

Counterpoint



SPECIAL EDITION **COVID-19**

Keys to improve mental health resiliency

**LOCKED OUT DURING THE LOCKDOWN:
A NEW BRUNSWICK STORY**

WORKERS AROUND THE WORLD IMPACTED BY COVID-19

Going the extra mile to help students and families

Planning for recovery – a discussion with CUPE's economist, Angella MacEwen

BUKOLA ABIONA
Licenced practical nurse, CUPE 8

HE SAID

“There’s so much appreciation for our members’ hard work. It shows how important support staff are,”
JR Simpson, education support worker and CUPE 2268 member, p. 6



CUPE presses governments to fix long-term care

The crisis in long-term care is not something new. However, the COVID-19 outbreak has brought to light severe ongoing problems in that sector. Decades of underfunding, understaffing, poor working conditions, and a focus on profits over quality care have eroded Canada’s system of long-term care to the breaking point, leaving us tragically unprepared to protect the lives of our most vulnerable.

CUPE National launched a campaign in May to fix the broken long-term care system. CUPE is demanding the federal government lead the way by making long-term care an accessible, publicly funded, and universal health care service

The campaign draws attention to the deep issues that exist within long term care across Canada and calls for governments to fix the broken system now.

To add your voice, go to FixLongTermCare.ca.

COVID-19 can’t stop trade unionists

To address the constant demand for education, CUPE’s Union Education is working hard to provide workshops to members, this time with online tools.

CUPE Union Education Representative in Ontario took on the challenge by adapting the popular workshop Introduction to Stewarding. A first successful online training was done in May with CUPE 5441, a new local at the Toronto Hospital.

Presently, Union Education is prioritizing online training for stewards to new or merged CUPE locals. The branch is also providing locals the opportunity for online strategic planning sessions. CUPE members can also register for health and safety webinars on cupe.ca.

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Chosen to care

If you or a loved one are living in a senior's home or long-term care facility, Bukola Abiona is the person you want working there.

Abiona, who came to Canada from Nigeria in 2008, is a licenced practical nurse (LPN) at Intercare South in Calgary. She takes her job

seriously – and it's not just about medicine.

Abiona wants to treat residents with love.

"It's give and take. Whatever you sow, you shall reap. I sing with them, I dance with them, I buy things for them. I just

feel this is how

I would love my parents to be treated," says Bukola Abiona.

Originally educated as a chemical engineer,

she switched to nursing when she was unable to meet Canadian requirements to continue in her first profession. She started studying to be an LPN while working as a health care aide, and raising three children on her own.

Abiona originally planned to continue her studies and become a registered nurse, but life got in the way. Among other things, she became active in CUPE. After a successful organizing drive at her new workplace, CUPE Local 8 needed a vice-president. At a meeting she was unable to attend, the members nominated her to serve. After a phone call from the Local President Colette Singh, Abiona's union activism was underway.

"I told Colette, I'm so sorry, I don't know anything about unions, but I don't want to disappoint the members, because I think they trust me, that is why they nominated me. Colette told me I should not be scared, that I'll be trained."

Nowhere in Alberta has COVID-19 hit worse than in Calgary, particularly in the long-term care and meat packing sectors. At Abiona's



worksite, the two worlds collided when co-workers married to meat packing employees tested positive for the virus.

Long-term care was already deeply understaffed in Alberta due to underfunding and poor wages. The loss of these employees, plus health concerns from the remaining workers, has added to her workload.

"For the past few days, we have been working 12-hour shifts. We're only supposed to work seven hours."

"It's very challenging, but I give kudos to all members who have been

coming to work and who have been working together trying to keep the residents safe and also keep ourselves safe."

Is she worried about getting sick?

"I don't want to get sick. I do a lot of hand washing and once I get home, I changed clothes in my garage. I have a laundry basket there, where I dropped all my clothes before going into the house. I go in straight, I take my shower, I don't talk to anybody or hug anybody, until I finish taking care of myself."

■ Lou Arab



NATIONAL PRESIDENT MARK HANCOCK

We will fight for a progressive and just post-pandemic recovery

The last few months living through the COVID-19 emergency have made it crystal clear to Canadians just how important strong public services are to our everyday life. As we start the process of rebuilding, we are going to make sure nobody forgets that.

In every crisis, there is an opportunity. In the months ahead, we have a chance to change the way our jobs, our economy, and our society work for the better. This is our opportunity to create a better country and a better world for everyone.

In particular, the pandemic has exposed how vital our systems of care are, and how badly they have been starved by generations of austerity-obsessed governments. We have to rethink how we care for each other.

That means bringing long-term care, which has been ground zero for this pandemic, under the *Canada Health Act*, with consistent funding and national standards to

make sure our seniors and the people who care for them are living with dignity. It means removing profit from the sector and bringing private facilities into public ownership.

It also means rethinking and drastically increasing the way we fund health care, and finally implementing a national child care program to support families.

The pandemic has also exposed how often supports for workers – from health and safety protections to employment insurance – fall short. As we rebuild, we will fight for stronger protections and better enforcement of our labour and employment laws, and stronger income supports for Canadians who cannot work.

Of course, many of our opponents see opportunity in this crisis as well, and they are already looking for ways to further weaken and privatize public services. Investing in public infrastructure and services will be key to our economic recovery. We must ensure every penny we invest in our recovery goes to rebuilding communities and fighting inequality and climate change – not to padding corporate coffers. That's why we will fight against public-private partnerships and for-profit infrastructure arrangements through the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Our governments will be making significant decisions in the months ahead. As Canada's largest union, we have a major role in making sure they make the right ones. One thing is clear: we can't just return to the way things used to be. We deserve better. My recovery puts people, public services, and our communities first. How about you?

MARK HANCOCK ONLINE twitter.com/MarkHancockCUPE





IMPROVING MENTAL RESILIENCY DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended everything in our lives. The uncertainty about the coronavirus and its social, economic and cultural impacts are, without a doubt, making people feel on edge.

Change, even when it is expected, can cause significant stress, as our bodies react to new and unaccustomed pressures. But during this pandemic, many changes have been forced upon all of us very quickly.

Those pressures might include layoffs (actual or potential), working from home, limited social and physical interactions, having children home all day and the closure of many stores and businesses – not to mention being sick ourselves or taking care of sick family members.

Stress is a reaction, both physical and psychological, to events or hazards that challenge or threaten us. Our responses to stress include distinct and overlapping biological, environmental and psychological aspects. It's true that stress responses can help us: they are powerful protective mechanisms that help us deal with sudden changes, dangers or immediate demands (also known as "stressors"). But of course, problems arise when stressors don't subside.

In normal circumstances, stress usually has three phases: it comes, we deal with it, it leaves. The first response occurs quickly as an immediate, instinctive response to the stressor(s). When the situation concludes, stress usually also ends. However, when the situation causing the stress does not go away, a person can get stuck in the second phase (dealing with the stress), and the body continually reacts. This is the situation many of us find ourselves in now.

Building your resiliency

The amount of stress you can absorb is called your resiliency. It is like a battery: you need to recharge to be healthy. Anything in your life that adds stress likewise drains the battery and make you less able to cope with the next (or ongoing) stress.

CUPE never advocates for people to build their mental resiliency so they

can take more punishment at work. But building personal mental resiliency is important for coping with the "stress of life", whether at the best of times – or during a pandemic.

Know yourself and your resiliency

During these times, we need to take stock of our own mental health and work to increase our resiliency, as best as we can. Start to take notice of the factors that affect you. Understanding your strengths and weaknesses can help guide you to take steps which increase your resiliency (or that at least don't drain your "battery").

It is important to understand the areas in which you're strong, and those in which you could improve. This will allow you to learn new skills to help manage the challenges of

everyday life, and that can help strengthen your overall mental health by reducing stress.

Improving your resiliency

If we think of resiliency as a battery, we can also imagine ways to improve the "battery life" by increasing the battery's charge or reducing the power use. That is, we can make ourselves stronger, or reduce the impact of life events.

Building and maintaining energy reserves start with awareness of what builds up and what draws your energy. The fuel that recharges resiliency levels comes from good physical health practices (exercise, diet, rest), good mental health practices (like coping skills), family and social supports, and a work-life balance that allows you to do things you enjoy.

It might seem difficult to practice good health in current circumstances, or as we return to work. But you can start now, even within your own home.



HERE ARE NINE PRACTICES YOU CAN USE TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL RESILIENCE:

Self-monitor

Check in with yourself. Some people find it useful to create a journal or log of what's stressing them. Name the emotions you feel and identify the situations that make you feel that way. Rather than reacting indecisively or instinctively, review what causes negative emotions and determine the best path forward for overcoming the stressor.

Acceptance

Many things have changed for each of us in a very short amount of time. We had virtually no control about how those changes happened, so dwelling on resenting these changes will not help much. What can help is altering our practices to make the best of things. You weren't responsible for the current situation, but you can take charge of how you react to it.

Build a schedule

COVID-19 has thrown many of us off our regular schedules, and many will find it hard to adjust. Determine what you are required to do each day or week and make a plan for how you will accomplish these tasks. Break larger tasks into plans for sub-tasks. If you have too many things to do, list the things which must be done and separate them from what you would like to get done. Time for your own mental health should be included in the "must get done" group.

Physical distance, don't social distance

The best practice to avoid COVID-19 is to maintain two meters distance from anyone who isn't in your immediate household. That doesn't mean we can't reach out to others. If you are working at home, reach out to co-workers through

video chat or phone to talk about what you are working on. Schedule group coffee breaks like you would at work. Call relatives or friends you have not heard from, especially if they are older and can't leave the house.

Be optimistic

It may sound simplistic, but people who maintain an optimistic view of the world maintain higher levels of resilience. Being optimistic can reduce depression and anxiety and can help overcome intrusive thoughts and images that lead to further spiraling and reduced resilience.

Remove toxic stressors from your life

Do not allow negative influences to constantly affect your thoughts. It might help to limit the amount of news (online or other social media especially) you consume

about COVID-19. It's important to know what is going on, but constant minute-by-minute updates might be overwhelming.

Improve your physical health

Mental and physical health are linked. Diet, exercise and sleep may not restore your resiliency on their own, but they'll help. Even though your life is more restricted, you can stretch and move.

Perform a positive social good

Many community organizations need help. Find out if your CUPE local is organizing outreach initiatives or getting involved in local efforts to help out. Giving one's time or money can be an excellent way to become part of a larger collective action. It's good for others, and it's good for you: research shows that contributing is good for your mental health.

Give change time

Just like with a new workout routine, we must allow time for change to take place. You may not be able to feel improvements to your resiliency immediately. Start by identifying one or two of the above practices that would be relatively easy or that provide you with the greatest benefit; try and do it every day. Once you feel a change, add another.

Remember to track how you are feeling so you can reflect on the journey as you go. By tracking your resiliency levels, you can determine what adds to your "battery power" – and what drains it.

■ **Troy Winters**

If you are in a crisis

If you find yourself near or "in crisis", reach out for help. The stress from COVID-19 and the related upheaval may be too much for some, especially those with pre-existing mental health concerns or conditions. Now is the time to get better, not to work on resiliency. Don't forget, you're not alone. Visit cmha.ca/find-your-cmha to find resources in your province. If your workplace has an Employee Assistance Program, tap into it.

Making a difference from a distance

A story from JR Simpson, education support worker in Saskatoon

Support workers in the Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division have always been there for students and their families. When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down our schools, we became an essential lifeline.

Safety is the most important thing for everyone. The school division set out guidelines so we can stay

connected while keeping our members, students and their families safe with physical distancing, extra cleaning in the schools and proper use of masks, gloves and hand sanitizer.

Support workers from CUPE 2268 are stepping up in many ways and working side by side with teachers to keep students learning, starting by making sure students have the technology they need to connect. Our office coordinators are in daily contact with students

and parents to make sure students who need a laptop or iPad get one, and are sharing the information students need to continue their education.

CUPE education assistants (EAs) are coming into schools to put together packages of materials for students, and are connecting with students through FaceTime and other online communication tools to help with assignments. They're also giving daily support to students who are new

to Canada and learning English, as well as to students with special needs like autism. And custodians, members of CUPE 3730, are keeping school buildings clean with a stepped-up routine.

Our students are used to seeing us every day. When we go online, they're really excited to see us. EAs have also started safely visiting students at home, including driving by to visit students with special needs, always practicing physical distancing. Connecting in person for simple things like a walk is making a big difference.

CUPE 2268 members are also supporting students who were getting breakfast and lunch at school before the shutdown. Cafeteria and other support workers are packing and distributing food hampers, following protocols to keep every step safe. EAs are dropping hampers on doorsteps, then calling the family so they know it's there. This daily nutrition support is really helping students and their families.

There's so much appreciation for our members' hard work. It shows how important support staff are, and everything we do. We do so many things that people might not see or think about. Kids need that extra help.



JR Simpson is an education support worker and member of CUPE 2268 who works with students with special needs. He's also a custodian and member of CUPE 3730. He is a shop steward for CUPE 2268 and a trustee for CUPE 3730.



CUPE 2268 member Donna Tress carrying food packages to be distributed to students and their families.

Reaching out with thanks during a pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, Canadians found a number of ways, from nightly applause at seven o'clock to free hotel rooms and discount takeout meals, to thank frontline health care and other essential workers for going the extra mile to help others during the crisis.

In B.C., CUPE teamed up with LUSH Fresh Handmade Cosmetics to thank members with a donation

of scented bath bombs. Over two weeks in April, CUPE staff joined forces with sector activists to distribute more than 1,000 individually wrapped packages to community health locals in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island.

This included in-person visits to 13 worksites in Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, New Westminster, and North Vancouver. With a CUPE tent set up outside—and physical distance guidelines observed—members took turns showing up to receive their LUSH products and a thank-you letter, along with an assortment of union



Mia Nickel from CUPE 15 handing out LUSH products and CUPE giveaways to a member.

products.

"The members appreciated being thanked this way during the pandemic," said Mia Nickel.

"As well as enjoying the soap and some CUPE give-

aways, it was a chance to connect with their union while getting a breath of fresh air. Members shared updates about their workplaces, provided their personal emails to help us

keep in touch, and asked us questions we did our best to answer. I think they left these visits knowing that their union is looking out for them."

■ Daniel Gawthrop

New Brunswick landfill workers locked out for sick leave



CUPE 4193 members in lockout.

As most of the country's labour negotiations have slowed down due to the COVID-19 crisis, one New Brunswick employer is keeping its staff in locked out: the Chaleur Regional Service Commission (CRSC).

“The 23 members of our local working at the Red Pine Landfill in Allardville have been locked out since February 13, 2020, by the CRSC. All over a dispute about doctor's notes for sick days,” said Serge Plourde, President of CUPE 4193, representing landfill workers.

“It's not even about money, but control over workers,” he added.

The previous collective agreement states that a worker must produce a doctor's note if sick leave extends beyond three days. Now, management is asking that the contract be changed to require a worker to produce a doctor's note the very first day. When the bargaining team refused this concession, management walked away from the table and issued a lockout notice.

Lack of access to health care services

COVID-19 exposed the dangers of employers' policies denying sick leave to workers. Sick employees working has resulted in outbreaks in some workplaces, endangering people's health in many communities.

Access to physicians, like in many other jurisdictions in Canada, is limited in New Brunswick. Before COVID-19, Allardville and

other rural areas suffered from a chronic shortage of doctors.

The New Brunswick Medical Society recognizes that physicians in New Brunswick are taking care of more patients than anywhere else in Canada. Half of the province's family physicians have patient loads greater than 1,800, compared to the Canadian median of 1,400.

“The employer wants to force us to make the impossible choice between losing our job or providing for our family and going to work sick. I thought COVID-19 would show everyone the importance of health and safety at work. This goes against any common sense,” said Plourde.

Local solidarity and municipal elections

CUPE 4193 members have not been alone in these trying times. “We have received help from CUPE National and CUPE New Brunswick, other CUPE locals, local residents and more. Community support is key to maintain spirits, but it will also make a difference when municipal elections happen,” said Plourde.

As the CRSC is run by a board composed of local Chaleur mayors, CUPE members are impatient for the coming municipal elections. “Workers must mobilize in the election, so there is a political cost to treating people the way they have,” concluded Plourde.

CUPE 4193 is the only CUPE local currently on strike or locked out in all of Canada.

■ **Simon Ouellette**

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER CHARLES FLEURY

CUPE will continue to be there for you in this time of crisis

Dear members, this pandemic shows the important work you do on the front line across the country, caring for the sick and vulnerable, operating our transportation systems and making sure our public services continue to support our communities. You provide much needed services and I thank you for your commitment. I want you to know CUPE will continue to be there for you.

As your National Secretary-Treasurer, my main role in this crisis is to make sure CUPE National has the resources to continue to offer the critical services you count on.

Fortunately, CUPE's finances were strong going into this crisis. That means we have the campaign resources necessary to back the important fights you take on. And we are keeping staff on payroll to support you, offering critical services remotely.

We know there will be long-lasting economic effects of this crisis. CUPE National will be ready, but we will need to be very careful with our spending in the months ahead. We are therefore adjusting our national budget to find savings, mainly in our operational costs. Social distancing imperatives and postponements of all CUPE physical events, training and education programs also reduce our travel and meeting costs in the short to medium term.

But I want to be clear, not a penny in savings made will affect the level of services to members. Stay strong and stay safe my friends. We will come out of this stronger and more united than ever.

CHARLES FLEURY ONLINE twitter.com/CUPENatSec



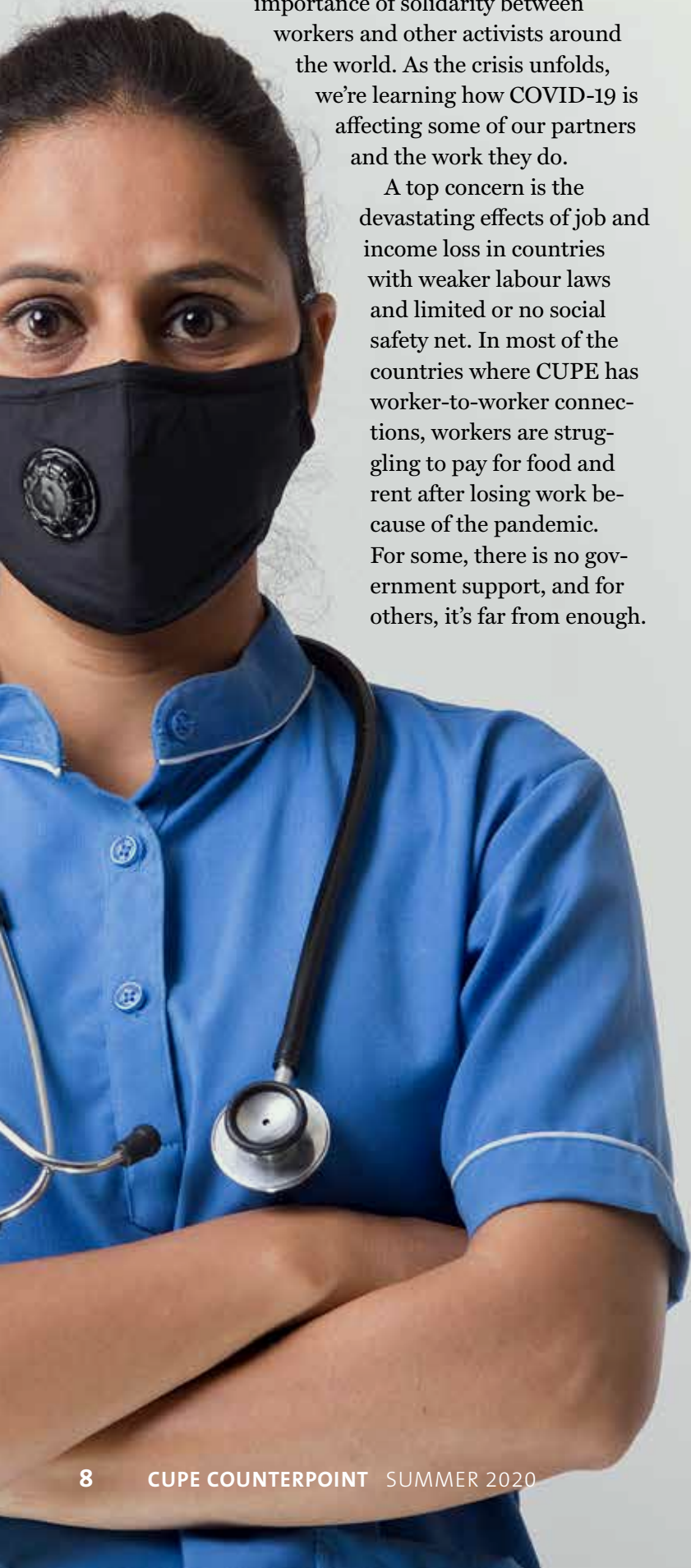
COVID-19 impacting workers around the globe



The COVID-19 pandemic is showing us the global importance of public services, including public health care and a strong social safety net. As this crisis sweeps the world, most countries, including Canada, are feeling the results of decades of policies that have attacked or dismantled these supports and the resulting inequalities.

The pandemic is also highlighting the importance of solidarity between workers and other activists around the world. As the crisis unfolds, we're learning how COVID-19 is affecting some of our partners and the work they do.

A top concern is the devastating effects of job and income loss in countries with weaker labour laws and limited or no social safety net. In most of the countries where CUPE has worker-to-worker connections, workers are struggling to pay for food and rent after losing work because of the pandemic. For some, there is no government support, and for others, it's far from enough.



The government has imposed community quarantines, which have included strict lockdowns in some regions, with military checkpoints and curfews. Mass arrests for violating curfew have added to already overcrowded jails, making them a virus hot spot. The Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE) and the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) are fighting for proper protective equipment, continuing their work to protect workers' rights, and organizing relief drives, despite ongoing harassment and arrests.



Garment manufacturing is a key industry in the country. Clothing companies have canceled orders, leaving factory owners unable to pay workers' wages, even for completed work. This affects millions of workers, most of them women. Most factories still in operation aren't doing enough to protect workers from the virus.



Many Palestinians have lost their revenue as travel restrictions between Palestine and Israel has prevented them from going to work. The Workers' Advice Centre, an independent trade union, is working to support these workers and asking the Israeli government for proper compensation. The Palestine-based Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre is raising awareness about workplace protections, providing legal advice to workers and unions, and humanitarian relief.



Human rights defenders and social movement leaders continue to face threats, attacks and murder during a country-wide lockdown. Varying their movements has always been an important security measure for community leaders. Now, armed groups know activists will be quarantined at home, making it easier to harass and attack them. At the same time, members of SINTRACUAVALLE, the union representing workers at the country's only public water provider, have been working around the clock to provide water for sanitation and hand washing.



The Honduran Women's Collective, CODEMUH, is agitating for proper compensation for garment workers in maquilas (textile sweatshops in free trade zones). The collective is also working to address recent hikes in domestic violence caused by the country's strict lockdown.



Many maquila workers in Nicaragua have been laid off with no guarantee they will return. Most are women. The Maria Elena Cuadra Movement of Employed and Unemployed Women (MEC) is helping these workers with basic food supplies, and is working to ensure they can return to work and get full severance pay in the meantime.

While some governments are reinvesting in and rethinking public services, others have taken advantage of the crisis to increase militarization and surveillance, encroach on land and on rights and to weaken social movements. We are at a critical point where unions, human rights and social movements around the world must act in solidarity, to demand our governments take the path of collective good, equality, justice and public investment in quality services to address and recover from the crisis.

■ Monique Ménard-Kilrane



An interview with CUPE economist, Angella MacEwen

Time to raise the bar for all workers

To what extent do you think the COVID-19 pandemic showed how flawed and fragile our system actually is?

Chronic underfunding of health care from the federal government has led to austerity and privatization across Canada, and the impacts of this are particularly clear in long term-care. Weak labour legislation that is not effectively enforced allows employers to rely on precarious work, which creates economic and health risks for workers. Most workers did not have job-protected sick leave when the pandemic was declared, and they still don't have paid sick leave.

Governments have enacted emergency income supports and emergency leaves for workers. What needs to change in the long term to better support workers?

Workers' health and safety must come first. All workers need to have access to adequate personal protective equipment, safety protocols, the right to refuse unsafe work, and paid job-protected sick leave, not just temporarily, but permanently.

We need to raise the floor for all workers. At all levels of government, we need more active enforcement of existing labour legislation and higher minimum wages. Legislation currently makes precarious work attractive for employers. If legislation required part-time, casual, and sub-contracted workers to have access to the same rate of pay and pro-rated benefits, we could remove some of those incentives and make precarious work more stable for many workers.

Many of the labour movements' long term demands for improving Employment Insurance (EI) would also

help address the gaps in our income support system, for example by implementing a lower entrance requirement and higher replacement rates.

There is new appreciation for care work and people see how essential it is. Where do we go from here?

I think the pandemic has really exposed to many people how care work, including education, is too often undervalued and underpaid.

The pandemic also exposed the gaps in services that come from privatization. Profits are squeezed out

of underpaid workers and underserved recipients of care. The gaps in long-term care for both workers and residents have become particularly clear. No one should profit from providing essential care.

Care work is dominated by women, many racialized, with an increasing reliance on migrant workers. These workers have been labeled heroes for their important work during the pandemic. A much better way to honour them would be by permanently implementing fair wages and better working conditions.

Looking ahead, what role must the public sector play in a fairer, more sustainable future?

There is an essential role for the government to provide critical public services and to rebuild public infrastructure. There will be a tendency for governments to do stimulus the same way that we have in the past, focusing on 'shovel ready' physical infrastructure projects. But this recession is different. Our response needs to put the most vulnerable in our communities first and recognize the gendered and racialized impacts of the health and

economic crisis.

The rate on the Canada 30 Year Government bonds is only two per cent, making federal investment in public infrastructure more affordable than ever. Public investment should take into account our other twin crises - climate change and inequality. Public investment in care work, clean energy, energy efficiency retrofits, public transit, and active transportation infrastructure are essential components of a green and equitable recovery.

■ Pierre Ducasse

