



WE ARE THE SOLUTION

CUPE Ontario
May 2010 Convention
Action Plan

Introduction

We are living through fierce attacks on public services and public sector workers. The immediate panic of the economic recession that began in 2008 is receding, but its impact continues, especially for public sector workers. Unionized workers, including CUPE members, are being made scapegoats by right-wing politicians and governments and even blamed for the economic collapse.

Transnational corporations and banks, bailed out by governments at the height of the recession, are emerging from the crisis to fuel resentment against, and even between, workers. Non-union workers are pitted against unionized workers. The private sector worker is pitted against the public sector worker. The right sees this as a chance to take away what workers have won and to force us to abandon our principles of solidarity, equality and universal accessibility.

In Ontario, the Liberal government is giving business a helping hand by targeting public sector workers. In the 2010 budget, the Liberals tried to freeze all compensation increases for public sector workers by deciding not to fund employers in the broader public sector adequately. These, and other “reforms” in health care and social services, are direct measures intended to cut services in order to respond to the deficit and to pay for the \$2.4 billion in tax cuts that McGuinty is offering corporations. Should the Liberals continue to push their wage restraint proposals CUPE Ontario will explore the possibility of legal challenges to such proposals.

But these attempts to gang up against workers, public sector workers, and the services we provide, will not succeed if we – the 230,000 CUPE members in Ontario – have the support of Ontarians. Building community support for public services and for good jobs – union jobs – in all our communities is the best hope for the future. With the support of Ontarians, we can build a province that is a stronger, fairer, more sustainable, and more just place for us all.

CUPE Ontario must protect public services and good jobs, partner with social movements to effect real change, and engage our union’s members to actively participate in, and value our role in, democracy.

Our Action Plan for 2010 reflects these three basic pillars that will inform all our campaigns in the next year. We invite you to speak to these issues and begin the process of strengthening CUPE Ontario to meet the challenges of the next year right here and now.

1. *Protecting Public Services and Good Jobs*

In the aftermath of the “great recession of 2008-2009,” we are living in a world where the bankers tell us that the pain is over and the politicians tell us that the public sector needs to share the pain. Who are we to believe?

One thing **we** know is that CUPE members are integral to Ontario. We are in every community, every day. We impact the lives of countless people and, yet, somehow, we have become part of the problem in the minds of some politicians, and even more importantly, in the imaginations of some of the public. We have to remind ourselves, and the people around us and our politicians, that we cannot be separated from “the public.” We need to remind people of the work we do and the services we provide.

We can best protect public services and good jobs by helping the public understand that our jobs are to provide what they think of as “public services.” We are the people who stand up for universal access; we

are the people who campaign against user fees; we are the people who make Ontario a fairer place than it would otherwise be; we are the people who fight against the rising tide of global capital, embodied in Canadian registered mining corporations. As upper-tier governments decrease social transfers for public programs in order to fight the deficit that has been created by a generation of continuous tax cuts, investments in local public services will decrease.

Public services are the backbone of equality in Canada. There is a social consensus that all those who live in Canada are entitled to certain services regardless of their income. Water, electricity, health care, education, social services – protecting Ontarians’ access to these services is good for us as CUPE members and, even more importantly, it is good for the communities in which we live. It is this principle of equality that should be the foundation of all economic development to that end CUPE Ontario calls on CUPE National to initiate a campaign to organize some of the most vulnerable public sector workers that is Personal Support Workers.

Right-wing politicians and Canadian and international corporations are hoping to turn Ontarians’ public services into their profit-making entities. They are trying to use the recession as an excuse to privatize services. Dalton McGuinty has indicated in the 2010 budget that he is considering selling off public assets such as the LCBO and Ontario Hydro. Corporate interests are looking at how they can benefit from Ontario’s natural resources. There are more free trade agreements in the works that will commodify our resources and services. We must oppose internal and international Free Trade Agreements that Canada is seeking to negotiate with countries ranging from Columbia to the Caribbean. We have to challenge these attempts at privatization not only because they jeopardize our jobs, but also because they threaten our neighbours and our communities.

Ontario’s economy has not recovered from the recession. The stock markets may be adding value, but unemployment in Ontario is still over 9% (and in double digits in a number of places). In many Ontario communities, public sector employers – municipalities, universities, school boards, hospitals, social service agencies – have provided some measure of local economic stability. The loss of such jobs would be bad news for the workers, but even worse news for the communities in which they live since their salaries are crucial to community economic development.

Ontario needs more – not fewer – public services and good jobs. Good jobs are permanent, full-time jobs, jobs with defined benefit pension plans, and jobs with benefits. These are the jobs that have helped many Ontario communities weather the recession. We must fight against the erosion of bargaining unit work through the extension of “volunteer opportunities” especially to those who are forced to rely on the inadequate social assistance provided by programs like Ontario Works. By working with coalition partners in the broader social movements of our time, we can protect public services, and protect and create good, sustainable jobs for our communities.

2. *Partnering with Social Movements*

Social movements are part of a popular and global history of dissent. They remind us that a better world is always possible and that we do not have to accept the status quo. Fighting for equality is not something we stop doing during a recession – we do not have to accept concessions; we do not have to roll back wages; we do not have to give up on pensions and benefits – we can come together with the popular and global movement of people to fight for workers’ rights as human rights.

CUPE has a proud tradition of being a social movement union. As an organization, we have recognized the value of human rights – of equality for all – at the bargaining table and in social and political processes. Today, it is easier than ever to tap into the technology and social networking possibilities of Email, Face Book and Twitter to connect our movement with other social movements. But commitments to movement-building are not as easy as clicking a button on a webpage or forwarding an email. The on-the-ground work of building common causes still needs to be done so that, together, we can engage in progressive change: change that not only benefits us, but also all Ontarians.

CUPE Ontario works with our social justice partners, such as the Council of Canadians and the Workers Action Centre, to protect workers' rights as part of protecting human rights. Our involvement with organizations across the globe who share our concerns is a source of strength. We need to build upon these connections. To that end we must continue to promote the global human rights agenda on gender issues – both here in Canada and across the world. We must also continue to stand up for the rights of those who are marginalized by state violence from Palestine to Sri Lanka. In working with social movements, we can build a common front so that politicians of all stripes cannot find public support for bashing public services and public sector workers.

Our work with community partners to prevent the building of a gigantic dump at Site 41 on the Alliston Aquifer in Simcoe County is an example of how working with social movements leads to successful campaigns. CUPE members in that area who were involved with the fight against Site 41 also have proven themselves to be valuable allies in the community, and should be able to draw on the support of the community if their employers try to attack them in their next rounds of bargaining. Working within the communities in which we live is important for local issues, but it is also crucial to building a broad, progressive base amongst the public who will support accessible and universal public services, and the workers who deliver these services. For our own survival, we need to be part of the people's movement, not just the labour movement.

Too many people wrongly believe that our movement is limited to protecting our own “shrinking islands of privilege.” We cannot allow that inaccurate framing from “the right” to stop us from negotiating the best collective agreements we can get. We should not accept the blame for this recession. And, we need to remind ourselves that this is not a time for “us” and “them” politics. Union density has fallen to historically low levels. To reverse this trend, we need a powerful new vision of inclusiveness that draws in people. The idea of union solidarity is a powerful motivational force and we need to more clearly extend this same kind of care for other people who are also victimized by global capital.

This time of challenges is also a call to offer an alternative vision of the world in which we want to live – not just make little adjustments to an unequal world. We need to work with the women's movements, with marginalized communities, with anti-poverty groups, Aboriginal groups both inside and outside CUPE to lobby government on issues ranging from establishing Aboriginal Day to assessing the Grassy Narrows watershed, to the lack of safe drinking water in many Aboriginal communities and with the unorganized. We need to partner with those who may feel that labour is part of the problem to show them that we are, in fact, part of the solution. This is how we can build on the values of equality and universality.

3. *Participating in and valuing Democracy*

Democracy is under assault in our world today: fewer people vote in each successive election; global entities like the G8 and G20 meet with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and make super-

policies; federal politicians feel that they can tell women's groups to shut up; provincial politicians feel that they don't have to consult with the public before signing free trade deals; municipal politicians contract out public services even when it is more costly. Now, more than ever, is it important for us to engage, to participate in and value democracy and to promote more participatory forms of democracy such as proportional representation. Not only do we need to be part of electing our politicians at the local, provincial and federal levels. We need to work with them, hold their feet to the fire, and help them keep their commitments to us and our communities beyond the elections.

As public sector workers, we know that public policy matters. Federal, provincial and municipal governments, English and French, Catholic and public school boards, all make policy decisions every day that affect the communities we live in, the work we do, the services we provide, and the conditions under which we provide them. We need to expose and combat the silencing of democratic dissent and the reprisals against activists/organizations who speak out by the federal and provincial governments on a range of issues from women's reproductive rights to those of migrant and undocumented workers.

Right now, elected public officials and staff are wrestling with choices that will impact us all: funding for child care and early learning, standards of care for seniors, the model for home care provision in Ontario, continued corporate tax cuts at the expense of services we all need, providing the framework for real retirement income, or selling those institutions that our parents and grandparents bought and paid for with their labour. The list goes on. Countless public policy decisions are made daily that affect our working lives and the lives of our communities.

That is why CUPE Ontario cares about public policy and about **who** is setting public policy.

For CUPE Ontario, influencing public policy isn't a choice, it's an obligation. We do it a hundred different ways: by writing letters to the government, by carrying placards on a picket line, by communicating policy ideas to governments, the media, and the public, and directly, to locals and CUPE members. CUPE's conferences and conventions are about coming together to make decisions about public policy positions. The decisions we make have an impact and they matter. We – and our community partners who speak out on the needs of communities – must play a role in making public policy in Ontario. If we want to protect public services and good jobs, we must engage with democracy. It's fundamental to the equality and public services we believe in.

2010 is election year for municipalities and school boards, and CUPE Ontario's Action Plan is calling for a focus on workers' role in democracy. We need to work together to maximize our impact as workers and residents of Ontario – which also increases CUPE's impact as a union. If CUPE Ontario could tell the Premier of Ontario or any local mayor in every provincial and municipal election that 90% of CUPE members vote, and vote to defend and protect public services, our influence, as a union, would be far greater than it is now. Member mobilization of this kind would benefit every CUPE member directly.

As CUPE members and Ontarians concerned about decisions being made at the municipal, provincial and federal levels in our names, we need to educate ourselves. Education is crucial to be able to participate fully in the democratic process. By encouraging and helping all our CUPE members to better engage in democracy, we strengthen our community and the place of our values in that democracy.

Goals for CUPE Ontario in 2010-2011 that come from our 3 pillars:

The Economy

In conjunction with labour allies, economic experts, community partners, and social justice organizations, develop a progressive alternative vision for the economy that will benefit people, create good jobs and new sustainable “green” jobs.

- Build resistance to the Liberal Government’s “Open Ontario” plan by highlighting the inherent unfairness of cuts to services and targeting public sector workers while handing out billions of dollars in tax cuts to corporations Work with community and other labour movement partners to build knowledge of and resistance to the agenda of the G8 and G20 Summits in June of this year
- Build capacity among locals and members to take leadership in their communities to fight for public services, and against those who would pay down government deficits on the backs of working people
- Campaign against the growing casualization of work and the rise of precarious and part- time jobs that is fueling poverty and economic instability in Ontario
- Clearly articulate the economic impacts of government policy on aboriginal workers, women, young workers, racialized workers, and workers with disabilities
- Work with all our sectors, community partners, and environmental groups to encourage the creation of good “green” jobs in the public sector that are full-time with decent pay, benefits and pensions
- Work to rescind the corporate tax cuts that have reduced Ontario’s revenue stream to unsustainable levels

Collective Bargaining

Respond to the threats to freeze public sector workers’ compensation packages contained in the 2010 Ontario Budget.

- Strongly and clearly reaffirm CUPE’s commitment to no-concessions bargaining and to not bargain two-tier collective agreements
- Call on CUPE members in Ontario to commit to each other through solidarity pacts in tough rounds of bargaining
- Continue to expand sectoral bargaining coordination, work on pattern bargaining, and work with sector committees to develop strategies for central bargaining

- Enhance coordination between sectors and the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) to ensure a strong, united response to the attacks on public services
- Work with other public sector unions to build a comprehensive multi-union approach to resist service cuts and concessions in public sector bargaining
- Fight to strengthen free collective bargaining in Ontario and campaign against any attacks to fairness in the arbitration process
- Mount campaigns early in the bargaining process that support membership goals and focus on the value of the public services CUPE members provide and their importance to the community
- Build capacity to truly profile our members and the importance of their work in communities

Privatization

Continue to challenge the push by governments and corporations to privatize, contract out, restructure and downsize public services in all CUPE sectors.

- Mount province-wide campaigns to build links between the recipients of public services and our members with a particular emphasis on mobilizing against the provincial government’s market-based funding reforms for hospitals and other health services
- Discourage any further expansion of private child care
- Campaign with coalition partners to oppose and stop the sale or monetizing of public assets like Hydro One and local hydro utilities and the LCBO
- Protect public water and call for the use of public infrastructure investment programs to build new water systems on reserves and create jobs for aboriginal workers; encourage and support CUPE members to start or participate in their communities Water Watch committees
- Enhance our government relations’ capacity combined with community-based mobilization to prevent funding cuts, contracting out, privatization, and any public-private partnership (P3) projects

Global and Social Solidarity

Work in solidarity with a broad cross-section of social movements to develop campaigns to reverse the social cutbacks of the past thirty years, for workers and people living in poverty, recognizing communities already marginalized by systemic racism, sexism, xenophobia, ableism and homophobia.

- Campaign to raise wages, social assistance rates and employment insurance to levels that provide livable wages for all

- Call for the implementation of stimulus spending on public transit and other public service infrastructure projects
- Increase our commitment to social unionism by enhancing our work at all levels with community coalition partners to resist increasing attempts to sow the seeds of social injustice
- Work with the CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee on the priorities identified by the committee in the resolutions submitted to this Convention

Democracy

Enact a comprehensive plan for the 2010 municipal and school board elections that builds community support around a clear, issues-based campaign which gets labour-endorsed candidates elected to communities across Ontario.

- Reframe the debate about public services underway in communities so that it focuses on keeping services public, fighting privatization, commercialization and contracting out
- Resist any attempts by municipalities or school boards to balance their budgets by cutting valuable services our communities rely on
- Support Labour Councils' on-the-ground election campaigns

Economic and Social Equality

Engage CUPE members in equality campaigns that:

- Continue to build on our proud history of inclusion and equality work by profiling our union in events that celebrate and demand diversity
- Call on CUPE National to provide training and support to Locals and CUPE national staff focused on the union's legal obligation under the Pay Equity Act and to support Locals in Ontario to meet the legal requirement to establish Pay Equity Maintenance Committees
- Build member support for a comprehensive Employment Equity Plan
- Campaign with CUPE National and our labour and community partners to achieve the core demands of International Women's Day 2010: Defend public services, good jobs, pensions and end violence and exploitation
- Support the necessary work to expand the implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Investing in our Future**Continue our work across sectors to put kids and youth first.**

- Work with our partners in the student movement to ensure that accessible and free post-secondary education is available for all and that the government does not use international students to fund post secondary education in Ontario
- Campaign with coalition partners to ensure the rollout of Ontario's new early learning and care program reflects the vision presented in the Pascal Report
- Fight for adequate funding for the publicly-delivered, not-for-profit child care, child protection services and children's mental health services that communities need
- Get young members to become more active in the labour movement and develop mentoring and training programs that will enable us to do succession planning

Defending our Rights**Continue working with our labour and community partners to promote the rights of working people.**

- Work with the Ontario Federation of Labour to re-instate card-based certification making it easier for workers to organize unions
- Amend the Workers' Safety and Insurance Act to provide coverage for all industry sectors and workers, and restore public provision of Vocational Rehabilitation Services under the Workers' Safety Insurance Board (WSIB)
- Work with CUPE National, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Ontario Federation of Labour to defend defined-benefit pension plans and to build political pressure to ensure pension security for all Canadians
- Actively engage the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety to press for the expansion of Occupational Health and Safety rights in legislation

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