

**VIRTUAL CONVENTION**

# 2022 ACTION PLAN

**DEMAND BETTER,  
VOTE TOGETHER:**

**THE ONTARIO  
WE DESERVE**

**CUPE SCFP**  
Ontario



## Introduction

1. Two months after Ontario had its first case of COVID-19, Indian activist and author, Arundhati Roy, wrote in the Financial Times that the “pandemic is a portal...a gateway between one world and the next”.<sup>1</sup> It was a call to recognize the inequities that were brought to light in the pandemic and see them as an opportunity to interrogate both our past and present and reimagine our future. It would require us to see what defines our world, not just the pandemic unfolding in front of us, but the long-standing systemic inequalities, failings, and fragilities that have become commonplace. A clear understanding of these challenges would allow us to “break with the past and imagine their world anew.”
2. Roy’s words look prophetic when viewed against the last two COVID years. In Ontario alone, there are over 12,000 dead and at least 1 in every 12 Ontarians have caught COVID-19. Both numbers are undercounts and will continue to rise over the coming months.
3. At first, the virus highlighted our solidarity and interconnectivity as we were all susceptible to its grasp. However, as time went on, a long-standing truth became obvious once again, that there were two different pandemics, one for the rich and white, and another for everyone else.
4. In particular, the pandemic most heavily impacted those of marginalized social locations which magnify their social determinates of health. They were the ones who were first to be let go or who were “essential” and could not work remotely; they were the ones who could not afford or were not given proper personal protective equipment (PPE); they were the ones who had no sick days in times of illness; they were the ones who lived in heavily racialized neighborhoods which meant they were likelier to contract COVID; they were the ones who most often lived with pre-existing health conditions which meant they caught and died from COVID disproportionately; and Black and Indigenous people were the ones with a history of inhumane medical abuse and experimentation which caused understandable vaccine hesitancy.
5. CUPE Ontario members have been on the front-lines throughout the pandemic. Many of our members have been working to keep others safe and healthy and providing essential services, while at the same dealing with the stressful and unsafe working conditions and burnout after two long years of overwork in the pandemic.
6. COVID has exposed the consequences of years of government cuts and underfunding of public services. We saw this when our health care system was at capacity and the Conservatives proposed critical care triage protocols which would have decided who would receive lifesaving care and who would not; our

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

government failed to provide simple basic resources needed to keep students and staff safe, such as a HEPA filters in each class; and parents struggled to afford daily necessities as this government held out signing an agreement with the federal government for \$10 a day child care.

7. Now, adding to already challenging times, we are facing historic inflation making the daily cost of living unbearable for many. The cost of bread and other basic items is rapidly increasing; at the same time, bread price fixers such as multinational giant Loblaws continue to receive preferential treatment from the government, even after making excess COVID profits. While the cost of everything goes up, public sector wages are capped by legislation to a maximum of one percent.
8. While it is unclear how these crises will continue to unfold, what is clear is that reforms at the margins will not suffice. We need to act now to make change – on inequality, challenging white supremacy, climate action, and improving working conditions and affordability.
9. People are demanding change. Less than 24 months ago, we had the largest protest in North American history in support of the Movement for Black Lives. Between 15 and 26 million people marched in the streets in support.
10. We need to rethink basic assumptions about what our society should look like and work to make that change. It will require us to organize deeply within our union, within our communities, and beyond our so-called borders. It will require us to reignite the militancy of our movement and use all options to push back, and to push forward for working people. It will require us to transform class rage into class consciousness.
11. Here in Ontario, we have a huge opportunity with the provincial election this spring. At the end of a four-year term in office, we would ask if we were better off now than four years ago. While the pandemic has changed the calculus of that question, the answer to whether this government deserves another term in office is clear. The Ford government has failed us in this pandemic and we cannot afford another term with them in office. It is time for the working class in Ontario to turn the page on the status quo, to organize to defeat Doug Ford's Conservatives and to elect the Ontario NDP.

## Organize to Build Worker Power

12. Across the labour movement, unions are struggling to address the impact of COVID-19 on our capacity to organize and affect change, and CUPE Ontario is no exception to this. The pandemic has reduced opportunities for activists to meet and continue to build the type of solidarity that serves as the bedrock of our movement. While unions have transitioned traditional training and education programs to the online space, workers have struggled to adapt, leaving many to feel isolated, and to retreat into silos.
  13. At the same time, the struggles we are facing in COVID also present a huge opportunity. People across the country are seeing how essential the work of our members is. Workers across the country and across North America are also realizing the power that comes from organizing and we have seen support for joining a union on the rise in sectors many thought were impossible to organize.
  14. At this same moment, over the last decade, unions have suffered unprecedented attacks against our rights to free and fair collective bargaining. The first bill this government passed on the first day of their mandate was to legislate CUPE 3903 members back to work. Public services continue to be deprived of basic funding and members have seen their wages falling against inflation. Workers need to rediscover the collective power of the labour movement.
- “...members have seen their wages falling against inflation.”**
15. We must continue to invest in strengthening our internal structures to build power and make change. This means creating structures that engage with our members in meaningful ways. This means investing in supporting the different levels of CUPE Ontario to ensure that they are ready to mobilize and organize for our members. This means making sure that members from marginalized communities feel like they are represented in our union and that they have space to have their voices and concerns heard.
  16. We must reignite the fight-back, rebuild the capacity, and reinforce the solidarity of our movement.

### CUPE Ontario will:

17. Reinvest and reimagine models that centre organizing through member-to-member conversations and high participation locals to continue to build the power of our union through engagement and mobilization, to fight back against concession bargaining and fight forward for gains, both at bargaining tables and in politics.
18. Provide central resources to support sectors, bargaining councils, committees, district councils and locals at every step, and coordinate work to fortify our structures to ensure that every level of CUPE Ontario is prepared to fight back against any issue facing our members.

19. Create modules and offer training sessions and tools to equip sectors, bargaining councils, committees, district councils and locals with the knowledge and skills they need to begin this organizing within their spaces.
20. Create conditions to build the power and confidence of our members by building a culture of worker militancy.
21. Explore opportunities for CUPE Ontario to organize and be visible in spaces where members are, rather than depending on members to come to us.
22. Work to ensure that space is created at all levels of CUPE Ontario for members who belong to marginalized communities to strengthen our union, fortify our solidarity, and increase our union's power and capacity to fight back against austerity and to fight forward to demand a better Ontario.
23. Through our Retirees Network and working with CUPE councils, ensure that recent retirees continue to have avenues to stay involved in various levels of CUPE Ontario, to be able to use their time and motivation to support our work, while mentoring the next generation of activists, to ensure that we don't lose the wealth of knowledge and experience those retirees have accumulated through years of activism."
24. Continue to build solidarity with community groups that share the progressive vision of promoting a workers first agenda, and work collaboratively with those groups to ensure that our members are receiving communications and updates and engaging with these groups.

## Organizing for Public Services

25. In addition to the pandemic, we are battling multiple other crises which are interconnected and, importantly, have common solutions.
26. Strong and expanded public services are crucial in our recovery from the pandemic and for our vision of a future that is built on solidarity, equity, reciprocity, and the interdependence between people and the environment. The attacks on public services both at home and across the world are a part of large project to weaken collective solidarity and care.
27. Public services are key in our ability to live healthy, happy, and dignified lives and help reduce inequality while bettering people's lives and our planet. Publicly owned and provided services are collectively and democratically created. They pool our common resources through progressive taxation creating fairness by accounting for people's ability to pay.
28. Most Ontarians get far more benefit from public services then they pay in taxes. The average family "enjoy[s] public services worth about \$41,000 — or 63% of their income."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/canadas-quiet-bargain>

29. Universal quality public services help counteract systemic inequality based on race, gender, ethnicity, caste, disability, age, and sexual orientation. Without public services funded by progressive taxation, many services would only be available to the wealthy.
30. Across our so-called borders, many other countries are hampered in providing public services due to international efforts that undermine them. These efforts, which include trade agreements, illegitimate and coercive debt, and international public-private-partnerships create challenges for delivery of public services and generating revenue to pay for those public services. Our solidarity must extend beyond our so-called borders to ensure that our efforts to advocate for CUPE members do not come at the expense of people and public services in other countries.

**“The carceral system, built on police and prisons, has been used to enforce oppression and discrimination to protect whiteness and wealth.”**

31. While universal quality public services are a cornerstone to our vision for our equitable future, we also understand the ways in which certain public services have benefited the interest of the powerful and wealthy. For example, the carceral system, built on police and prisons, has been used to

enforce oppression and discrimination to protect whiteness and wealth. We reject this and other attempts to use public services to the benefit of a particular individual or group.

32. Attempts to dismantle public services through austerity, privatization, or simply leaving services to the market commodifies our dignity and shared needs and threatens our collective quality of life. Instead, we must organize for universal quality public services to create opportunities for solidarity and care.

### **CUPE Ontario will:**

33. Work with our allies in the labour and social justice movement to resist any government’s push for austerity budgets and cuts to public services.
34. Bring attention to the contributions of the universal quality public service to collective wellbeing and prosperity.
35. Highlight the value of universal public services in reducing the impact of domestic and unpaid care work of women.
36. Campaign through CUPE National and the International Solidarity Committee to ensure that efforts to support workers in Ontario do not come at the expense of people and public services internationally (e.g., pension investments in international privatization).
37. Highlight that our ability to respond to the climate emergency and provide a just transition to impacted workers and communities depends on the strength of the public sector.

38. Work with our allies to together reimagine the public sector as a central pillar of sustainable development.
39. Highlight the ongoing failures of the privatization of public services and instead campaign to stop further privatization and to bring services back into the public sector.
40. Fight to strengthen public services to endure the current public health crisis and make the historic investments needed to prevent future crises and improve the quality of services for all.
41. Work to expand OHIP coverage to include universal mental health care to support the one in four Ontarians who needed mental health or addictions support during the pandemic.

## Organizing for Wages

42. Throughout the pandemic, Ontarians relied on public services to help them navigate challenging times. While the services CUPE members provided were appreciated in a new light, and front-line workers received pot banging nightly applause, the pandemic did not translate into better working conditions or wages for those same workers. Instead, governments highlighted a key distinction between essential work and essential workers. Vegetables still needed to be picked, people still needed transportation, and Ontarians still needed to be cared for; yet, migrant workers are still excluded from basic labour rights, gig workers are still misclassified as independent contractors, and public sector workers are still denied, through Bill 124, our constitutional right to free collective bargaining.
43. These wage restraints are built on lies. For example, as part of the rationale to bring in a public sector wage restraint law in 2018, the government contracted the accounting firm Ernst & Young to conduct a line-by-line review of Ontario government expenditures for the prior 15 years. The Ford government claimed that public spending and wages were out of control. However, despite the government's best attempts to distort the data, the accounting firm's review concluded that "government expenditures as a portion of GDP have shrunk over the relevant 15-year time period for Ontario".<sup>3</sup>
44. The Ford government also stated that the cupboards were bare and Ontario could not afford to pay workers fairly. Once again, the basic facts did not support this claim. Using the most common measure of prosperity, GDP per capita, Ontario was richer in 2019 than compared to any other time in our history.
45. Despite claims of poverty, exceptions were made to the wage restraint legislation. Police, for example, were explicitly carved out of the legislation and secured an agreement that provided an annual two percent wage increase over four years,

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<sup>3</sup> [https://files.ontario.ca/ey\\_report\\_2018\\_en.pdf](https://files.ontario.ca/ey_report_2018_en.pdf)



which was double the legislated cap for the rest of the public sector. As the pandemic progressed, the government provided various groups of workers exceptions to Bill 124. Increasingly, the government is sidestepping collective bargaining to pick groups of workers who they prefer or who they need votes from.

46. It is obvious that the cupboards are not bare and instead this legislation is a specific choice to arrive at specific ends – weakening union power.
47. Now, almost three years after the bill's introduction, we clearly see the ongoing devastation enacted by the legislation.
48. With inflation currently above six percent, the legislated wage cap results in impacted public sector workers having at least a five percent wage cut. Effectively, the government has legislated wage theft against public sector workers.
49. Against the backdrop of the pandemic burnout and the lack of real wage gains, long-standing labour shortages have intensified across the board. Job vacancies in many critical sectors, such as health and education, have increase over 100% in just twelve months. Many workers have left their fields to find other work, or joined the private sector where wages are not legislatively capped.
50. Labour shortages, magnified by Bill 124, create other equity-based concerns. Attacks against public sector workers target women, particularly racialized women disproportionately in three distinct ways: they lose the prospect of decent work within the public sector, they use and therefore suffer from the cuts to public services at higher rates, and lastly, they end up taking on an increase in the share of domestic and unpaid care work as a substitute of public service failure.
51. Sacrificing public services and public sector workers in the name of ideology must stop. Instead, we must organize for a future built upon caring for one another and create an equitable society.

### **CUPE Ontario will:**

52. Continue our legal challenge of Bill 124 to ensure that workers can exercise their constitutional right to free collective bargaining.
53. Actively campaign to increase public sector wages to undo the damage done by years of decline.
54. Work to highlight public sector workers as part of Ontario's core infrastructure that requires investment and protection.
55. Work with our allies to continue the fight for a \$20 minimum wage.
56. Demand we "raise the rates" with substantial increases and indexation to social assistance and ODSP rates.
57. Expand our Wealth Tax campaign for progressive tax reforms specifically targeted at increasing taxes for the wealthy and corporations. Taxes must be raised on both

- groups and a new wealth tax must be established for those who make excess profit. We must also end corporate handouts via boutique tax credits.
58. Lobby to strengthen workers safety nets by enforcing health and safety standards and campaign for full coverage to all workers under WSIB.
  59. Continue our push for labour law reform including making it easier to join a union, legislated ten permanent employer paid sick days, protection against misclassification of workers and creation of minimum standards for all workers regardless of status.
  60. Demand an end to use of back-to-work legislation.

## Organizing for Political Action

61. CUPE members serve as the backbone of the public services that Canadians depend on. While the Ford government is focused on refunding people their license plate fee, they have refused to make the necessary investments to ensure our schools, universities, long-term care homes and other workplaces were safe. We know that they have chosen to not invest in key measures and services that could have been used to save lives, to avoid school closures and to support those who are working in unsafe conditions, facing job loss or at risk of eviction.
  62. CUPE Ontario is clear in its position – we need to fund public services and pay our members a fair wage, and we need to ensure that all levels of government are exploring revenue generating tools, rather than implementing another devastating round of austerity and privatization, while prioritizing corporate profits over people.
  63. Ontario is scheduled to go to the polls in just a few weeks, on June 2. With such a tight race and volatility in public opinion polling, this election campaign is really going to matter. A majority of voters are looking for an alternative to the Ford government because Ford has failed Ontario. He has introduced harmful cuts to public services, resulting in far too many COVID-19 deaths in long-term care, and he has failed to provide the needed supports for hospitals, long-term care, schools, social services, municipalities, and universities to operate safely.
- “Ford has failed Ontario.”**
64. This October, there will also be municipal and school board elections in Ontario, where there will be an opportunity to elect city councillors, school board trustees and mayors who are supportive of a workers first agenda. Municipal politicians have a significant amount of influence in making change at the local level and ensuring that public services and public sector workers are protected. Politicians who will advocate for strong public services and making our cities more equitable and affordable deserve our support.

### **CUPE Ontario will:**

65. Mobilize all available resources to ensure that the Ford Conservatives are not re-elected. But our efforts cannot focus on this goal alone. It was years of Liberal austerity and tax cuts that undermined our public services when we need them most. We will recommend to our members that they vote in our collective interests, for the future we deserve, for the Ontario NDP.
66. Use the provincial election as an opportunity to train and empower CUPE members, build capacity and power within CUPE Ontario, and to increase electoral participation of our members, as voters and volunteers. After June 3<sup>rd</sup>, regardless of who is elected, we must work to ensure workers' rights are at the top of the agenda.
67. Ensure that provincial and municipal issues of importance to CUPE members, including the repeal of Bill 124, appropriate funding of public services, and increasing revenue, are part of the wider election discourse.
68. Work with coalition partners at the municipal and school board level to create and execute a plan that includes candidates search, mobilization and the election of municipal politicians and school board trustees who promote public services.
69. Work with municipal locals, OMECC and coalition partners to fight policies which promote P3's and the privatization of municipal services.
70. Fight the climate emergency through a worker-led and intersectional lens, including:
  - a. Advocating for "green economic development", including the expansion of public transit, government funding of green infrastructure and support for green manufacturing, to help meet municipal, provincial and federal climate targets, and Canada's Paris Agreement commitment.
  - b. Engaging in meaningful consultation with both public, non-profit sector and private sector workers and unions as recommendations and plans are developed.
  - c. Promoting care work as good green jobs in our fight against climate change.
  - d. Ensuring that a stream of pandemic recovery spending is focussed on job creation and training in industries that have been hardest hit and industries that meet our climate and equity goals.

### **Organize against White Supremacy**

71. Canada bore witness to the occupation of Ottawa by protests that were in large part organized and funded by white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. These groups continued a long history of manipulating crises to create division and further their ideologies of hatred. As many communities faced hardship during the pandemic, these groups targeted people who have understandable concerns

about what lockdowns mean for their jobs or who have questions or hesitation about vaccines, who are just tied of it all, and manipulated them into amplifying white supremacist views, homophobic and transphobic views, hateful views against people with disabilities and conspiracy theories.

72. The COVID-19 crisis has allowed many groups to find new relevancy by pushing disinformation related to COVID-19 conspiracies. They have preyed on people's understandable fear, anxieties, uncertainty, and doubt to position themselves as truth tellers. We have then seen this power used to spread hate and target racialized minorities and immigrants to spread homophobic and transphobic hate and to create a wider sense of fear and panic in our communities. Despite grassroots appearances, they are often funded by well established organizations and powerful individuals with deep pockets, who are connected to other established white supremacist groups and anti-LGBTQI2S+ groups.
73. White supremacy is part of the foundation of Canada. In June of last year, we learned of the remains of 215 Indigenous children found in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, or Kamloops, British Columbia. While our governments went through the motions of lowering the Canadian flag to half mast, there was a lack of commitment to concrete actions for reconciliation and justice, not even a commitment to fund further investigations into other potential mass grave sites. This is the type of lip service that is rolled out over and over again, in lieu of any concrete action.
74. This pandemic has thrown a spotlight on the continued systemic racism in our institutions and the inequities in our society. The essential service work of the pandemic is disproportionately done by women and racialized people. It is also abundantly clear that racialized communities were the hardest hit by the virus and have suffered the most. We must acknowledge that COVID-19 is not the only public health emergency in Ontario and that we must formally recognize racism as a health crisis and take the necessary actions towards fighting structural racism in our governments, policies, institutions, and public services and ensure a racially just recovery.

### **CUPE Ontario will:**

75. Working with our coalition partners, develop, resource, and implement an anti-white supremacy campaign to build on the "Recognize and Resist White Supremacy" guide developed by the Racial Justice Committee.
76. Continue to fight for the recognition of anti-Black racism as a public health crisis.
77. Fight to restore and increase the funding to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, for the appointment of competent experienced adjudicators to fill the growing number of Board vacancies to deal with the huge and growing backlog of cases, and for a public system to represent workers in this process.

78. Lobby the government to restore and increase funding to the Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate and its sub-committees, to make all its reports public, and to create a committee under the Directorate that would have inter-ministerial connections and responsibilities for concrete actions.
79. Support calls for the introduction of equity, anti-harassment, and anti-discrimination training for all government funded agencies and institutions.
80. Support actions to fight systemic discrimination against workers with disabilities – visible and invisible – and to fight for the accommodations and resources that are essential during the pandemic and beyond.
81. Support actions to organize against hate and violence targeted at LGBTQI2S+ people and gender-based violence, and call for an intersectional gender equity strategy to address the vast legislative failings that allow many to fall through the cracks.
82. Fight for a reallocation of resources away from police services towards a restructured public safety model and increased spending on housing and social services generally and mental health supports.
83. Urge CUPE National to echo our calls against anti-Black racism at the federal level.
84. Campaign and lobby the Ontario provincial government to recognize and designate the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation as a statutory holiday. CUPE Ontario will encourage all locals and members to honour September 30 as a day to learn about the history of the residential school system and reflect on the harms that it has caused and continue to cause Indigenous People.
85. Continue the implementation of the CUPE Ontario Anti-Racism Organizational Action Plan to root out racism in our union's structures and spaces.
86. Make available to any CUPE Local that wants it, the documents and processes used by the CUPE Ontario Anti-Racism Organizational Action Plan so that CUPE locals may use those resources to combat racism in their own organizations.

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