

**EDUCATION STAFF ADVISORS'
REPORT TO NATIONAL OFFICERS
JANUARY 17, 2007**

2006 Amalgamations

With the government directed amalgamations in the rural public division sector and voluntary amalgamations in the separate school sector, it has been a busy time for education workers. In the public school sector, 59 school divisions were amalgamated into 12 school divisions effective January 1, 2006. These rural school divisions are very large geographical regions that have created issues for CUPE to address. Many locals sharing the same new employer have or are in the process of merging into one local. Similarly, in most of the situations where a new employer has more than one CUPE collective agreement preparations are underway to merge the agreements into one CUPE agreement per employer.

Over all, the number of Saskatchewan school divisions has been reduced from 88 to 28. We are optimistic that the long-term impact of the amalgamations will be positive for our members. We are already making some gains in reducing or eliminating regional wage and benefit disparities. This means there will be a lot of action at the bargaining tables to create that one agreement with the employer. We will push hard for fair wages, benefits and working conditions.

Negotiating in School Board Locals

Many settlements have been achieved with improvements to wages, benefits and other provisions. Thanks to Brother Guy Marsden, Research Representative, who has created two valuable resources for locals to utilize in preparing for upcoming rounds of negotiations. The Comparison of Coverage in Saskatchewan School Board Benefit Plans as well as the Provincial Bargaining Achievements documents will be extremely helpful to the members.

We anticipate a heavy emphasis on negotiations over the next two years as the newly merged locals seek to achieve one agreement per employer and later when urban locals return to the negotiating table. We hope for even more action as we struggle to achieve provincial negotiations to eliminate wage, benefit and other disparities throughout the education sector.

Organizing Across the Province

CUPE's membership has grown substantially in the education sector -- in part thanks to Brother Bill Robb, who was temporarily assigned as Organizing Coordinator for fifteen months until February of 2006 and to Sister Kim Aschenbrenner who worked on these unionizing efforts throughout much of the 2005-2006 school year. Bill and Kim will be the first to tell you that organizing is a collective effort. We wish to acknowledge the work of many CUPE members, CUPE representatives and especially those workers who played critical roles in signing up fellow workers.

CUPE now represents over 70% of the education workers in Saskatchewan.

Welcome to the new CUPE members in the following Locals:

Local 1948, Saskatoon Public pre-kindergarten educational assistants
Local 3084, Sask Central School Division (amended)
Local 4683, Hertz Northern Bus in Prince Albert
Local 4726, Parkland School Division
Local 4729, Davidson School Division
Local 4734, St. Alphonse Roman Catholic School Division in Viscount
Local 4737, Hudson Bay School Division
Local 4757, Aspen Grove School Division
Local 4761, Golden Plain School Division
Local 4765, Moosomin School Division
Local 4766, Rosetown (Bus Drivers)
Local 4767, Herbert School Division
Local 4770, Saskatoon East School Division

CUPE National continued to provide funding for an organizer working in Saskatchewan for the first part of 2006, for which we are grateful. Sister Kim Aschenbrenner was successful in her organizing work that also included assisting with the merger of locals and with making applications to the Labour Relations Board for all employee units wherever CUPE has the majority of workers unionized. Sister Kim has recently been assigned to continue organizing in this sector, until March 31, 2007.

Solidarity Pact Conference

The executive held a one-day Solidarity Pact conference in April. We had over 70 participants and received positive feedback.

The purpose of this conference was to build on the CUPE Saskatchewan Solidarity Conference that was held in November and to get Locals thinking about what they need to do to help achieve provincial bargaining.

The conference started off with presentations on provincial bargaining given by Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) staff representative Gary Ferguson, CUPE representative Andrew Huculak on the experience in the Health Care sector, and Kim Aschenbrenner and Rona Tyson who talked about the Nova Scotia framework agreement for provincial bargaining in the education sector. We then moved to small group discussions where we prioritized the common issues.

Provincial Bargaining Campaign

In the spring of 2006, the EWSC executive adopted an Action Campaign for Provincial Bargaining plan. A cost share program was put forward to CUPE National. We gratefully acknowledge the acceptance of this request. This means that CUPE National will contribute up to \$3,850 to assist education workers in their struggle for a provincial collective agreement.

Much work has already gone into this campaign. Brother Guy Marsden has completed a powerful and comprehensive brief and an executive summary of the brief that makes a compelling case for a provincial agreement. We note that there are large differences in wages and benefits for workers throughout Saskatchewan doing exactly the same work. This is a basic question of fairness that needs to be resolved.

Communications Representative Sister Beth Smillie assisted in making the cost share application and in creating a marvellous information kit for our members to use when meeting their employer or local MLA to seek their support for a provincial agreement. This kit provides basic information on every MLA in Saskatchewan and that is a good thing as we intend to meet with every MLA in Saskatchewan. We have already met with a number of MLA's and we are enthused with the results so far. The kit provides guidance for us prior to, during and after the meetings. We also intend to meet with school board employers throughout Saskatchewan.

Education Representative, Sister Melanie Medlicott has stepped forward to help form and coordinate an Action Committee to make sure that we successfully get our work done. We have a just cause as we seek to eliminate wage and benefit discrimination in the education sector. We have made much progress over the past several years but much remains to be done. When we work together in an organized and united way, we can accomplish our goals.

Communication and Liaison

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation

The EWSC executive met with the STF executive and staff on Friday, April 7, 2006. We discussed enhancing the communication at the school division levels between members of both organizations; the mergers of CUPE locals in the new school divisions as well as the mergers of teacher associations in the new school divisions; and our goal of achieving provincial / bilateral bargaining for all CUPE support staff in Saskatchewan. The meeting was productive and the STF offered encouragement and support for all of our issues.

Provincial Government

In September of 2006, the Executive met with the new Minister of Learning, Deb Higgins. We spent 90 minutes with Minister Higgins discussing the need for provincial bargaining. During this meeting, we outlined the campaign that CUPE is undertaking with respect to meeting with MLA's, school boards and employers throughout the province in an effort to achieve provincial bargaining for support workers in the education sector. Minister Higgins asked a number of questions, and we left her with an executive summary of the provincial bargaining brief. We look forward to continued discussions with Minister Higgins.

We are in the process of setting up a sub-committee with Minister Higgins office to address the concerns of the government with respect to provincial bargaining. We anticipate the first meeting to take place by the end of January, 2007.

Saskatchewan School Boards' Association

The three staff advisors met with representatives of the Saskatchewan School Boards' Association (SSBA) in April of 2006. It was timely, as a newspaper article had just appeared in the Regina Leader Post regarding CUPE's desire to achieve provincial bargaining and the SSBA expressed concern about what benefits it might or might not provide for the school boards.

At the meeting: we advised the SSBA of CUPE representation in this sector; we talked about the applications for all employee bargaining units going forward to the Labour Relations Board and requested that the SSBA encourage the divisions to make joint applications; we presented our goal of achieving wage and benefit parity; and we put forward our vision of having a provincial collective agreement and provincial benefits plan.

We were encouraged by the positive tone of the meeting, as well as the positive reaction we received from the SSBA representatives when we discussed our issues and concerns. They will be taking the information back to their executive and we will be having a follow-up meeting in the near future.

Aboriginal Employment Development Plan

The SSBA has requested our support of an Aboriginal Employment Development Plan. This program's focus is the development of a Representative Workforce through recruitment, training and selection of Aboriginal workers for education sector occupations. Requests to fund the program have been submitted to the Department of Learning and First Nations and Metis Relations. Brother Tom Graham, President of CUPE Saskatchewan, has responded to this request, offering the services of Brother Bill Anderson to help develop and implement this plan.

EWSC Executive

The executive had some changes in personnel over the year. Sister Karen Carle (L.4195) stepped down as the Recording Secretary in order to accept the position of Secretary in the Prince Albert area office. We thank Sister Karen for all of her hard work in the past and congratulate her in her new position with CUPE. Sister Brenda Anderson agreed to step in as the Recording Secretary for the remainder of the term.

Sister Eden Guidroz has received a change to her assignment and is no longer an advisor to the EWSC. Sister Eden worked with the committee for many years and she was recognized for her contributions at the EWSC Solidarity Pact Conference as well as at the EWSC Annual conference. Brothers Bill Robb and Bill Cronin have joined Ann St. Denis as Staff Advisors to the EWSC.

At the annual conference in October, elections were held and the delegates elected a new Chairperson, Sister Brigitte Scott (L.2268). We saw three members step down, Sister Dot Stewart (L.4195), Sister Judy Seager (L.1948), and Sister Kim Aschenbrenner (L.2268). We thank them for their contributions over the years. We welcome the new additions to the executive: Brother Earl Booth (L.5506), Brother Mark Kincaide (L.34), and sister Rita McKaig (L.3730). Sister Rona Tyson (L. 4119), former Chairperson, now holds a member at large position on the executive. We anticipate this year to be an extremely busy year for the executive and we know they are up for the challenge.

Sister Cheryl Stadnichuk and Brother Guy Marsden, Research Representatives, have been a huge assistance to us over the past year. We thank Brother Peter Barnacle, Legal and Legislative Representative, for all of his help with respect to Labour Relations Board applications for all employee units and for his general assistance in helping us to understand the legal aspects of this great time of change in the education sector. Communications Representative Sister Beth Smillie has provided important support for our action campaign, as has Education Representative Melanie Medicott.

We wish to express our gratitude to Regional Director Jim Swaok for his excellent leadership and for his effective support for all our efforts within the education sector. Brother Swaok has played a critical role in accessing financial and human resources to assist us in our active drives for recognition, equity and power. We have great resources within CUPE to use in our efforts to achieve fairness and justice for all education workers and for all other sectors within CUPE.

In solidarity,

Bill Cronin
EWSC Staff Advisor

Ann St. Denis
EWSC Staff Advisor

Bill Robb
EWSC Staff Advisor