

CUPE Ontario Convention 2019

**BE BOLD.
BE BRAVE.**

BUILD THE RESISTANCE.

Action Plan

Final—Adopted at CUPE Ontario Convention 2019



CUPE Ontario Action Plan 2019

A Different Plan of Action

- 1 The working class is facing unprecedented challenges. Our wages have stagnated while underinvestment in public services threatens our livelihood and the wellbeing of Ontarians. The Ford Conservatives have made it clear that they are not above attacking workers, whether through legislating us back to work or by threatening legislation that would undermine our right to freely bargain collective agreements.
- 2 Unprecedented times call for new tactics. As such, this year's Action Plan is more succinct and focused than those in previous years. This Action Plan describes the challenges we face and lays out a strategy to build our resistance.
- 3 While our traditional sector and equality sections are not in this document, they will continue to inform all areas of our action. Fighting for decent work, economic justice and social justice for all will always form the foundation of our union.
- 4 Our fight cannot be won solely at Queen's Park. We will only win by engaging members across the province, in every constituency. Locals need to take on leadership roles in this battle, supported by elected officers and staff, in order to ensure that we successfully build the resistance to the Ford government. As such, this document includes new sections that are specifically directed toward our locals making commitments to help us in this fight.

Overview

- 5 Across the globe we have had strong economic growth over the last decade. This growth has benefited the wealthy at the expense of the working class. Underinvestment in public services and increased reliance on the private sector not only weakens the services Ontarians rely on, it is also more expensive. While Ontario spends the least on public services per person in Canada, this government prioritizes tax breaks for the wealthiest corporations. As the working class, we know that this system is not fair. We are desperate for change.
- 6 In the face of growing frustration from the working class, governments and the wealthy utilize racism to deflect anger away from themselves. However, by blaming racialized immigrants and other racialized groups, we allow those who are truly at fault for our broken economic and political system to obfuscate their accountability. We must direct our anger up, rather than out, if we are to build a true resistance. As the working class, we are all united in wanting decent lives, decent work, and to retire with dignity.

- 7 Across Canada, we have had a shift in political leadership. 82% of Canadians are governed by conservative parties. The rise of Conservatives has come at the expense of women and other marginalized people. The loss of five women premiers means that, for the first time since 2008, every premier in Canada is a man. In addition to a gender problem, we also have a diversity problem. All our current premiers are white, as were the five women most recently in office.
- 8 Conservatives manufacture economic crises to justify their attacks on workers, unions, and the most marginalized people in our society. With a federal election less than five months away, we must redouble our efforts to make sure that we stop the conservatives – both their fiscal policies that favour tax breaks for corporations over investing in public services and their fear mongering that throws fuel onto the flames of hate which are burning throughout our province and country. Conservative governments hurt workers, so we must mobilize our members to stop conservatives in the upcoming federal election.
- 9 We must organize our members and work with social movements, labour and coalition partners in our communities and abroad. We must work to organize and mobilize the entire working class to challenge capitalism. We must be both allies and accomplices – particularly to those who are the most marginalized. We will stop at nothing less than the creation of a political and economic system based on the emancipation of and shared prosperity for all.
- 10 **We will win this fight by building a resistance that engages all our members, local leaders, staff, and elected officers, and prioritize three issues:**
 1. **Protecting our public services and fighting against cuts and privatization;**
 2. **Defending our right to free collective bargaining; and**
 3. **Fighting against white supremacy and the rising tide of hate.**
- 11 These issues speak to the core strength of our union. A more equitable society can be achieved through strong public services, fair working conditions, and fighting against white supremacy and hate for more equitable treatment for all. We know that we are stronger because of our sectoral representation, the strong voices of our equality-seeking members, and our members' commitment to fighting for a more equitable and more inclusive Ontario.

Protecting our Public Services and Fighting Against Cuts and Privatization

- 12 Doug Ford promised that “not a single worker will lose their job.” He lied. Thousands of workers across the province, in all sectors, are losing their jobs due to Ford's cuts and the restructuring and privatization of the services Ontarians rely on.
- 13 The social services sector is facing a \$1 billion cut that will devastate our social infrastructure with widespread implications for our members and communities. University workers are being laid off in student-run service centres and face fewer available jobs due to an unfunded tuition

cut and funding cut in the 2019 budget. Municipal workers are facing a regional government review, downloading of services, massive cuts to public health, land ambulance restructuring. Library workers who deal with interlibrary loans have already been laid off. Restructuring in health care puts health care and hospital workers' jobs at risk, and legislation opens the door to privatization. Our school board workers are first in the fray as they face an incredibly difficult round of bargaining with the government sitting at the table, after already facing significant budget cuts. Solidarity pacts between the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) and other sectors show that we are ready to support one another in school board workers' bargaining and beyond.

- 14 What is not evident in the above cuts are the variety of ways in which this government is hurting public services via the different forms of privatization that are all too familiar to Ontarians. Whether through contracting out or public-private partnerships (P3's), privatization costs more, service quality declines, control is lost, and ultimately public funds are diverted to corporate profits. The public simply receives less for more when public services are cut or privatized.
- 15 Privatization and budget cuts have significantly impacted all our sectors. These cuts harm the services our members provide, put our members' jobs at risk, and all too often fewer staff will lead to increased workplace violence.
- 16 This government is attempting to sell Ontarians on the idea that there is a budget crisis, and that there is no alternative to slashing public services. But we know that there is an alternative. Our publicly delivered services are more effective than private alternatives, and the public sector focuses on people rather than profit. The government only wants to talk about the deficit, but we know that we have a revenue problem, not a spending problem. We need to raise revenue by fairly taxing corporations and the richest among us, rather than by slashing public services. Policy decisions by the Ford government will reduce revenues by \$2.1 billion in 2018-19, and by an average of \$3.7 billion over the next four years. This is just not acceptable, especially in a time where the Ford government wants us to believe that there are not enough resources to go around.
- 17 While the government will increase spending on public services by an average of 1% over the next five years, after factoring in inflation and population growth this amounts to a real cut in spending of 2.4%. That does not factor in the shifting demographics of baby boomers entering retirement which will cause an even greater demand on health care spending.
- 18 We must remember that if we organize ourselves, we can win – and we have recent proof of this. Ford announced dramatic cuts to autism funding in February, and within 60 days he caved because of coordinated pressure from a variety of groups, including unions. Similarly, measures

to open the Greenbelt for development were halted after an outcry from both environmental groups and agricultural workers.

CUPE Ontario will:

- 19 ● Build public support against cuts and privatization through mobilization, education, and an external campaign highlighting the importance and benefits of public services to our communities and the low levels of public service spending in Ontario.
- 20 ● Track and publicize cuts to public services and privatization, highlighting the impact on Ontarians' lives.
- 21 ● Work with our sectors, members, retirees and locals to fight public sector cuts and privatization and coordinate our responses. We will use an equity lens to highlight the disproportionate impact that cuts and privatization have on the most marginalized in our communities.
- 22 ● Build and strengthen coalitions and work with our community allies to take a united stance against cuts and privatization.
- 23 ● Create materials to explain that Ontario has a serious revenue problem, not a spending problem. These materials will focus on fair taxation, including increasing taxes on corporations and the wealthiest in Ontario. The materials will offer an alternative to the Conservatives' slash and burn approach.
- 24 ● Equip members with the training and tools to be frontline spokespeople to talk about the local impact of cuts and privatization.
- 25 ● Work with local leaders to support community actions to oppose cuts and privatization.
- 26 ● Provide political action training to activists and leaders to support skills development.
- 27 ● Create a document, a clear program that is explicitly a labour program, focused on the needs of the working class.

CUPE Locals in Ontario will:

- 28 ● Work with the elected leadership and staff of sectors to prioritize bargaining demands that are tied to the protection of services.
- 29 ● Mobilize members and work with community allies to fight against cuts and privatization that impact our communities. Workplace or community actions will be decided by locals and communities themselves, and strategies may differ across the province.
- 30 ● Apply direct pressure to Conservative MPPs, municipal councillors and school board trustees.
- 31 ● Work closely with NDP MPPs, community allies and other unions to share information and amplify members' actions.

- 32 ● Report service cuts and job losses in your workplaces to your national representative, who will notify sector coordinators, sector chairs and CUPE Ontario for mobilization and fightback.
- 33 ● Use an equity lens to identify members as local frontline spokespeople to talk about cuts and privatization, especially highlighting the impact in the local's community.
- 34 ● Identify diverse activists and leaders to receive activist and member mobilization training and begin organizing within our communities.
- 35 ● Work with other locals in the region to collectively defend our work against cuts and privatization.

Defending our Right to Free Collective Bargaining

- 36 At the beginning of April 2019, the Ford government announced that it would be conducting “consultations” on the compensation of public sector workers. These consultations are an excuse for the government to blame workers for the government’s deficit. In fact, the government suggested wage cap legislation is one of the possible outcomes of this consultation.
- 37 Based on advice from CUPE’s legal team, CUPE participated in the consultations to ensure that we could still pursue a possible future court challenge. We responded to the government stating that while we would participate in these consultations, our participation was based on the following premises:
 - No worker’s wages caused Ontario’s deficit.
 - Wages have not kept pace with inflation over the last decade according to the Ministry of Labour’s own data.
 - Ontario does not have a spending problem – we have a revenue problem.
 - The race to the bottom regarding tax cuts has caused our deficit.
 - Ontario spends the least per person on program spending and generates the least per person on revenue in Canada.
 - Taxes need to be increased on corporations and high-income earners.
 - Population, inflation and changing/aging demographics will increase the need for public services.
 - CUPE bargains at the bargaining table and does not support bargaining through consultation with government.
 - Any attempt to impose or legislate a wage restraint will be strongly resisted by CUPE.
- 38 The government is threatening legislation that would undermine our charter-protected right to freely negotiate collective agreements. Healthy labour relations are best achieved through free and fair collective bargaining. When governments interfere with free collective bargaining by unilaterally imposing terms and conditions of employment on employees, they undermine workers’ rights.

- 39 Free collective bargaining is the best way for the working class to defend and advance public services; when we bargain for job security in the public sector, we also secure and protect services in communities. Bargaining is not just about wages – it’s also about securing working conditions that are better for all. Through collective bargaining, workers have been able to fight against violence at work, secure health and safety protections, fight against discrimination and unfair hiring and firing practices, and fight for more equitable compensation. Free collective bargaining is how we use our shared voice and collective power to define and better our working conditions. This right is something that workers have fought for generations to establish, and we must maintain this right at all costs so workers of tomorrow can share in our gains.
- 40 Many of our locals do not have the legal right to strike and rely on interest arbitration. A fair interest arbitration system is fundamental to protecting workers’ rights.

Our Plan

- 41 We find ourselves facing an extraordinary attack. CUPE Ontario is launching a province-wide fightback campaign to defend our charter-protected free collective bargaining rights, including a fair and balanced arbitration system. This plan for escalating actions will involve our members, locals, leaders, staff, and elected officers. It will require us to engage all our members, and commit to working with other unions, coalition partners and community allies. It also requires us to realign our work, both locally and provincially, to focus on this fight.
- 42 Because these events are unfolding at a rapid pace our response will need to be agile. Our immediate next steps will be dependent on how the government moves forward. We have a history of dealing with these kinds of regressive government tactics and we know what our line in the sand is. Using CUPE National’s Fightback Fund terms as a guide, we believe that:

43 Legislation that suspends or strips freely negotiated collective agreements or significantly impacts our ability to freely bargain is defined as a fundamental attack on collective bargaining rights.

- 44 The above represents a line in the sand for our union. We are the largest union in the country and the province, and our members will have the full weight of our union’s power behind them if the government crosses this line in the sand.
- 45 No matter what approach the government advances, CUPE will regularly communicate and update a plan to respond to these attacks. The plan will be an activist-based, militant response to stop the Ontario government’s attack.

46 Our fight cannot be won solely at Queen’s Park or in the courts. While we will study any possible legislation with an eye towards a legal challenge we will only win by engaging members across the province, in every constituency. We will need to set our sights on winning this fight in the streets by mobilizing our members and our communities.

CUPE Ontario will:

- 47 ● Fight against all attacks on free collective bargaining, including arbitration.
- 48 ● Work with CUPE locals, sectors, equality representatives and existing regional organizing structures to support members in organizing and executing escalating actions in communities across Ontario.
 - Escalating actions may include workplace and community actions, actions off the job, regional or provincially coordinated actions, sit-ins, protests, walking off the job and other actions up to and including a general strike.
- 49 ● Lobby CUPE National for legal and other resources to support members to support taking on the direct actions described in this plan. We will also develop and distribute know your rights materials and create how to guides to access already existing materials to these ends.
- 50 ● If circumstances warrant, have an emergency town hall regarding any impending legislation.
- 51 ● Organize a coordinating committee comprised of elected representatives and staff to coordinate our fightback.
- 52 ● The coordinating committee will organize province-wide regional meetings to begin in June. Meetings will be shaped by the current context; if legislation is introduced, the structure of meetings may need to be adapted.
- 53 ● At these meetings, we will begin discussions about regional responses to the direct attack on our bargaining rights. This discussion will be prefaced by a conversation about the scope of the challenge that we face and examples of escalating actions.
- 54 ● Votes will be taken to organize and participate in escalating action.
- 55 ● This fightback will be resourced by:
 - Designating a member book off, who will be assisted by staff, to support local organizing by members.
 - Designating a national staff person to coordinate with local contacts.
- 56 ● Work with Union Education to create and deliver activist training across the province over the summer. This training will build upon the skills that local leaders and activists have gained through our Stronger Together campaign. These workshops will focus on political education, mobilizing and direct action and will address the need to fight white supremacy and hate.

CUPE locals in Ontario will:

- 57 ● Mobilize members to participate in meetings, town halls, and fightback actions.
- 58 ● Work with national representatives to secure an up-to-date membership contact list including members' home mailing address, telephone number and personal email. Our locals are legally entitled to this information from the employer.
- 59 ● Share membership lists with CUPE Ontario for the sole purpose of communicating directly with members on matters related to the government's attack on free collective bargaining and our response to it.
 - If locals cannot share lists with CUPE Ontario, they will communicate all the information that CUPE Ontario shares about this issue with all members.
- 60 ● Organize local membership meetings to update members and discuss strategies for escalating actions in the local, community and region, and organize participation in provincial action.
- 61 ● Work with other locals in the region to coordinate a plan for escalating political actions.
- 62 ● Appoint one member per local (or per unit) to serve as a point person for this fightback.
- 63 ● Track participation in events and grow coalitions as actions unfold.
- 64 ● Strengthen direct membership contact, including through one-on-one conversations with members. The model of direct conversations will also be utilized through direct contact with community members to build our resistance.
- 65 ● Identify diverse activists and leaders to participate in activist and member mobilization training.

Fighting Against White Supremacy and the Rising Tide of Hate

- 66 The fight against white supremacy must be an integral part of fighting against cuts and privatization and defending our right to free collective bargaining. Exploitation of the working class has always relied on upholding white supremacy and dividing us by race in addition to dividing us by gender, sexuality, religion, ability, age, and ethnic origin. While this plan lays out our fight against white supremacy using anti-racism principles it is not to the exclusion of our other work fighting for equity issues. Our work as a union and as unionists is inextricably linked to and rooted in fighting against all forms of oppression.
- 67 This work is borne from two causes. First, the recent rise in hate crimes rooted in white supremacy specifically targeting Black, Muslim, and Jewish communities impacts both our members and communities. Second, our members, predominately Black women, have highlighted both our lack of allyship on this specific issue and the ways structural racism is embedded within our union. We hear them and know we must do better.
- 68 As a first step, we have developed an Anti-Racism Organizational Action Plan. This plan addresses some of the structures of white supremacy within the union that prevent the full

participation of racialized and Indigenous members in all areas of our union. We have also developed materials to combat white supremacy in our communities. Both represent starting points to becoming more engaged in work that has been placed on the backburner for too long.

- 69 Often, we ask ourselves how human tragedies could have happened. When politicians like Andrew Scheer can be elected as a party leader, when white supremacists like Faith Goldy and Paul Fromm feel comfortable running for mayor in two of Ontario's largest cities, and when Yellow Vests feel comfortable showing up to anti-racism rallies, we do not need to look to our past to find striking examples of hate. As unionists, it is our responsibility to respond to hate and to simultaneously organize for a better, more equitable society.
- 70 The working class is frustrated by financial inequity and the exploitation they face at every turn. But we must fight to help everyone understand that our problems are not caused by migrant workers, racialized workers, Indigenous workers, or other marginalized populations – they are also part of the working class. Our work against white supremacy must highlight the principle that economic justice for all can only be achieved by also fighting for racial justice.
- 71 Fighting for racial justice requires that we take clear action to support racialized and Indigenous members within our union, but also in our communities. We must show up for one another to defend against hate. We must be both allies and accomplices – particularly to those who are the most marginalized.

CUPE Ontario will:

- 72 ● Continue to fight against white supremacy internally and will continue to develop materials to combat white supremacy outside our unions.
- 73 ● Work with CUPE locals, sectors, equality representatives and existing regional organizing structures to encourage others to take on the fight against white supremacy. CUPE Ontario will offer support in this endeavour.
- 74 ● CUPE Ontario will incorporate the UN International Decade for People of African Descent by acknowledging it at each convention or conference.
- 75 ● Grow active participation with community coalition partners who are already taking on anti-racism work.
- 76 ● Take clear public stances against all forms of white supremacy and hate, including throughout the federal election campaign.
- 77 ● Integrate anti-racist principles and practices into the broader work that we do as a union.
- 78 ● Continue to make the connection between economic justice and racial justice so that all members and coalition partners understand the importance of undertaking anti-racism

work. This will include internal communication to members tying anti-racism work to our work to fight against cuts and privatization and protect free collective bargaining.

- 79 ● Ensure that our responses to the government cuts and privatization clearly articulate the disproportionate impacts these actions have on marginalized people in Ontario.

CUPE Locals in Ontario will:

- 80 ● Fight against white supremacy and hate through campaigns work within locals.
- 81 ● Develop and strengthen relationships with community coalition partners fighting hate in local communities to better reflect the diversity of our membership.
- 82 ● Publicly participate in actions to fight against white supremacy and hate in our community and communicate the importance of doing so with our members.
- 83 ● Take clear public stances against all forms of white supremacy and hate, including throughout the federal election campaign.
- 84 ● Integrate anti-racist and equity principles and practices into your local's meetings and events.
- 85 ● Continue to make the connection between economic justice and racial justice so that all members and coalition partners understand the importance of undertaking anti-racism work as a part of all other work that they do.
- 86 ● Amplify the voices of marginalized and diverse community members by promoting and working with social justice organizations in our regions.
- 87 ● Work with CUPE Ontario to engage the broader community in the fight against white supremacy and hate.

Gender Justice

CUPE Ontario will:

- 88 ● Continue the work started by the sexual violence working group to bring awareness of sexual violence issues in our workplace and unions. This will include model contract language and bylaws; developing resources that provide example procedures to deal with sexual violence that happens within union spaces; processes for support from the point of first disclosure; tabulations of survey results collected; workshops and training to help members deal with reports of sexual violence when police are not involved; and the creation of staff positions that can work to implement these policies and support survivors of sexual violence. CUPE Ontario will ensure the resources and polices are disseminated and shared nationwide.

Dealing with our Climate

CUPE Ontario and CUPE locals:

- 89 • Recognize and acknowledge the gravity of environmental and climate change as a major, if not the greatest threat, before our members, society, humanity and earth itself.

CUPE Ontario and CUPE locals will:

- 90 • Resist initiatives contrary to the well-being of the environment, especially those proposed or supported by government, in particular the provincial government, and will effect positive coalitions, with groups seeking to restore, preserve and promote the wellbeing of the environment.

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