

Counterpoint



**QUICK
THINKING
SAVES
LIVES**

**CONCEPTION
BAY SOUTH –
A SUCCESS
STORY**

**Pay equity
win in
Quebec**

Protecting
Ontario
Hydro

“Everything is better – wages are higher with the town, and benefits are better.”

Corey Mitchell, p. 5

Two decades of fighting for pay equity in Quebec

In 2016, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Quebec’s *Pay Equity Act*, which requires all employers with 10 or more employees to implement a pay equity plan.

The Act was amended in 2009 by Jean Charest’s Liberal government. This reform was contested in court by a coalition of trade unions, with CUPE playing a major role.

The Superior Court of Quebec declared several provisions of the Act of 2009 unconstitutional, including one that ruled out the retroactivity of pay equity maintenance payments.

Although the Quebec government appealed this decision on October 12, 2016, the Court of Appeal upheld the judgment of the Superior Court.

The Quebec government was given 60 days to refer the case to the Supreme Court of Canada. Just a few hours before the deadline, Philippe Couillard’s Liberal government decided to refer the case to the highest court in the land, much to the disappointment of CUPE Quebec.

At the time of writing, the Supreme Court has not yet agreed to hear the case. But, if it does, CUPE Quebec will be at the heart of this

battle for women’s equity.

Meanwhile, the Job Evaluation Branch continues their work on hundreds of files that enable thousands

of women in Quebec to obtain significant wage adjustments, whether in the public sector, including health and education, or

elsewhere. They will also strive to ensure that the *Pay Equity Act* remains and becomes even stronger.

■ **Ronald Boisrond**



New attack on good pensions

New legislation from the Trudeau Liberal government is threatening the pensions of Canadian workers. The legislation, known as Bill C-27, is an attack on good defined benefit pensions and would allow employers to break

their pension promises to thousands of workers and retirees across the country.

If passed, Bill C-27 will allow federally-regulated employers to retroactively change a defined benefit pension promise into less secure “target benefits” by pressuring workers and

retirees into surrendering benefit promises they have already earned.

Converting defined benefit pensions to a target benefit model shifts virtually all risk onto workers and retirees. Bill C-27 would essentially allow employers to walk away from pension commitments to their workers, and leave thousands of Canadians abandoned in retirement.

CUPE is strongly opposed to Bill C-27. While it only applies to federally-

regulated employers, it will set a dangerous precedent for other jurisdictions, and put more pressure on defined benefit pension plans.

During the 2015 federal election campaign, Justin Trudeau clearly promised to protect good, fair defined benefit pensions from being retroactively changed to target benefit plans. Bill C-27 breaks that promise. The Harper government considered these changes, but even the Conservatives did not proceed with this

anti-worker legislation.

Bill C-27 was introduced in Parliament late in 2016, but it has not been debated. There is still time to push back against this regressive legislation. CUPE is working with other unions and pension allies to stop this short-sighted and ill-conceived attack on the retirement security of Canadian workers.

More information on Bill C-27 and the threat it poses to workers can be found at cupe.ca/pensions.

■ **Greg Taylor**

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Quick thinking saves lives

Powerline technicians Mario Ménard and Guy Desgagné are members of CUPE 1500, which represents workers at Hydro-Québec. The two men had a recent experience that they are not likely to forget.

During a snowstorm, earlier this year, while patrolling in their truck west of Montreal, they heard cries for help. They followed the sound of the cries and saw a mother and her two daughters standing on a ledge outside a second story window of a burning

home. They called 911 and sprang into action. They convinced one person at a time to jump down from the window ledge into their arms.

Their heroic act made the headlines in several media outlets. Counterpoint wanted to learn more about these two heroes.

Mario Ménard has been a union leader for some time. But these days, he prefers to let union matters be handled by others whom he characterizes as “more diplomatic” than he is.

What motivates his activism? “Injustice,” he answered immediately, “in society in general, but

especially in the workplace.” Although he is eligible for retirement, he has not yet decided when he will be ready to pass on the torch.

After training as a line-man, Ménard’s young colleague, Guy Desgagné, worked for the SAQ (Quebec Liquor Board) for several years before being hired by Hydro-Québec just over a year ago. He is a young father and his wife is expecting their second child.

Like many CUPE members, both men have a deep love for their work as powerline technicians. The fact that they saved these three lives does not seem to have changed them;

but, once they start talking about that day, their emotions rise to the surface. They insist that they just happened to be in the right place at the right time, “If we’d driven by a few

minutes earlier or later, we wouldn’t have heard their cries for help or seen the flames, which could have had tragic consequences for this family.”

■ Ronald Boisrond



Changes to Bill C-51 may not be what were promised



In June 2015, the Conservative government, supported by the Liberals under Justin Trudeau, passed the draconian *Anti-Terrorism Act* commonly known as Bill C-51. It handed sweeping new powers to Canada’s spy and security agencies. For example, the legislation broadened the definition of “security” in such a way that could criminalize peaceful protests.

Not surprisingly, the backlash against Bill C-51 from coast to coast was massive, a clear sign that Canadians remain concerned about their civil liberties, proudly enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Liberals took note and did a total about-face during the 2015 election promising to repeal the bill’s “problematic elements” and introduce legislation that would strengthen Parliament’s oversight.

Fast forward 15 months and the same unmodified Bill C-51 remains in place. One can only assume that spy and law enforcement agencies are making use of their enhanced powers. The government has introduced legislation that would establish a new security and intelligence committee composed of parliamentarians. On the surface, this would appear to be a good first step in enhancing oversight but the details paint a different picture. The committee would report to the prime minister rather than to Parliament and cabinet ministers can block any investigation into an issue or activity related to their department.

Unbeknownst to most Canadians, this past fall, Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale held online consultations on national security. Privacy and civil liberties experts are concerned that the consultations are heavily tilted towards giving surveillance agencies more – not less – power to spy on Canadians. Big changes will likely be announced in early 2017 but they may not be what Canadians have been waiting for.

■ Charlie Brenchley

NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

A new blueprint for national solidarity in bargaining

A lot has changed since our union was founded in 1963.

But two things remain constant today: public services continue to be important equalizers in our communities and our members who deliver them are under attack.

Governments continue to cut corporate taxes, starving public coffers of the resources needed to deliver important services to Canadians. Workers are being asked to make up the shortfall through lower wages, lesser benefits, and diminishing working conditions.

We continue to face austerity agendas and attacks on workers’ rights both at the bargaining table and in legislatures across the country. We have seen a sharp rise in the number of employers seeking concessions and two-tier provisions in our collective agreements. Governments

of all stripes are restructuring the services our members provide and looking for ways to privatize those same services.

As Canada’s largest union, representing 643,000 workers across sectors in every province, we have a responsibility to fight back on behalf of our members and all workers across the country. I know that we are stronger and achieve so much more when we stand shoulder to shoulder. That’s why I am proud of the renewed collective bargaining policy adopted by our National Executive Board this past December.

It’s our strategy to protect collective agreement rights, resist demands for concessions and two-tier contract provisions, and defend every worker’s right to free collective bargaining. And it’s our blueprint for solidarity across the board, to ensure CUPE locals and members are ready to stand together and fight back against attacks during bargaining.

We’re equipping our locals with the resources they need to fight concessions and two-tier contract proposals. And we’re asking them to negotiate better provisions for precarious workers and protection against workplace violence. We’re developing a coordinated bargaining approach in every region so that we can lead from a position of strength. And we’re committing to political action to defeat any government that attacks our bargaining rights.

Corporate interests and austerity-pushing politicians across the country know that we are unstoppable when we work together. So, together, let’s stand strong against attacks on workers’ rights, and set a course for a fairer and more equal Canada.

MARK HANCOCK ONLINE twitter.com/CUPENatPres





CUPE CELEBRATES

When private goes public – community wins

Five years ago, the Town of Conception Bay South, Newfoundland and Labrador, was facing problems with its privatized solid waste collection. Complaints were on the rise, and costs were headed in the same direction. In 2011, the town council voted to bring the service in house, ending 30 years of contracting-out.

The CUPE local representing the town's workers had worked tirelessly over the years to convince management and council that public worked best, first bringing bulk garbage pickup back in house, and building a solid case to end privatization once and for all. Now, at the end of a successful five-year in-house trial period, the service is staying public. The town-run service has also expanded to include

curbside recycling pickup.

"It's a win-win for everyone," says CUPE 3034 President Terri-Lynn Cooper.

In a recent survey of town residents, garbage collection topped a list of what residents liked about their community, with nearly 82 per cent of people choosing the service first.

Increased service quality is a point of pride for the solid waste workers, members of CUPE 3034.

In-house operation is also helping the solid waste crew improve their safety on the job. And town officials are also seeing the benefits of in-house control when it comes to accountability, flexibility and cost savings. The average yearly savings since bringing services in house are "significant," says the town's Chief Administrative Officer Dan Noseworthy, clocking in at about \$230,000 a year to total \$1.15 million over five years.

With 25,000 residents, Conception Bay South is the province's second-largest and fastest-growing community. The town's in-house crew works the streets four days a week in distinctive white garbage trucks, picking up trash from about 10,000 homes.

Some households use wooden garbage boxes, which can be a health and safety hazard. The boxes aren't always at the roadside, they attract rodents and wasps, and can have protruding screws. As direct employees of the town, the solid waste crew is better equipped to address the ongoing issue of broken-down boxes and other hazards like bags that are overweight or full of sharp items.

"If we see it's unsafe, now we have the power not to touch it," says solid waste crew member Gary Lush, who worked for a contractor before being hired by the town in 2012. "We can take a photo and email it [to town staff] explaining what's wrong, with the address."

Under the contractor, workers didn't have a direct line to town administration. When they didn't pick up garbage because it was unsafe, town staff and homeowners wouldn't know why garbage was left behind. Problems would go unsolved, which led to complaints. Now, with clear lines of communication and



responsibility, town staff can follow up with property owners about problems, working with the in-house crew. “Every time I put in a complaint, the next week I go back and it’s all cleaned up,” says crew member Shawn Dillon. Being able to tackle unsanitary and unsafe garbage boxes is part of the difference in-house delivery makes.

“Accountability comes with ownership and responsibility. When you have someone specifically responsible for that particular service, they own it,” says Noseworthy. “We’re better prepared and more willing to address occupational health and safety issues like garbage boxes,” he says.

As a contractor, Corey Mitchell didn’t get paid sick time and other benefits he now has as a town employee. “Everything is better – wages are higher with the town, and benefits are better.” The town also

supplies safety equipment, like proper boots, that he had to pay for before.

Dillon has been part of the solid waste crew since 2012. He beams when he describes how it feels to be keeping the town clean for his neighbours, family, and community members. “It’s just excellent to be doing this,” he says. The pace of the work lets Dillon and his crewmates work safely and carefully. The in-house routes break the town into four runs, while the contracted-out service had three longer runs – and much more lifting.

For Mitchell, it’s the difference between lifting 13 tons of garbage a day with the contractor, and eight tons with the shorter in-house routes. Crew members also have a regular route, which helps deliver consistent, reliable service. Residents have noticed the difference says Mitchell, who also joined the crew

in 2012. “They’ll come up and greet you and thank you. At Christmas, we get cards. People are great with us.”

The tone for the town’s high service standards is set by the white garbage trucks that it bought when the service came in house. Painted white and emblazoned with the town’s logo of a child playing on a tire swing, the crew washes them at the end of every day. The contractor’s trucks were dirty and showed their age with leaks and frequent breakdowns that meant missed pickups, says Cooper.

Former contractor Leo Power worked as part of the original in-house crew. The town’s trucks are “far superior” to the contractor’s vehicles, including a feature that lets the engine work as a brake. “We’ve got a lot of weight [in our trucks]. When you’re going downhill, you’re not picking up speed, you’re actually losing speed,” says Power.

Buying new trucks

meant fewer breakdowns and mechanical problems. Town mechanics maintain the fleet, another factor that boosts reliability and reduces costs. A four-day pickup schedule leaves Mondays for maintenance, and there’s room in the town’s service bays for other unexpected work, which means trucks get back on the road faster than with a private garage.

The mechanics, also members of CUPE 3034, are taking care of a million-dollar investment, and it shows in the service they provide, says the town’s Superintendent of Public Works Joe Byrne. “The trucks are serviced to death here. The oil is never black in our trucks, it just doesn’t happen. We won’t lose an engine because the oil wasn’t changed, or anything.”

After five years, the town is planning to start replacing its fleet. “The trucks are still going, but the mileage is up and every part is moving every day”, says

Byrne. The town’s fleet renewal plans mean trucks will be retired before problems set in, a move Byrne says will save “a lot of money and a lot of downtime.” The town will keep the truck with the lowest mileage as a backup, ensuring reliable service even when one of the new trucks is off the road for maintenance.

At the end of every collection day, a convoy of four trucks heads for the landfill in nearby St. John’s. Crew members work as a team - waiting until everyone’s finished their route before leaving. If one member’s behind, others who are already done step in to help finish the other route.

“The hardest-working guys in this town work in garbage collection,” says Byrne.

“We’re all out to help everybody and look after each other,” says Lush. “I’m working with a fine bunch of people.”

■ Karin Jordan



CUPE 1858 shines light on mental health issues

Vancouver Island University local CUPE 1858 in

Nanaimo is the first Canadian union local to sponsor a Friendship Bench project. The purpose of the project is to raise mental health awareness, provide opportunities for those struggling to reach out to others, and encourage discussion of mental health challenges.

“This program spoke to our members because it shines a light on mental health issues our students and colleagues face every day,” said CUPE 1858 President Deborah Hopper.

Mental health challenges, particularly anxiety and depression, are on the rise

at post-secondary institutions. Despite the significant impacts on faculty, staff and students, the stigma surrounding this issue often creates barriers for those seeking treatment and support.

Lucas Fiorella was a student at Carleton University, in Ottawa, who was active, seemed happy and had many friends. He reached out to others who were suffering from depression, anxiety or stress. His suicide in 2014 was the first people learned about his struggle with depression. Through the Lucas Fiorella Friendship Bench campaign, created to continue his legacy of reaching out,

friendship benches have been placed in high schools and post-secondary institutions to provide information about counseling services and resources on campus.

“By having a Friendship Bench on campus, we hope to normalize discussion of mental health challenges within our community and help people who really need it,” said Hopper.

CUPE 1858 joined the Friendship Bench project to mark its 40th anniversary and invite other locals who work in post-secondary or high schools to bring these benches to their facilities.

■ Janet Szliske



CUPE 1858 members raised funds for a friendship bench at VIU as a legacy project. Pictured (L-R) are CUPE 1858 executive members Bernie Heise, CUPE 1858 President Deborah Hopper, Shannon McKenzie and Annette Woolf, with Sam Fiorella, a co-founder of the project.

Seasons of Solidarity

A deal has been ratified between CUPE 2974 and the Essex County Library Board. The workers had been on strike since June 25, 2016. “We remained united and resolute in our commitment for fairness and respect,” said Lori Wightman, unit chair of CUPE 2974.

The 58 full-time and part-time employees had been on strike for 230 days.

“Our solidarity and friendships that have been forged in this strike would not have been possible without the support from our community and the CUPE family,” said Wightman.

At time of print no details have been released for the agreement but the main issue in the dispute has been third party coverage for short-term disability.

■ James Chai



“Enough is enough” – Ontario health care staff fighting to curb workplace violence

Across Canada, incidents of workplace violence against health care workers happen daily. From verbal abuse to aggravated assault and sexual violence, rates are spiking in all health care settings from hospitals, emergency response, and home and long-term care. Studies show those most at risk are nurses and personal support workers who have the most direct contact with patients and their families. Indeed, all the Ontario registered practical nurses and personal support workers in attendance at a CUPE health care conference specifically focused on violence, said they have experienced workplace violence.

Hospital emergency departments and psychiatric wards are the most violent, according to research. It is also widely understood workplace violence against health care staff is under-reported largely because of fear of employer reprisals against workers who report.

In Ontario, where provincial spending on hospitals is the lowest among Canadian provinces and there is insufficient front line staff to provide adequate patient care, hospital and long-term care workers have made curbing rising rates of workplace violence a priority.

Following the firing in the winter of 2016 of a registered practical nurse who spoke on a panel at the 2016 health sector violence conference, health care workers are saying “enough is enough”. Hospital, long-term care and home care workers – about 75,000 CUPE members in Ontario – have the right to be safe at work. They’ve developed a plan to get the provincial government to listen to them and strengthen protections. One protection they are seeking is for a specific category under the criminal code to make violence against health care workers an offense.

Through focus groups with health care staff who had experienced violence both directly as a target or as a witness to violence against a co-worker, CUPE’s Ontario Council of Hospital Unions working with independent researchers are telling “first-person” accounts of workplace violence through both a video and soon-to-be published report. Ontario-wide media conferences are planned throughout 2017, which “give voice to the many health care workers who have been assaulted at work and challenge directly the culture of reprisal and attempts to silence workers who speak out against workplace violence,” says Michael Hurley, president of CUPE’s Ontario Council of Hospital Unions.

■ Stella Yeadon

Good quality jobs mean good quality education

For many years now, precarious work has been on the rise on university and college campuses across the

country. A growing number of people employed in the post-secondary sector – those who teach students,

serve them food, clean and maintain university and college campuses, and deliver clerical and other support services – are now in precarious positions.

Academic and support workers are passionately committed to delivering high quality education and services for students, but they need fair and decent working conditions to make that happen. Precarious work hurts post-secondary education twice: it hurts workers and it diminishes the quality of education that students receive.

CUPE is fighting back. *Quality Jobs, Quality Education, Better Futures* is a campaign that will include town hall meetings at campuses across the country. The campaign will raise awareness about the reality of precarious work, share bargaining strategies and stories of resistance and action by workers.

Find out more at cupe.ca/quality-jobs-quality-education

■ Pierre Ducasse



CUPE heads to court to protect Ontarians against hydro privatization

Faced with a government unwilling to listen to the vast majority of Ontarians, CUPE National and CUPE Ontario are taking Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Ministers of Finance and Energy to court over the privatization of Hydro One. The suit of misfeasance for wrongdoing over the sale of shares in Hydro One was filed in court on December 6, 2016.

“Our goal with this lawsuit is to protect the people of Ontario and Hydro One ratepayers, to stop any further sale of shares in Hydro One and keep the majority of shares in public hands,” said Fred Hahn, president of CUPE Ontario and one of the plaintiffs in the case. “The Premier and her ministers had no political mandate to pursue the sell-off; experts made it clear the sale would be bad for Ontario and still they chose to proceed with privatization.”

The lawsuit is part of a larger, ongoing campaign to keep hydro public that has been building mass support in communities all across the province.

Joining CUPE in the lawsuit are Dianne Dowling, who runs a family farm in eastern Ontario and is the Kingston-area president of the National Farmers Union, and John Clarke, an organizer for the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. Both chose to join the suit because they are seeing first-hand the impact hydro privatization is having on their communities.

■ Sarah Jordison

Quality Jobs Quality Education Better Futures

PRECARITY HURTS WORKERS AND STUDENTS. FULL-TIME WORKERS WITH FAIR CONTRACTS MEAN QUALITY EDUCATION AND BETTER FUTURES.



NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY

An improved Strike Fund for all CUPE members

Our National Strike Fund is very healthy with over 90 million dollars in the bank. By managing our money carefully, CUPE National has made improvements to our Strike Fund regulations to help our 643,000 members when they need it most.

At our last national convention, we struck the National Strike Fund Taskforce. Since then, taskforce members have been hard at work. They built a consensus on a shorter waiting period to receive strike pay, more flexible picket line shifts and better consideration for other strike duties as well as changes for locals who do not have the right to strike. At the September 2016 National Executive Board meeting, the taskforce report was unanimously adopted.

For the first time in our history, our members will start receiving strike pay on the fifth day of a strike, instead of

waiting for nine days. In addition, for members who need an accommodation we now have clearer regulations.

Access to strike averting campaign funds will also be easier. We will have more resources to prevent a strike and to build our power before bargaining breaks down.

CUPE National has increased its contribution for interest arbitrations. We now cover 90 per cent instead of 75 per cent of the cost of the union nominee on boards of arbitration. With the improvements made last year, we now cover 100 per cent of a local's share of the cost of an arbitrator for interest arbitrations.

Training for elected officers and staff on the Strike Fund regulations will be increased, and the Strike Fund regulations will be reviewed every four years.

Overall, we have a solid and more generous Strike Fund. This makes our national union stronger, and employers and governments understand this.

At CUPE, we do many things to prevent a strike. But sometimes, going on strike is the only way to hold onto what we have and to make gains.

In 2017, as always, CUPE National will continue to be there with you in your bargaining fights, and we have the financial resources to back you up and win.

CHARLES FLEURY ONLINE twitter.com/CUPENatSec



Fighting privatization one conversation at a time

As part of the privatization fightback in Nova Scotia, CUPE members reached out to elected officials across the province in November 2016. With research and messages on privatization and contracting services back in house, 12 member activists met face-to-face with 65 city councillors and members of the legislative assembly.

The campaign had three goals: to train members to lobby and establish the foundation of a new network of member activists, to leverage the network going into the 2017 provincial election and beyond, and to establish long-term relationships with local leaders so that we can work together.

The members received one day of lobby training facilitated by staff from communications, research and union education. The group practiced their new skills and began preparations for their own lobbying activities. “Without positive

conversation and relationships with our elected officials, we will for the most part be not much more than a bystander on important decisions in our communities. I am excited to start fresh with these folks,” said Greg Williams, member activist.

Initially some members were nervous, but determined to do their best. As member activist Mary Jessome said, “My first solo meeting was with Larry Dauphinee and Paul MacNeil of Inverness County. I can breathe now. I was nervous at first, but now I’m having a blast!” Member lobby coordinator Pauline Chicarella assisted with booking appointments and profiling elected officials.

Throughout the campaign, members and staff shared ideas via a private Facebook page about their successes and lessons learned. At the end of the month, members submitted a diary of their experience with observations. The meetings

revealed many contracts that are under review and opportunities for CUPE members to help bring those services back in house.

#WorkingTogether



Many councillors asked to meet with our members on a regular basis in the future, and appreciated the effort to “work together” to find solutions. The team received invitations to present the *Back In House* report at council sessions in Baddeck, Inverness, Digby, Shelburne, Queens County, Colchester County, Victoria County, and Sydney.

On December 6, we learned that a motion was unanimously passed “that Halifax Regional Council request a staff report that analyzes the cost and benefits of clearing sidewalks to bare concrete, comparing the options of contracting out these services and providing the service in house.”

While making the motion, Councilor Shawn Cleary cited the *Back In House* report. “The Centre for Civic Governance in British Columbia did a report recently looking at 15 municipal units across the country, including Port Hawkesbury and Moncton, that brought various services in house.”

Toward the end of the campaign, CUPE NS President, Nan McFadgen sent this message to the team: “I have to tell you all how very proud I am of the work you have done. This is how change happens, one conversation at a time with our voices at the right table.”

Many of the activists echoed sentiments expressed by their teammate Denise Hutchings Lewis: “I learned a lot by doing this lobby and I am thankful for the chance to not only enlighten the elected members we met with, but myself also. I am happy to have been a part of it!”

■ Colleen Reynolds



British Columbia election campaign update

British Columbians go to the polls on May 9 this year to elect their provincial government. After 16 years of cuts, privatization and attacks on working people by the right-wing BC Liberal government, CUPE National and CUPE BC are pulling out all the stops to make sure CUPE members in the province know what’s at stake.

Support from CUPE National has made it possible to have a Provincial Election Coordinator in place earlier than ever before, and member engagement is already ramping up all over the province, with workshops and volunteer recruitment well underway.

Since the BC Liberals first took power in 2001, they have closed more than 250 schools, stripped health care and education workers of their collective agreements, privatized public services, and rewarded the wealthiest British Columbians with massive tax cuts while increasing fees and service charges for the rest. The BC Liberals won the last election in 2013 with a margin of just over 5,000 votes across the province. In many ridings across the province, the number of CUPE members is greater than the BC Liberals’ margin of victory.

■ Clay Suddaby

Manitoba Labour Movement Faces Threats to Collective Bargaining

In spring 2016, CUPE members were in the midst of a major shift in Manitoba politics. The Conservative Party swept into the legislature with a large majority, after 16 years of New Democratic Party governments.

During the election campaign, Manitobans made it clear that maintaining and improving public services was a priority. Conservative Party Leader Brian Pallister promised that he would protect frontline services and the workers who deliver them.

By September 2016, the new government seemed to be moving away from its commitments. News stories reported that the Conservative government planned to take drastic steps.

Already, Premier Pallister has cancelled labour agreements that require collective agreements for workers on big government projects. After years of labour peace, there have been three strikes in Pallister’s first eight months in office.

In November, Premier Brian Pallister stated that he was exploring wage freezes, re-opening existing collective agreements, and restructuring bargaining units in health care. A January 2017 meeting with CUPE and other labour bodies confirmed this.

CUPE has lobbied, joined picket lines and protests, made links to community groups, and is speaking up for public services.

“A deal is a deal,” said Kelly Moist, president of CUPE Manitoba. “Collective agreements that were negotiated between employers and unions must be respected. We fully expect the government to honour its election promise to maintain and improve public services and jobs, and its commitment to respect collective bargaining.”

CUPE continues to ask the government for proof that any changes involving public sector unions are needed to boost the economy. CUPE is prepared to listen to government and engage in consultations, while defending the integrity of collective bargaining and the public services we all rely on.

■ Elizabeth Carlyle