Year End Message 2022

Sisters, Brothers, Comrades & Friends

What a year 2022 has been!

As pandemic restrictions eased, we re-engaged with one another in person and at numerous CUPE Ontario conferences and events, reigniting our participation in community events like Pride celebrations, Carnival, and Labour Day.

Our 55,000 school board workers made labour history in resisting the most draconian piece of anti-worker back-to-work legislation we have ever seen: Bill 28. Because of the power of their phenomenal organizing, led by the Ontario School Board Council of Unions, these workers led a province-wide political protest and inspired solidarity, not only across the province, but across the country. Along the way, they kindled the call for a general strike throughout our entire labour movement. Ultimately, education workers forced Doug Ford and his Conservative government to back down, consigning Bill 28 to the dustbin of history.

CUPE education workers in Ontario also set a new standard for organizing and for participation by the membership. It resulted in a collective agreement – the first these workers have been able to freely negotiate in a decade – that set a new, higher bar for wage settlements in the public sector.

This year also saw the courts finally rule on the challenge brought by our union, along with 70 other unions and associations and the Ontario Federation of Labour, against Bill 124, which capped wage increases at 1% for most of our members. We always said this Bill was unconstitutional, and the courts completely agreed with us, rendering Bill 124 null and void. Ford has announced his intention to appeal this decision, but rest assured: with this win under our belt, we are more determined than ever to win this battle once and for all – so we can get on to negotiations for damages for every worker impacted.

These two events show the breath and depth of our fightback in CUPE Ontario. We will take our fight to the streets, we will use the courts, we will do whatever it takes to fight for our members, their standard of living, and the services they provide.

So many other milestones have happened this year. Many locals have pushed back in bargaining to achieve better for their members. In every sector of our union, from municipalities to social services, universities to health and long-term care, our locals, sectors, and bargaining councils are working hard, in concert with us at CUPE Ontario.

A special mention to members of CUPE 3906, who led a three-week strike after their employer, McMaster University, refused to listen to their demand for a new high-bar wage settlement for academic workers. But the strength and resolve of these workers, aided by solidarity from all of us, won the day!

Another milestone that deserves special recognition was this year’s launch of a unique new program, Women in Leadership Development (WILD), undertaken as one of the key actions established under CUPE Ontario’s Anti-Racism Organizational Action Plan. Delayed two years by the pandemic, the program is designed to increase representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized women in the leadership of our union. Fifteen candidates, drawn from every sector in CUPE and from every corner of the province, were enrolled in the first year-long program. We will meet these agents of change and inspiration in May at CUPE Ontario’s convention.

On behalf of the CUPE Ontario Executive Board, and the amazing staff of CUPE Ontario, we send our deepest appreciation and thanks to all our members, activists, and leaders. Thank you for your hard work, your activism, and your commitment to building a better Ontario for ourselves and our families.

We hope that over the coming weeks you will have some down time, some time away from work and from union activism, to relax and spend time with people you love.

For those of you who are about to begin some well deserved holiday time, we hope it is filled with rest, joy and laughter.

As a public-sector union, CUPE Ontario knows, however, that many CUPE members will remain hard at work over the holidays, serving our communities across Ontario.

We send our deep gratitude to the snowplow operators; paramedics; hospital, long-term care and homecare workers; transit operators; hydro workers; shelter support staff; and social services and community agency staff. Your hard work and dedication keep our province running all year round, but especially at times of the year when many others are away from their work.

As we head into the new year, we are looking forward to building on the successes of 2022. It was a year like few others at CUPE Ontario and its lessons will serve as our inspiration for a long time to come. This year has taught us that we don’t have to wait for permission or even for elections: we can make change happen when we come together. We will continue to build workers’ power with all of you, challenging the Ford Conservatives and building the ever-growing resistance to their agenda.

We look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

In solidarity,

Fred Hahn Yolanda McClean

CUPE Ontario President CUPE Ontario Secretary-Treasurer

