

Reclaiming worker power:

Strategic Directions
2023-2025

Québec
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Introduction

This document is a roadmap to guide the work of all levels of our union for the next two years. It lays out our priorities, our hopes, our dreams, and our fight for a better and more equitable future.

Indigenous members, Black and racialized members, 2SLGBTQI+ members, young workers, persons with disabilities, our communities, our climate, and our families are being threatened by the right-wing, by white supremacy, and by the greed of capitalism. As workers we need to reclaim our power, to stand up for each other and our rights. Together, as workers we can build a better future for everyone.

Governments and employers left workers to fend for themselves during the pandemic – and now they're leaving them to fend for themselves again as they face record inflation, skyrocketing housing costs, and wage suppression that makes it impossible to keep up with the overall cost of living.

While working families across Canada are struggling to make ends meet, the wealthiest households continue to skate through the cost-of-living crisis, and major corporations and banks continue to make out like bandits with record-high profits.

With very few exceptions, our governments are enabling them by letting grocery giants like Loblaws gouge families at the supermarket, or by pandering to wealthy developers who only build for the rich, or by opening up our health care system to privatization by wealthy profiteers.

What is at stake? Simply put: everything. The gap between the rich and the working class is getting wider by the day. The right is capitalizing on the desperation of working families, hoping to divide us so that we fear and fight with each other, rather than organizing together and fighting back against the root cause of our struggles – corporate greed.

Public services that form the bedrock of our social safety net are under existential threat. The rights of equity-deserving communities are under attack in ways we haven't seen in a generation. We are beginning to see the devastating impacts of a changing climate in real time.

Despite these relentless attacks on the working class, CUPE members, with our allies across the labour movement and in our communities, have been standing together and fighting back – whether it's health care and education workers in British Columbia winning major inflation-fighting wage increases, or education workers in Ontario defying legislation and Charter attacks by the Ford government, or members in New Brunswick organizing and winning a general strike against the Conservative government.

Over the past two years, CUPE has been at the forefront of bringing our labour movement together, building worker power, and mobilizing across the country to fight for better, for everyone. Looking ahead for the next two years, we are energized, determined, and hopeful. We've shown what we can do as CUPE members when we get organized and fight back. It's time for us to reclaim worker power.

Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

The work of reconciliation belongs to everyone, and as Canada's largest union, we recognize that we have a major role to play in that work – as an organization, and as a national network of community activists. As part of our ongoing commitment to truth and reconciliation, over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Continue supporting Indigenous communities in calling for the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.
- Support the calls to justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people, and pressure the federal government to implement the federal action plan.
- Support the implementation of the 2023 *United Nations Declaration Act Action Plan* to bring federal laws and policies in line with UNDRIP, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- Advocate for policy changes that address historical injustices and improve the quality of life for Indigenous communities.
- Improve representation of Indigenous union members within our organization, addressing barriers to their full participation and advancement.
- Support initiatives by Indigenous communities to combat environmental racism, promote cultural preservation, traditional land stewardship and conservation practices.
- Promote awareness and action for September 30th, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and pressure provincial governments to recognize the day as a statutory holiday for reflection.
- Strengthen our relationships with progressive Indigenous organizations, especially with local, regional and grassroots Indigenous-led groups.
- Continue promoting the importance of water as a sacred resource that belongs to everyone, not for the profit of a few, in the same vein of CUPE's Water Is Life campaign.
- Advocate for the creation of a Red Dress Alert to notify the public when an Indigenous woman, girl or Two-Spirit person goes missing.

Human Rights

Hate and white supremacy are on the rise across the globe, as are far-right political movements that are threatening hard-won rights and reopening debates that were settled decades ago. Using an intersectional lens to fight to end racism, harassment, and discrimination, and advance the work of reconciliation in our communities has never been more important. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Fight anti-2SLGBTQI+ hate, including at CUPE workplaces where threats and violence have become unacceptably common and are impacting the health and safety of our members.
- Continue to advance the goals of CUPE's National Anti-Racism Strategy.
- Develop bargaining tools and resources to support CUPE members who are migrant workers in our locals and in our communities.
- Continue to work with, and support, migrant led organizations in Canada.
- Engage with the disability justice community for a stronger Canada Disability Benefit program, address misconceptions and stereotypes regarding people with disabilities and advocate for better workplace protections.
- Continue our fight against anti-black racism, commemorate the end of the UN Decade for People of African Descent in 2024, and continue celebrating Black history beyond 2024.
- Work to end gender-based violence by educating members about online harassment, bystander intervention, and third-party violence.
- Educate our members about the damaging impacts of workplace violence and harassment, and our right to live and work free from violence and harassment.
- Continue our work to integrate equity and human rights work across all branches of CUPE.
- Educate members and work with community members and allies to combat the toxic drug crisis.
- Identify and address accessibility issues within our union spaces and our communities.

Building Strong Locals

Locals are the foundation of our union. They are critical voices for progress in our communities, and they are the vital doorway into union activism for rank-and-file members. Building strong locals means creating a union environment that is more resilient in the face of adversity, and more inclusive for everyone – because we know we are so much stronger united than divided. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Offer a national conference focused on skills-building for local leaders.
- Continue building on the work of our Safe Union Spaces Working Group.
- Fight back against systemic racism and systemic discrimination.

- Work with all chartered organisations to increase representation of equity-deserving groups, including 2SLGBTQI+, persons with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, and racialized members, in our union.
- Foster deeper member engagement with our members by offering training to members and activists on member engagement strategies and participatory tools.
- Improve our capacity to communicate directly with our members across the country.
- Support local leaders by organizing online forums to allow leaders to share experiences and learn from one another.
- Encourage mentorship between members and local leaders in each province.
- Support young workers' and precariously employed workers' involvement in our union with initiatives that empower them, and work to remove barriers that may restrict their participation.
- Develop more tools and resources to assist members experiencing mental health challenges.
- Offer more communications skills training for leaders at all levels of experience in our union.
- Cultivate deeper solidarity across our movement by fostering a stronger culture of, and respect for, picket lines and protests.
- Prioritize the work of, and training for, our health and safety committees.
- Support bilingualism within our union by making more resources and events accessible in both official languages.
- Give locals more resources to mobilize members to address precarious and part-time work.

Bargaining

As the cost-of-living crisis grinds on, governments have become more and more inclined to use draconian legislation to take away our rights. These losses have the biggest impact on our precarious workers. It's never been more important for us to stay focused on defending our bargaining rights, and on bargaining forward to make major gains for our members at the negotiating table. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Engage and empower CUPE members to stay strong throughout the bargaining process, so they know they have the full support of our national union.
- Strengthen and expand coordinated and sectoral approaches to bargaining, to bring our full negotiating power to bear.
- Proudly continue following our bargaining policy of no concessions and no two-tiered agreements to ensure our members are always moving forward – never backward.
- Fight tooth and nail for wage increases that guarantee a living wage and keep up with inflation.
- Negotiate collective agreement language to protect against understaffing and precarity, and ensure inclusivity, employment equity and safe spaces in our workplaces.

- Ensure CUPE members can retire with dignity by fighting for good, defined-benefit pensions and expanding pension coverage to all members.
- Reject efforts by employers or governments to restrict or take away our Charter right to free and fair collective bargaining.
- Oppose the use of scab workers during labour disputes, and advocate for strong anti-scab legislation in all jurisdictions across Canada.
- Increase bargaining training and support for local unions and make member mobilization and engagement an inherent part of the bargaining process.
- Defend our right to strike, and our right to respect the picket lines of other striking workers.
- Provide more job evaluation and classification training for locals to strengthen our hand at the bargaining table.
- Negotiate stronger human rights protections, including protections and care for trans members.
- Develop stronger supports for members who are unable to strike.
- Explore coordinated sectoral bargaining, with other labour allies, wherever possible.

Protecting our Work

Governments fixated on immediate cost-savings, and employers fixated on profits, will never stop looking for ways to cut costs – no matter the impact on service to the public or on working conditions. From coast to coast to coast, our members are often forced to get by without the support and resources they need to do their jobs, and our workplaces still suffer from a lack of adequate staffing and dependable funding. The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) also represents a growing and evolving threat to many of our fields of work, including in the ports and communications sectors where it's already having an impact. Globally, an estimated 25 per cent of jobs could be automated by the end of the decade. Over the next two years, to ensure we defend our jobs, and the quality of our work, CUPE will:

- Directly confront and raise awareness about the dangers of underfunding and selling off public services.
- Fight for more dependable funding for public services and the workers who deliver them.
- Protect our work with updated agreement language where AI and technology threatens jobs and livelihoods.
- Hold employers accountable for providing apprenticeships and training and re-training workers to ensure a just transition for the working class.

Organizing Non-Union Workers

Every worker deserves the protection of a union and the opportunity it brings for a safer, more secure job, and a better life for their family. Organizing new, non-union workers is one of the best ways we will continue strengthening our movement and expanding our power at the bargaining table. That's why organizing and expanding the benefit of union membership to more workers is at the heart of our work. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Continue organizing workers who do not yet have the benefit of union representation, especially part-time and precarious workers.
- Enforce our certifications and expand our scope where we already have members, also known as "wall-to-wall" organizing.
- Advocate for legislative changes that make it easier for workers to join a union and fight back against laws that undermine our ability to organize non-union workers.
- Review barriers for locals to organize smaller groups of workers.

Political Action

We have never been afraid to take our fight for a better world beyond the bargaining table and into the legislatures and into the streets if need be. There will be a federal election in Canada some time before our next National Convention, and we need to make sure our union and our members are engaged in electing a progressive government. We also need to develop a coordinated political action and lobbying plan that increases the frequency of lobbying efforts, and empowers CUPE members to take the lead in our advocacy. Faced with a resurgent far-right political movement in Canada, we will answer the call to stand up for workers' rights, climate action, and social and economic justice. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Exercise our power in our fight for a better world and when our rights are under attack, to show governments and employers alike that we aren't afraid to take to the streets.
- Build coalitions and work with our allies to strengthen worker and community power.
- Pressure the federal government to enact federal anti-scab legislation by the end of 2023, and continue pushing for anti-scab legislation across all jurisdictions in Canada.
- Recognize the urgency of electing more strong and progressive voices to our city halls, school boards, legislatures, and the House of Commons, and back those efforts with resources to help progressive candidates win on election day.
- Encourage our members to run for leadership positions in our communities, whether that's on boards of directors, labour councils and federations, or political office, and support them when they're in office.
- Empower and equip our members to get involved in election campaigns as volunteers.

- Work together with our political allies for fair taxation, strong public health care, universal single-payer pharmacare, public long term care, affordable housing, electoral reform, and other priorities for workers.
- Reaffirm and strengthen our affiliation with the NDP, and educate members about the fallacy of so-called “strategic voting”.
- Strengthen the role and voice of labour within the NDP to ensure our priorities, values, and issues are front and centre in Canada’s workers’ party.
- Invest in membership data to increase the political involvement and coordination within our membership.

Defending Against Privatization

Governments across Canada, at all levels, have the public services that CUPE members deliver in their sights, trying to inflict death by a thousand cuts. Whether it’s health care, transportation, energy, education, and more, CUPE members understand and feel the urgency of fighting back against governments who want to sell out the public services that keep our communities thriving. Defending and strengthening the important services our members provide is vital which is why, over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Build awareness about the way privatization is used as a union-busting tool that takes away workers’ rights.
- Expand on our efforts to be vigilant and proactive against the threat of privatization in all our sectors of work, including opposing legislation that privatizes, or allows social impact bonds to finance, public services.
- Be informed by the lived experiences of our Indigenous, Black and racialized members when campaigning to keep services public.
- Remind workers and the public that tax dollars are our dollars and should be spent on services we can all benefit from.
- Fight to bring our work, and our members, back in house.

Affordability

After weathering the impacts of the pandemic, workers were thrust into another storm with soaring inflation and an affordability crisis like we haven’t seen in a generation. Workers are finding it harder and harder to live in the communities where they work, and the necessities of life feel further and further out of reach every month – especially for equity-deserving people. In a cost-of-living crisis, public services level the playing field for middle- and low-income people, and especially for equity-deserving communities.

Our union has an important role to play in fighting for the dignity of all people and combating the inequality and the ongoing affordability crisis affecting workers across Canada. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Advocate for universal services that are affordable, accessible, and high-quality public child care, health care, elder care, pharmacare, dental care, and more.
- Develop a strategy to support workers struggling with the housing crisis, including advocating for affordable and non-market housing, better rent control, tenants' rights, and the ability of workers to live in the community in which they work.
- Develop bargaining language on affordability measures such as workforce housing, public transportation, and child care.
- Fight for funding for housing that prioritizes housing people, instead of profit for corporate landlords and developers.
- Lobby for federal safeguards against profiteering and price gouging by major corporations, especially grocery giants.
- Explore initiatives to improve food security in our communities.
- Advocate for a worker representative to be added to the Board of Governors at the Bank of Canada and for a stronger mandate on unemployment.
- Explore, with our trustees, new regulations or statutory limits on pension fund ownership of residential real estate as part of our broader effort to address the housing crisis.
- Affirm the right of all people to high-quality education, and advocate for more tuition supports while reducing and eventually eliminating tuition fees for post-secondary education.

Protecting our Planet

Climate change is no longer a theoretical event on the horizon – it is happening in both urban and rural communities across Canada right now. As we shatter weather records and endure unprecedented flooding and wildfires, CUPE members and workers are responding on the frontline while their own homes and communities are in harm's way. When climate change poses such an existential threat to our families and our communities, there's no question about it: climate change is union business. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Call on all levels of government to implement climate solutions faster, and work with unions to ensure a fair and just transition for workers in carbon-intensive industries.
- Work with employers to find ways to reduce our carbon footprint and environmental impacts in the workplace, and to ensure the health and safety of workers as we face the impacts of climate change on the job.
- Promote strong public transit systems as a critical climate solution.
- Fight environmental racism and the unequal impacts of climate change, and engage those affected by environmental racism in the conversation about solutions.

- Bolster our coalition work to deepen our partnerships in the fight to protect the planet.
- Foster conversation about energy and climate that focuses on worker-inspired solutions.
- Use CUPE's "Bargaining Language for a Greener Workplace" to negotiate language that will help protect our planet.
- Lobby for legislative changes to ensure workers affected by growing wildfires, floods and other environmental hazards are still insured.
- Set a goal of making our union carbon-neutral with timelines and an action plan, and develop strategies to help locals reduce their carbon footprint.
- Lobby the federal and provincial governments to offer financial support to municipal governments to help achieve their climate goals.

International Solidarity

Our fight for workers' rights and a better life for everyone goes well beyond our regional or national borders. We are committed to building a stronger movement worldwide of workers united against capitalist exploitation, and fostering international solidarity between our union and unions across the globe. Over the next two years, CUPE will:

- Connect with workers around the world, to learn and share our struggles and victories.
- Continue our commitment to support workers around the world fighting against unjust laws and unfair working conditions.
- Hold Canadian governments and corporations accountable for harmful foreign policies and their complicity in violations of labour, human and environmental rights around the globe, particularly in the extractive industry.
- Oppose trade and military aid with countries who violate labour and human rights.
- Hold pension funds accountable to ensure they are not financing privatization and that they reflect our labour values and respect human rights and the health of the planet.
- Encourage and promote participation in CUPE's international solidarity courses.



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