

# FIGHTING TOGETHER FIGHTING TO WIN

CUPE Ontario 2012

Draft Action Plan

To stop the attacks on Public Services

& Build a Better Ontario

## INTRODUCTION

The people of Ontario are under assault. Poverty is on the rise. Homelessness and inadequate housing are epidemic. Health care is being privatized. Social assistance and social services are being scaled back with drastic consequences. Municipalities are cutting and reducing services. Parents of young children are growing increasingly desperate in their search for quality child care. The education needs of communities are being ignored. Post-secondary education is less and less affordable and more and more dependent on private sources of revenue. Real wages are falling. A growing number of workers face a future with no pensions, no benefits and no savings. Youth unemployment remains unacceptably high. Fundamental human rights are being denied. Inequality is rampant. The gap between the very rich and the rest of us grows wider and wider. It's a wholesale attack on our very way of life.

CUPE members in Ontario experience this assault as community members and as workers. Because we deliver public services, we witness firsthand the devastation caused by government cuts to services and programs. As a large and well-resourced public sector union, we can and must play a leading role in stopping the assault: we must take action with other organizations to build a mass movement to turn things around. The following action plan sets out the way forward to resist the agenda of cuts and job losses – otherwise known as austerity - to defend our hard-won rights and entitlements, and bring about greater equality through stronger public services, an expansion of public ownership, and more equitable distribution of the province's wealth.

CUPE Ontario rejects austerity and we will do everything possible to stand in its way. We can win against austerity. We can push back the assault. Everything that is under attack was won through hard work and struggle. Social programs, public services, public health care, public education, old age security, health and safety protections, public water, community services, unions, collective bargaining, collective agreements—all were achieved in a relatively short period because people came together and fought for a more democratic and just way of organizing society. If we choose to do so, we can once again mobilize to not only defend what we have today, but also win back the ground lost in the last two decades.

## CURRENT SITUATION

The Ontario Liberal government's 2012 budget (like the Conservative federal budget) is an aggressive attack on social programs, public services and public sector collective bargaining. Spending on the public good will be reduced by \$17.7 billion between now and 2015. Taking into account inflation, spending will be reduced by more than 7.6 per cent in areas that are vital to the wellbeing of citizens. These spending cuts will be particularly devastating for those who depend most on health and social services—people with the lowest incomes—and as a result, inequality will grow.

Ontario does not have a spending problem it has a revenue problem. Years of tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest in Ontario, has meant a reduction in the money available to fund services, ensure public ownership and access to services for the vast majority of Ontarians. The result of underfunding and low tax revenue is a province that is more unequal than any time in recent memory. For the province to address this situation, more needs to be done to bring fairness back to the tax system. Now is also the time to address the great disparity between rich and poor and to address social assistance rates, pensions and generate good paying jobs to stimulate the economy.

In rejecting austerity, we stand up for equality. We say no to a budget that takes away from the poorest to give to the richest. We say no to an economy that is based on the exploitation of the majority for the benefit of a few. We say no to the decimation of public services and social programs that generate public wealth and raise the standard of living.

We will do everything we can to block austerity. We will use our collective bargaining power and collective agreements to stop the attack on services. We will mobilize our member, staff and financial resources to support our strategic plan against austerity. We will dedicate ourselves to building an inclusive and diverse movement that stretches well beyond our union and the broader labour movement to be in the best possible position to fight austerity in all its different forms.

## **1. FIGHTING TOGETHER WITH OTHERS TO WIN**

**CUPE Ontario will take action for others, not only for ourselves.**

The forces pushing austerity are powerful and have successfully portrayed us—the unionized sector of the working class—as being concerned only about ourselves. These forces exploit the fact that unionized workers, particularly public sector workers, enjoy collective agreement and legislated protections that many other workers do not have. Our opponents, including many of our employers, use our relative advantage against us: they say we cost too much; that the money that goes to pay our salary and benefits could be used to improve service delivery instead; that when we act to protect or improve our working conditions we do so at the expense of the public.

Our strategy against austerity cannot ignore the power of these false arguments. However, we must make it clear through our words and actions that when we fight against austerity, we are taking action for others, not only for ourselves. That we defend the rights of all, and want better working conditions for all. That the way forward is to improve the conditions of those worse off, not make things worse for those who have union protection.

CUPE and many others in communities across the province are encouraging the government to invest in child care, to adopt buy-local procurement policies, to repair and “green” government infrastructure, invest in northern transportation and

communications and to stop adding long term costs to public projects by relying on public private partnerships.

There are many other examples of CUPE locals in Ontario taking action strategically and linking the fight for public services to collective bargaining demands. We need to be more strategic in the coming year, particularly in light of the budget funding cuts that risk increasing the false competition between public service worker, public service user and public service taxpayer.

### **CUPE Ontario will defend collective bargaining.**

The Ontario Liberal government is moving to weaken and undermine collective bargaining by legislating changes to interest arbitration and threatening public sector wage freezes, and public sector pensions and benefit plans, including sick leave entitlements. We will resist these attacks on our communities and our union rights.

### **CUPE Ontario will work with others to build a powerful resistance movement. We will:**

1. Reaffirm CUPE's stand against bargaining contract concessions as the crucial means to defend public services and jobs, and block the downward slide for other workers. Maintaining and raising the bar helps others make gains;
2. Organize regional demonstrations in key target ridings where governments move forward with cuts to public services;
3. Organize area leadership meetings with District Councils around the province to inform, educate and mobilize members to push back against the government's austerity agenda;
4. Train our local leaders and activists to fight austerity strategically through collective bargaining and campaigns by: holding anti-privatization and political action workshops at CUPE Schools, sector conferences and offer to hold at District Council meetings;
5. Train members to enable them to:
  - a) Participate and organize campaigns with a diversity of tactics
  - b) Lobby MPPs to develop political relations with politicians and
  - c) Actively engage members to be involved in electoral politics and the NDP
6. Conduct an aggressive lobby of Ontario MPPs, with our District Councils, Sector Committees and Equality Committees, on the impacts of the austerity budget through the summer months at constituency offices;
7. Work with the Ontario Federation of Labour, labour allies, coalitions and community partners such as: the Ontario Health Coalition, Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Canadian Federation of Students, the Council of Canadians, the Workers Action Centre, anti-poverty

organizations, the Colour of Poverty and with NGO's like, the Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives, to engage the public against cuts to public services and jobs, against privatization, and to develop an alternative vision for government revenue generation and economic growth;

8. Develop a coordinated and strategic response to every attempt by government and business to move to two-tier compensation and two-tier collective agreements;
9. Work with social justice community allies to force the government to invest in a comprehensive income security and anti-poverty agenda that includes raising social assistance rates, raising disability pensions and WSIB pensions, and to invest in a more comprehensive anti-poverty agenda;
10. Campaign for fair taxation and an increase to corporate taxes, so the corporate sector can pay its fair share; the campaign shall include organizing a lobby day at Queen's Park;
11. Organize locals to register with CUPE Ontario a flying squad consisting of members, and our community allies and to provide their contact information; so that flying squads around the province can be quickly activated to provide solidarity and support when CUPE members and communities are under attack;
12. Organize and coordinate our activities across Ontario to mobilize for positive results for public services and good jobs in the 2013 provincial budget;
13. Step up efforts to ensure all CUPE members have an adequate income and access to a pension plan and work with the CUPE National and the CLC on their Old Age Security and CPP campaign;
14. Support living wage campaigns, such as those organized by the Workers Action Centre, to ensure workers rights are upheld and all workers receive a fair livable wage;
15. Promote the merits and benefits of unionization with allies to strengthen and lift workers out of poverty, through public media campaigns in communities and alternative mediums across the province;
16. Fight to strengthen free collective bargaining in Ontario and enlist community allies in a campaign against attacks to fairness in the arbitration process;
17. Mount an aggressive campaign against any attempts to legislate away our bargaining rights;
18. Work with the OFL and other labour allies to lobby the government to expand card check certification to cover those workers who are currently exempt and work with the NDP to introduce other progressive labour law reforms;
19. Oppose the expansion of trade deals such as CETA that have a negative impact on workers and communities, and work to lobby municipal and provincial governments and institutions to pass motions against the implementation of CETA.

## **2. BUILDING THE BASE**

To win against austerity, CUPE members must be engaged in the fight in our workplaces, and communities, and across sectors from one end of the province to the other. The Union must take an active role to build a stronger labour movement throughout Ontario and amongst CUPE locals. To fight the austerity agenda we must train, resource and support members with tools and workshops to engage in activism and electoral politics. In order to build a movement we must first build the base of our union, because it is only from this position, having a stronger, mobilized and informed base of members that we will be truly successful.

### **CUPE Ontario will profile members.**

There are many components to building the base of the union. CUPE Ontario must profile our members and the work that they do in our communities. This member-focused approach will help to personalize the union and highlight the work of our members and the role that they play in the community. This initiative relies heavily on reaching out to members to tell their stories, in print profiles and videos; the aim is to generate a positive image of unionized workers. Profiles will reflect the diversity of the membership, from an equality lens, and CUPE Ontario will ensure there is sectoral, regional and language representation.

### **CUPE Ontario will undertake affiliation drives.**

To activate and build the membership base, CUPE Ontario will increase affiliation efforts at all levels and provide support to District Councils. Affiliation drives will include working with locals to maintain current membership contact information for every member. Up to date contact information will allow the Union to maintain direct contact with members and ensure more members are active and informed of CUPE Ontario campaigns.

### **CUPE Ontario will build its base by organizing.**

One of the ways to bridge the gap between union and non-union workers and counter the accusation that we are concerned only for ourselves is to organize workers into unions. Increasing union density (the percentage of the unionized work force) also helps strengthen our numbers and therefore our collective power. By organizing wall to wall those non-union workers who work in our sectors, we make it more difficult for our employers to play off one group against the other.

Our organizing priority must be to reach out and organize in CUPE's key sectors. Many of these workers are part-time or casual. Many work for private contractors who have moved into our sectors through privatization, or through the introduction of competitive

models of service delivery where government-imposed rules require public sector work to go to the lowest bidder.

CUPE has made some significant headway in organizing in recent years but the overall rate of unionization in Ontario is dropping. Austerity will accelerate privatization and contracting out, and lead to further de-unionization. Therefore, our organizing efforts must be intensified.

**CUPE Ontario will build the base of the union as a way to strengthen the fight against austerity. We will:**

1. Build the profile of our members and their work in communities through the creation of member profiles in sector videos, and materials such as banners, social media, newsletters and leaflets;
2. Give visibility and voice to members by profiling their stories and their work in the community to increase the awareness and importance of unions in the community and to expose the impact of austerity measures;
3. Develop community and media strategies to raise awareness in the lead up to Labour Day and during the Fall, to showcase the value of public services while also highlighting the important role of public sector workers;
4. Affiliate more locals to CUPE Ontario and to District Councils to help build our base in Ontario and ultimately our political strength;
5. Support locals to negotiate to get email addresses, home addresses and phone numbers of members and to share that contact information with CUPE Ontario as a way to better inform, educate and mobilize our members during strikes, lockouts and major political campaigns;
6. Put in place effective communication systems so that information and action alerts can reach members quickly by phone and/or email and work to ensure that the membership data base is up to date;
7. Coordinate support for locals through sector committees to bargain language that includes paid time off for union activists;
8. Support members, locals and sector committees to participate in public hearings and make depositions at all levels of government to defend public services;
9. Support the Health and Safety and Injured Workers educational and mentorship campaign as a way to strengthen health and safety committees in every local across Ontario to help make workplaces safer and recruit health and safety representatives to be mentors;
10. Actively promote the CUPE Ontario website and social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook to allow for better communication with our members and improve direct member to member contact;

11. Work to implement the national strategic directions document on organizing wall to wall through sectors and committees;
12. Re-energize the push to implement a strategy to organize home care workers and personal support workers;
13. Work with CUPE's organizing staff in the different regions to develop strategic plans for each sector in consultation with CUPE Ontario's sector committees. The plans will identify organizing targets, set out specific strategies for each target group, and assign resources to get the job done by the Fall of 2012;
14. Work with CUPE Organizing to make CUPE the union of choice in the event of mergers and amalgamations;
15. Pursue collaborative organizing strategies with other unions and/or other organizations wherever it makes sense to do so, particularly in hard-to-organize sectors such as home care, where it will take significant resources and a sector-wide strategy to organize successfully;
16. Involve activists directly in organizing drives since the most successful drives engage workers with first-hand knowledge and experience.

### **3. EQUALITY – FRONT AND CENTRE IN OUR UNION**

Ontario's austerity budget will severely affect the economic and social conditions of equality-seeking groups who already experience the highest rates of poverty, have the most difficulty getting decent housing, and are at greatest risk of homelessness and joblessness. Our public services like schools and health care means more equal access to programs and services no matter your income level. The public sector is also a source of good jobs, pensions and benefits for members of equality seeking groups, in part because public sector employers have been forced to put in place employment equity programs. Austerity threatens all of these measures, and is the reason we must put human rights and equality at the centre of our work.

Equality will be front and centre to the work of the Union. The best way to ensure that we work to defend others, not just the union, is to work side-by-side with other organizations and communities. CUPE Ontario has a long and proud history of reaching out to other groups, and working in coalitions. The Union must strengthen our relations to work with and advocate for the most marginalized communities.

**CUPE Ontario will work to defend and maintain equality gains already made and we will advocate and fight for human rights locally and internationally while seeking gains for all equality seekers. We will:**

1. Step up efforts to educate locals to put concrete employment equity language into their bargaining proposals as the next phase of the Employment Equity campaign;



2. Step up efforts to educate all activists in human rights issues to build solidarity across the union against all forms of inequality because this fight is a shared responsibility for all workers;
3. Mobilize to double the attendance at Human Rights and Women's Conferences in order to build activism and knowledge amongst the membership on equality issues;
4. Work with the Aboriginal Council to educate and mobilize our members to stand in solidarity with Aboriginal peoples on issues such as safe, clean drinking water;
5. Work through the Young Workers Committee to increase mentorship opportunities for young members to help grow their participation in CUPE, with Coalitions and in the broader labour movement;
6. Campaign through the Workers with Disabilities Committee to assist locals with education and enforcement of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and lobby for improvements to the Ontario Disability Support Program;
7. Advocate for better hiring practices for persons with disabilities (internally and externally) with the Workers With Disabilities Committee so individuals with disabilities are not forced to live in poverty;
8. Campaign against ongoing gender inequality, under the leadership of the Women's Committee, with our labour allies and women's groups, to fight for pay equity, public universal child care, access to women's health resources and other women's issues;
9. Work to broaden our participation in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) pride events across the province and to strengthen LGBTQ organizing against bullying and for Trans human rights in part through the promotion of the pride in our work website ~ [www.prideinourwork.ca](http://www.prideinourwork.ca);
10. Work with the Racial Justice Committee to strengthen the partnership with the Colour of Poverty and organize an awareness campaign about the link between racialized people, poverty and the casualization of work and the negative police profiling of racialized people;
11. Educate members on workers struggles and human rights issues to build solidarity across the Union against all forms of inequality locally and internationally because this fight is a shared responsibility.

## **4. SECTORAL STRATEGIES**

CUPE Ontario in concert with its jurisdictional committees and the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions will fight against austerity and defend services in each sector by taking coordinated action to resist contract concessions, fight back against privatization, protect union rights, organize and defend equality rights and the next generation. CUPE Ontario will work to secure resources for each sector to fight back in a way that makes sense for that sector, taking into account its specific

circumstances. CUPE Ontario, through its Executive Board and other means, will ensure effective communication between sectors and coordinate province -wide actions when necessary.

CUPE Ontario will assist sectors to take province-wide action and secure the support of other unions, the Ontario Federation of Labour and other provincial organizations for sector campaigns and initiatives. Coordinated action will be strategic and determined by each sector's situation and will involve the following plans:

## **HEALTH CARE**

### **ACTIONS:**

1. Develop a comprehensive home care campaign highlighting the importance of homecare as a cornerstone of the public health care system, the need for better working conditions, wages and benefits for homecare workers and Personal Support Workers and to bring an end to the system of compulsory contracting out;
2. Continue campaigning for a minimum standard of care (3.5 hours), an increase in long term care beds and an end to the expansion of private-for-profit homes;
3. Work to inform and mobilize the membership to organize a series of escalating militant workplace and community events and actions with a view to mounting a vigorous and passionate defense of our public health care system;
4. Hold regular virtual interactive town hall calls for local union leadership and assigned national staff to ensure the leadership base is informed, involved and active;
5. Work in cooperation with the Ontario Health Coalition and other health care allies to organize and mobilize communities across Ontario against the Liberals health system changes that include privatization initiatives, service cutbacks, staff layoffs and the closure of community and rural hospitals;
6. Intensify efforts at Queen's Park to complement the impact on the minority government of membership mobilization while also targeting the most electorally vulnerable Liberal MPPs in their ridings through a series of regional demonstrations;
7. Work to ensure the full protection of Personal Support Workers in the Personal Support Workers Registry and continue to keep the membership informed and active on this issue.

## **MUNICIPALITIES**

### **ACTIONS:**

Support OMECC's "Mobilize to 2014" campaign which includes working with locals to do the following:

1. Hold province-wide area meetings and anti-privatization workshops as a way to inform, educate and mobilize the membership to take action against any and all moves to privatize and contract out jobs and services;
2. Work to hold elected Councilors/officials to account through the development of joint union/community coalitions and Council Watches;
3. Organize trainings and workshops, in conjunction with Union Development, to strengthen members skills to lobby, fight privatization, and build coalitions;
4. Assist with a mapping of municipalities to determine the current political climate, Council decision making bodies and to identify opportunities and officials to lobby;
5. Build and strengthen the relationship with CUPE District Councils where they exist, and in areas where there is no Council bring CUPE locals together to collaborate on campaigns and community events;
6. Identify suitable candidates to run and support in the 2014 Municipal elections;
7. Identify areas throughout Ontario that require active on-the-ground anti-privatization/P3 campaigns and provide support.

## **SCHOOL BOARDS**

### **ACTIONS:**

1. Work with locals, trustees, parent groups and others to lobby the government to fix the faulty funding formula for school boards;
2. Build an effective mobilizing plan to be ready for the 2014 School Board Elections that includes identifying suitable candidates - this should include assessing the performance of labour-endorsed trustees in the 2010 elections;
3. Mobilize and organize to stop contracting out and privatization of education services and fight against the elimination of jobs;
4. Mount a vigorous campaign against the contracting out of early childhood education programs. Work with CUPE's community child care workers to advocate for an early learning and child care system that is integrated into the school system and provides quality public child care for all age-groups;

5. Mobilize in the community with allies to stop school closures and defend community schools;
6. Support and advance the OSBCC's central and coordinated bargaining strategy;
7. Support sectoral efforts to mobilize around bargaining in 2012 when all collective agreements open (August 31);
8. Vigorously oppose any attempts to legislate changes to collective agreements in the upcoming rounds of bargaining.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

### **ACTIONS:**

1. Work to create a climate of public opinion and political will that challenges Ontario to commit to an investment of long-term sustainable funding in a public social services system by building alliances with community partners; using mass and social media to get our message out and lobbying MPPs and officials as well as municipal councils and other local boards of directors in the social service sector (continued roll-out of integrated campaign);
2. Mobilize members and community allies to build a movement of organizations and individuals to implement a vision for social services;
3. Implement the next phases of an integrated campaign that targets all politicians in an effort to influence political parties and that includes on-the-ground tactics such as media conferences, use of social media tools and materials development;
4. Campaign to restore core, stable funding and reject any cuts to services resulting from the expansion of individualized funding models or other forms of privatization;
5. Work with labour partners such as the Ontario Federation of Labour and coalition partners such as the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care to advocate for a universal, public, not-for-profit child care system and an end to for-profit childcare expansion;
6. Promote the important role of social service workers in building a Better Ontario, fighting poverty and promoting social justice and inclusiveness in communities;
7. Advance bargaining demands to address the impact of austerity on social services, including heavier workloads and increased threats to the personal safety of social service workers.

# UNIVERSITIES

## ACTIONS:

1. Work to develop a provincial discussion table with the government, universities and our affiliates on campuses to: identify inefficiencies in university operating budgets, ensure financial accountability and to achieve sustainability;
2. Work to develop a provincial discussion table including universities, our campus affiliates who are pension plan contributors and plan administrators to develop a cooperative approach to finding solutions to sustain pensions;
3. Work with coalition partners including OCUFA, CFS, OFL, NDP and the government to review the current post-secondary education funding structures, all user fees, such as tuition fees, to develop a common front that addresses the chronic underfunding of universities and to increase public funding for post secondary education;
4. Develop a comprehensive campaign to fight the privatization on university campuses;
5. Work to promote legislated changes to funding and representation structures on university Boards of Governors;
6. Work to compile a CUPE post-secondary education member contact list to ensure we can communicate our message and actions with post-secondary education members through member-to-member telephone contact, e-newsletters, town hall conference calls and social media;
7. Establish a direct action strategy for campuses and communities with universities including a schedule of public information events;
8. Draft solidarity pacts that include a commitment to establish flying squads, direct action workshops and communications networks on each campus.

