and to join International Women's Day events happening across the province, visit cupe.on.ca.

Home care hotline exposes patient vulnerability

Thousands of home care patients across Ontario are caught in a quagmire of service cuts and long waitlists. In December, CUPE Ontario set up a new Home Care Hotline for patients and families to share their stories and raise the profile of this growing health care crisis.

“It’s clear that, even though the provincial government says patients not receiving care in hospitals will be able to access

support at home, the reality is that patients are not getting the care they need,” said CUPE Ontario First Vice-President Michael Hurley. “The province is underfunding all aspects of health care, including home and community care. We want to hear from patients about how they have been affected.”

Increasing attention on health care cuts can spur government action. Following home care cuts

in the Windsor area, for example, there was considerable public backlash. That led the province to announce \$4.1 million to restore support for patients who had seen their home care hours slashed.

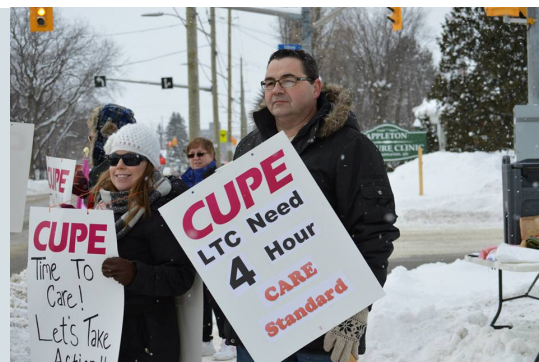
Home care hotlines are currently in operation in Cornwall, London and Grey/Bruce.

North Bay long-term care workers say it’s Time to Care

At a snowy info-picket in North Bay, CUPE Ontario members rallied around the call for a four-hour minimum care standard in long-term care.

“A mandatory care standard is long overdue,” said CUPE Ontario Fourth Vice-President Henri Giroux at the January rally outside his workplace, Cassellholme. “Since 1992, the complexity of care needs of long-term care residents has increased significantly. In 2003, the Liberals promised to legislate a daily care standard. Here we are in 2015 with increased incidents of violence, incontinence, falls and staff overload, with documentation taking away from hands-on care all over the province. At the rally, members worked toward a goal of gathering 77,000 signatures on a petition calling on the province to legislate a minimum hands-on care standard. That’s one signature for each person who resides in a nursing home in Ontario.

Learn more about the campaign at cupe.on.ca/TimeToCare.

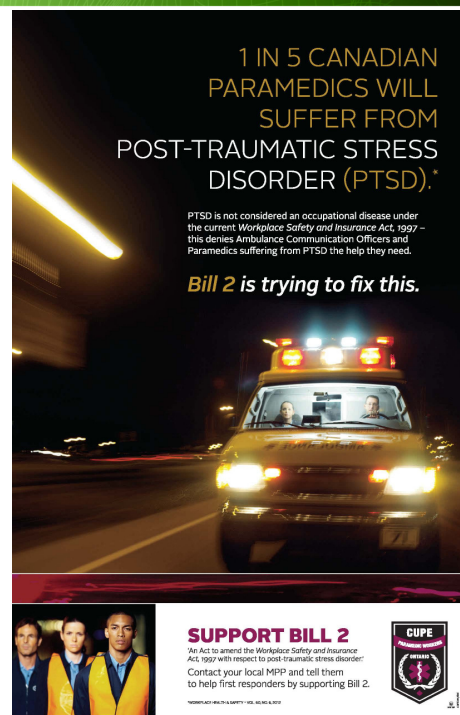


Protecting paramedic workers

Members of the provincial parliament received a special package from CUPE Ontario in February: a new poster urging them to demonstrate their solidarity with paramedics and other first responders, and help pass Bill 2. The bill seeks to amend the WSIB Act to include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which affects thousands of first responders across the province.

Produced by the CUPE Ambulance Committee of Ontario, the poster is part of a growing campaign for the rights of emergency medical workers, which includes a petition supporting Bill 2 and an event at Queen's Park on Paramedics Day, Tuesday, May 5.

For more information, visit cupe.on.ca/CACO.



Another historic first for CUPE Ontario Secretary-Treasurer



When she became Secretary-Treasurer of CUPE Ontario in 2010, Sister Candace Rennick made history, becoming the youngest person and first woman elected to that position. Now she's added a few more historic milestones for our union, becoming the first ever CUPE Ontario officer and first member of the CUPE National Executive Board to have a baby while in office.

On February 5th, Candace welcomed Jackson Francis Michael weighing in at 7lbs, 2oz and 21.5 inches long.

"I am absolutely thrilled to be embarking on this new journey and can't thank the CUPE Ontario Executive Board and the members enough for the overwhelming, incredible and generous support I have received," said Sister Rennick. "Having a child certainly reinforces my determination to fight for the all of the things that are important, not only to CUPE members, but to the generation that will follow us."

"This is a historic milestone for CUPE, not just in Ontario, but all across the country and it's remarkable that it has taken this long! About time if you ask me," said CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn. "Candace is an inspirational and ground-breaking leader in our union and I know members across Ontario can't wait to meet and welcome Jackson into our CUPE Ontario family."

Sister Rennick will be taking a *short* maternity leave, but will continue active oversight of CUPE Ontario's finances. She will be at our CUPE Ontario convention to report to the membership. The Executive Board is now enacting a plan, based on Candace's request, that balances time for her new family and her clear desire to maintain her political accountability to our union.

Bad math shouldn't force school closures

The highly publicized threat to close more than 100 schools in Toronto has met with outrage from school board workers, parents and people across the city. But school closures are not just a Toronto issue. The provincial government is pressuring boards across the province to cut costs by closing schools, and communities across Ontario are fighting back.

A report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), shows that the provincial government is fudging the numbers to justify their push to close schools, using a series of inflated estimates and flaws in funding formulae, some dating back to the Mike Harris government.

"Bad math should never be used to justify closing schools," said CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn. "This report shows the government is using deeply flawed data in their push for school closures,

regardless of what's needed in our communities or what makes sense for our children."

Schools are used by all sorts of community groups. Many incorporate community centres, the local swimming pool, child care centres, adult education and language training—all of which the ministry counts as "unused" space.

"Schools are the heart of our community," said OSBCC Chair Terri Preston. "Closing them impacts all students, especially in rural areas where kids face increased time on buses when their local school is shut."

What can you do? Write your trustee and MPP and explain that closing schools is a bad idea, go to a school board meeting, talk to parents in your community.



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Upcoming Events

OUWCC Conference

Feb. 19 to 22, 2015 - University of Ottawa

Spring School 2015

Feb. 24 to Mar. 1, 2015 - Toronto Sheraton Centre

Women's Conference

Mar. 4 to 7, 2015 - Toronto Sheraton Centre

SSWCC Conference 2015

Mar. 26 to 28, 2015 - Delta Meadowvale

Library Conference

Apr. 7 to 8, 2015 - Delta Ottawa

OMECC Conference

Apr. 8 to 11, 2015 - Delta Ottawa

CUPE Ontario Convention

Wednesday, May 27th through Saturday, May 30th

Racial Justice/Human Rights Conference

Jan. 25 to 28, 2016 - Toronto Sheraton Centre

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