



CELEBRATING SOLIDARITY
BUILDING
POWER
TO MAKE CHANGE
CONVENTION 2023

ACTION PLAN



Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I
can hear her breathing. — Arundhati Roy

Introduction

1. In early November 2022, workers felt the breath of another world. After months and months of planning, Ontario education workers and the broader labour movement forcefully said ‘No – we will not have our ability to strike taken away.’
2. We demonstrated that we were ready to walk off the job and go on strike. We were ready to take action en masse. We were ready to return to a time when there was no legal right to strike, and working-class militancy propelled our struggles.
3. We did not know what would happen next, but we knew anything was possible and there was something extraordinary and beautiful in that. The freedom of possibility is essential to keep our labour struggles alive and kicking.
4. It was a reminder of what a path to liberation looks like. It was a reminder that while our fights are often about wages and benefits, they are also about something more. And it was a reminder that when one group of workers takes action, it inspires others to do the same, as we've seen in CUPE Ontario and across the labour movement.
5. Other sectors are also showing the way, as an unprecedented number of CUPE members and locals engage in deep organizing, campaigning, and strike action, all to inform CUPE Ontario's work moving forward.
6. We stand at a moment of new possibilities for the labour movement. Our intersecting crises of the rise of right-wing politics, of fascism, of war, of climate, and of care and community, necessitate that we focus on the power of action to bring hope rather than fall into despair. We must build upon the powerful reminder that our collective actions as workers can not only preserve, but also expand upon all that workers have achieved over generations.
7. Our dreams of what is possible must come out of struggle, movement, and

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relationships within those movements. When we fight together, when we fight as a global working class, we have power, and we can win and create another world.

Organizing

8. The benefits of high participation worker-led organizing are significant. Since 2020, almost one million Ontarians have been on strike and have demonstrated their collective power to achieve workplace gains. This is more than the previous ten years combined. We must build on the fact that one in eight workers in Ontario has had recent strike experience and the invaluable political education that comes from being on a picket line.

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10. Many locals across our sectors have utilized this methodology. Some locals have come close to going on strike and others have gone on strike as a result of the unparalleled power available from high participation organizing. Reflecting on our experiences of using this approach is important to ensure we can continue this success moving forward. The example of the education workers provides useful perspective for our future battles.

11. Under the shadow of an unfolding cost of living crisis, 55,000 education workers represented by CUPE Ontario, and the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), led a transformative struggle to negotiate higher wages in relation to inflation, better working conditions, and issues important for the common good, such as smaller class sizes.

12. After months of intensive and systematic organizing and tens of thousands of member-to-member conversations, members gave a resounding mandate by voting over 96.5 percent to strike, with a turnout of 82.6 percent.

13. In response, the government introduced Bill 28, the so-called *Keeping Students in Class Act*, a draconian piece of legislation which took away workers' right to strike and imposed a contract.

14. In the face of this attack, education workers and their supporters were ready to fight with labour leaders who were set to call an indefinite general strike. The government's resulting climbdown was swift and unprecedented.

15. We learned from these events that when workers have a place to express their anger, they are more than willing to act.

16. Replicating this expression of workers' unity is the way we build our collective strength and the common good. The critical role of CUPE Ontario in providing strike support to members in need is a crucial aspect of repeating these successes.

CUPE Ontario will:

17. Prioritize building high participation member and retiree engagement to win gains for workers.
18. Engage in well supported, large-scale worker-based campaigns to defeat anti-worker politicians and governments.
19. Continue to provide strike support and tools to all members in difficult bargaining.
20. Launch an affiliation drive for more locals to join CUPE Ontario in order to broaden our ambitions and build our political power and influence.
21. Organize around and support CUPE National's safer union spaces work and commit to fighting against sexual violence, harassment, and oppression in and out of our union spaces.

Wages and Affordability

22. We must use the power of organizing to help fight the extreme financial pressures facing Ontarians. We are dealing with staggering inflation which, in 2022, reached a 40-year high. Paired with real wages that have fallen over the last generation, double digit price increases for groceries, and an affordable housing crisis, our current financial landscape is destroying lives and communities.
23. One of the singular bright spots is our current unemployment rate which reached record lows in 2022 and has remained low for much of 2023. However, the Bank of Canada interest rate hikes are directly targeted at increasing unemployment and ensuring the weakening of working-class bargaining power.
24. This stands in stark contrast to businesses who have continued to rig the system to their benefit. Startlingly, corporate profits have, on average, gone up 9.2 percent each year since the start of the pandemic. Corporate profits as a percentage of our economy are also at 40-year record highs, averaging 14.4 percent of the economy. Sky-high corporate profits, not wages, are driving record inflation.

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25. High inflation also impacts those in retirement who rely on modest pensions. CUPE Ontario continues to lead the fight for a return to indexation for our pension plans and dignity for our retirees.

CUPE Ontario will:

26. Campaign against the lie that wages are causing inflation and instead highlight the destructive role that corporate profits are playing in driving up prices.
27. Ensure that our members understand how inflation is decreasing real wages and that we must demand more at the bargaining table to safeguard against further wage erosion.
28. Push back against the government's fearmongering of a public safety crisis to increase police and other carceral institutions that criminalize people (e.g., jails, prisons, courts, bail, etc.).
29. Resist attempts to use public sector workers in any effort to decamp the unhoused within Ontario by highlighting to members, who are directed by their employer to take part in removals, of their right to refuse work that endangers their life and someone else's.
30. Continue to fight for pensions for all workers with the goal of a defined benefit pension plan indexed to inflation.

Austerity, Privatization, and Attacks on our Democratic Institutions

31. Public sector workers remain in the shadow of Bill 124. At last count, the government's wage theft had cost public sector workers \$2.1 billion. While the bill was ruled unconstitutional by Ontario's Superior Court, the government has shamefully appealed that decision.
32. Even before Bill 124, public sector workers' wages have long been suppressed. The public sector has had almost 15 years of government restraint measures unilaterally imposed.
33. The pandemic laid bare the inequalities in our economy and the cost-of-living crisis which followed has hit workers hard, as governments at all levels aim to address inflation by increasing unemployment and shrinking our public services. Public sector workers who worked amidst years of cutbacks and hailed as heroes over the pandemic are now seeing their real earnings being dramatically clawed back by the government.

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continues to have the lowest program spending per person when compared to the other provinces. For six of the last ten years, Ontario has spent the least and, in the other four years, it has spent the second least. If Ontario spent the rest of Canada average per person, it would be an additional \$31.9 billion in program spending.

35. In response to the pressures of the pandemic and the wage restraint, public service workers are reaching breaking points and are quitting their fields under severe pressures of understaffing. While this is commonly referenced in relation to healthcare, with some hospitals cutting back on services – including ERs and ICUs – the havoc that Bill 124 wreaked has cut across all public services, including social services, school boards, and post-secondary. The government has refused to repeal Bill 124, claiming it is not the source of the problem. Instead, it is using the current crisis to push for a variety of right-wing economic ‘solutions’.

36. Meanwhile, grocery price increases are outstripping general inflation by an additional 5 percent and rents by an additional 6 percent. The result has been an entrenchment of an economy where a small segment of society benefits while everyone else falls farther behind. The cost-of-living crisis presents an opportunity to unify numerous working-class demands in a way that challenges the priorities of big business, the banks, the chambers of commerce, and their backers like Ford and his government.

37. Fighting battles on various fronts can obscure some of the commonalities of these fights. Reflecting on them as a whole highlights the right’s systemic attacks on our basic democratic institutions.

38. While the attempt to take away our constitutional right to strike is the most obvious example of this attack, there are other ways to see this unfold: privatizing healthcare; providing insider information and selling off the Greenbelt; weakening labour law; not implementing permanent paid sick days; cash-for-access fundraisers; conservative LGBTQ and racist attacks in schools; hiding from Ford’s responsibility to deal with the convoy; slush funds within the provincial budget; not releasing ministers’ mandate letters; funneling a disproportionate amount of COVID vaccines to rich white neighborhoods; and so on.

39. That is why our work in the labour movement as a countervailing power against big business is essential. We cannot let these attacks stand and further harm our communities.

CUPE Ontario will:

- 40. Oppose the government's appeal of the court's decision on Bill 124 and campaign for the return of billions in wage theft from the government to workers.
- 41. Encourage locals to bargain for above inflation wages, armed with the legal confidence that, despite the appeal, Bill 124 is "void and of no effect".
- 42. Work with our labour and community allies to demand an end to austerity in public services.
- 43. Demand large scale investments in public services that reflect both Ontario's fiscal capacity and Ontarians needs.
- 44. Forcefully respond to any attempt to privatize our public services in any sector.
- 45. Continue to work with our labour and community partners to demand that the government strengthen labour and employment law legislation in Ontario.

Taxation

46. Ford continues to do the bidding of corporations and the rich - in the March provincial budget, the government announced an upcoming review of the tax system.

47. A healthy and fair tax system is important to public service users and to public sector workers whose jobs depend on taxation revenue.

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48. While details are extremely scarce, CUPE Ontario, along with our allies, will be vocally participating in this process as we did when the last major tax review in Ontario took place in 1993.

49. We must collectively turn our minds to this issue as the right wing will undoubtedly take this moment to further drive down tax revenue and weaken the remaining traces of fairness within the tax system. The right-wing Fraser Institute

has long established its demand to slash both personal and business taxes to a flat 8 percent, which would decimate our already threadbare public sector.

50. While Ontario is on the cusp of returning to a surplus provincial budget, it has happened at the expense of our communities and the public services we rely on. Our current tax system is deeply insufficient for raising the necessary revenue to provide the public services we currently need.
51. For 15 years now, tax rates on the rich and corporations have been slashed. If Ontario raised the corporate income tax (CIT) rate just 1 percent from 11.5 percent to 12.5 percent that would raise \$3.7 billion annually and it would still be less than the rest of Canada CIT rate average of 12.7 percent. Notably, a one percent CIT rate increase would generate more money in twelve months than the government has saved in four years of wage theft with Bill 124, which amounted to \$2.1 billion. Furthermore, if the government returned to the previous CIT rate of 14 percent from 2009, it would raise \$9.3 billion annually.
52. In addition to staggeringly low tax rates, the government provides over \$44 billion in tax breaks, with the largest number going to businesses. According to the Financial Accountability Office, if tax breaks “were identified separately in the Ontario Budget ...[they]...would be the second highest expense sector for the Province, after the health sector.”
53. Ontario is a rich province and can afford to raise taxes on the wealthy and on corporations. For example, if Ontario raised the rest of Canada average revenue as a percentage of GDP, it would be an additional \$50.9 billion which is more than we spend on education and social services combined.
54. The labour movement must lead in advocating for both an increase in tax revenue and the reintroduction of a level of fairness in the system. Without it, our public services will not survive; the baby boom generation’s medical and long-term care needs are forecasted to grow 50 percent over the next seven years. This will be compounded by the yet unknown cost of dealing with long COVID which, according to the Dr. Tam, Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer, could be a “mass disabling event”.

CUPE Ontario will:

55. Work with our allies in the upcoming provincial tax review and push for a return to fairness in our tax system and a substantial increase in tax revenue from the wealthy and corporations.
56. Demand a tax system that ensures corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes.

- 57. Demand a wealth tax directed at those who have profited and concentrated their wealth during the pandemic.
- 58. Lobby for a crackdown on those who abuse our tax system via loopholes and offshore accounts.
- 59. Push for an end to the obscene cost and number of tax breaks provided to businesses and the wealthy.

Human Rights

60. The disproportionate toll of the pandemic on the equity-deserving groups, the resurgence of fascism and other far-right politics, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, transphobia, criminalization of bodily autonomy including abortion, ableism, and many other issues of equity are all interconnected struggles not bound by geography or nation.

61. The relentless violence inflicted against these groups is part of the larger mechanism that serves to divide working people from one another. Our response must be collective because our liberation is inherently tied to one another.

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62. The divisions we see in our local communities' mirror what is happening beyond borders.

63. Global working-class solidarity is particularly vital in response to the climate crisis. Collective effort based in global justice is required to deal with the deepening emergency in front of us.

64. Climate solutions must respond to the demand for climate reparations from the Global South borne of the historic and ongoing imperial extraction of the Global North. Environmental justice must ensure that those in the Global South, who are the least responsible for the climate disaster despite being the most in danger, are not further harmed from any solutions to climate change.

65. Responding to the climate emergency will require a transformation of our economy and can lead to a generation of new well-paying unionized jobs. These opportunities could speak to a broader understanding of a "just transition" where equity-deserving communities increasingly find their way into the labour movement.

66. It is crucial to recognize that our members, our workplaces, and our future are deeply affected by climate change. Our health and well-being are already being

affected by global warming. Our members' jobs and daily lives are on the line. This isn't a future problem; this is a now problem. The fight for climate justice is equally a fight for human rights.

CUPE Ontario will:

67. Centre the margins of the working class using an intersectional lens and provide support against all attacks from the right wing.
68. Continue our internal work of dismantling the structures of white supremacy within CUPE Ontario using our Anti-Racism Organizational Action Plan as a blueprint moving forward.
69. Organize against the right-wing threats and attacks against 2SLGBTQIA+ community.
70. Work with the OFL and coalition partners to lobby the provincial government to take immediate steps to redress widespread pay equity non-compliance in Ontario and set aside a specialized fund to ensure payments for public sector workers.
71. Advocate for strategies that put public services, communities, and workers at the center of climate change action.
72. Encourage our locals to use equity and climate change language when bargaining collective agreements.
73. Advocate for Indigenous rights, democratic rights, and workers' rights as an essential element of climate justice.
74. Work with pension advocates to ensure that our pension funds are not fueling the climate crisis and putting workers' retirement security at risk.

Conclusion

75. To take on the Ford Conservative's agenda and the big business lobby, we must build a real alternative for the working class. We need to fight for an agenda that will improve our lives and our communities across the province, starting right now and continuing beyond the election cycle.
76. This means doing more than organizing for the next election day to vote Ford out; it requires us to actively organize in our workplaces and communities. Our movement must fight to win real wage increases; to strengthen the public services our members deliver and rely on; to make daily life more affordable; and to make banks and corporations pay their fair share. These are popular ideas

that we must advance with our allies. It is up to us, as workers, to build solidarity across struggles and across movements as a way to get people to realize they have power. We must educate, agitate, and organize for another world.

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