



Election 2006 - a handbook for activists

CUPE in our communities

Elections 2006

Protect public services



Many CUPE members have experienced the difficulty of negotiating agreements or dealing with elected officials who are unsympathetic to public employees. This does not need to happen.

Elections at all levels give us an opportunity to pick the people that represent our interests as the working force of the country. Whether we decide to take this opportunity or not, is up to our members and us.

It is these federally elected officials who decide and set the framework for items such as Medicare, EI, CPP, childcare, etc. As public servants, it has a trickle down effect that often determines our working environment. Under-funding of transfer payments to the provinces often results in cuts in our hours or jobs, increased work loads, poor equipment, etc. and ultimately contracting out and privatization of services.

Every day elected officials are bombarded by business and other lobbyists for tax relief and for public contracts. The drastic cuts to education and municipalities have made the lobbyists' message more attractive than ever before as councils and boards scramble to balance budgets.

If we want candidates who support decent public services and are opposed to contracting out, we need to not only vote and lobby, but get involved in the election of candidates that support our goals of good services and jobs.

Even though casting our vote is one of our most treasured democratic rights, elections are seeing poorer and poorer voter turnout. This means, of course, that every vote counts, not forgetting the new election rules that get each party \$1.75 per vote, making campaigns more equitable. Getting members out on Election Day, then, is a priority. But more than this, by active participation in these elections, by working for and contributing to friendly candidates, we can make an enormous difference in the daily lives and work of our members and the public.

Between now and Election Day, candidates need to hear from us. They need to hear what is wrong with such policies as contracting out, privatization, cutting services and shifting tax burdens from business to the rest of us. We CAN make a difference on January 23rd. Let's start off the year right! Let's make sure politicians take care of the Canada we know and love!



How CUPE members can protect public services

Prime Minister Paul Martin dissolved Parliament, Nov. 28 and called federal election for January 23, 2006. It will be a long campaign. CUPE members know that low participation in elections means more privatization, so they're gearing up to make their voices heard – and not just by voting!

CUPE members and locals can use the election campaign to strengthen our communities and protect quality public services and public sector jobs. Working together in our workplaces, in our communities and on the campaign trail – CUPE members are fighting Paul Martin and Stephen Harper's privatization agenda. And they're getting behind candidates who pledge to defend public services and strong, healthy communities.



This election is expected to be dirty and nasty after the holidays – and then there won't be a lot of time to get rolling before voting day. We need to develop a positive campaign to build and improve public services right away to show that there is an alternative to the cynical tax-cutting and privatization agenda.

The first thing to do is get together and get creative! The power of the brainstorming session is unbeatable and is a great way to involve people.

Make sure you have read up on the election legislation (mailed to all locals in the Nov. 15 general mailing). There are changes to how unions can participate in the election process. For example, CUPE locals can encourage members to volunteer as individuals acting on their own time. But you can't pay them or book them off to work directly for a political party. Also, while you can produce materials for your own members, there are [restrictions on paid advertising](#).

Here are some ways you and your CUPE local can produce victories and influence this election:

Your local: On the campaign trail

Events, events, events! Engage your members in the election process. People working together for change is how we'll help strengthen our communities – and this election is part of that.

Volunteer for local candidates. Support those who are most likely to defend public services and who vow to stop privatization. Organize your locals to volunteer together to help on a campaign by staffing the phone bank one weekend (or more), or by organizing the distribution of neighborhood flyers or blitzing a community with lawn signs. There is power in working together!



Organize an all-candidates' meeting. It can be a general meeting or one with a focus on privatization, health care, childcare, women, unemployed workers, city infrastructure or another priority issue. This is a great way to showcase progressive candidates. And there's no better way to motivate people to vote wisely than letting a Liberal or Conservative candidate stumble through their anti-public services lines!

Encourage members to attend other all-candidates' meetings. Armed with leaflets and lined up at the microphone, they can set the agenda from the floor. Provide a "Truth-O-Meter", a placard with a moveable arrow that can point closer to "truth" or "lie" depending on who is saying what!

Organize your local welcome brigade. Leaders may visit your community for a photo-op. Be part of the picture with street theatre, banners, stunts. Be on the lookout for other high-profile politicians, too. Check election.cupe.ca for updates on leaders' schedules – we'll post them when we can.

Become the news. By making your presence felt at press events, you can become part of the news coverage. One large banner defending social programs and supporting labour's interests can steal the show. One clear voice with a powerful message can steal Liberal or Conservative thunder. Be whimsical; be daring, be on the front line!

Look for **labour friendly candidates** in the community. Explain the issues and the Locals' concerns so they can present these issues in an informed manner.

Your local: In the community

Reach out to your membership: Look at the different ways you are plugged into the community. Reach out to family, friends and neighbours: hockey players, folk music lovers, environmental activists, highland dancers, church groups, students, farmers, and bowlers. Tap into your community's diversity. Talk politics and privatization.

Watch more TV: Tune in the televised leaders' debates with fellow CUPE members, and invite your neighbours too! There's nothing like yelling at the TV with a group of friends.

Anti-P3 privatization alert pickets: Turn your main street into a stage by organizing a "P3 Privatization Alert" information picket. Two members per street corner can hand out hundreds of flyers over lunch-hour. Cover 10 intersections and you've reached thousands of people in one go.

Winter festivals: Be on the lookout for local events in your communities where a little leafleting can go a long way. People waiting in long holiday line-ups at stores would welcome new reading materials.

Coalitions: Find out what other unions and progressive groups are planning and work with them to complement each other's efforts.



Your local: At the workplace

Leaflets, posters, and stickers: They can all help spruce up your workplace. Download materials from election.cupe.ca to help get the word out.

Organize a brown bag lunch: Use it to discuss why we need to vote for public services. Or, depending on your local, organize a special session during a regular union meeting. Voting for public services starts at the local level.

Organize a skit: Use the cafeteria or lunchroom in your workplace to dramatize the differences between public health care and private, for example. Or how about our own version of "Survivor"? The players can vote Paul Martin or Stephen Harper off the island?

Election day support: Find out what support people might need to go vote. It might be help with childcare or getting a lift to the polling station. It might even be making sure they're on the voting list, and getting them on the list if they aren't already. Survey your members' needs and plan accordingly. Encourage members to help each other.

Media

Call-in shows: Monitor local radio call-in shows and encourage members and their families to call in.

Letters to the editor: Don't like what the Liberals or Conservatives are planning for your community? Write it down and send or email it to the local media. Even a few lines can make a difference.

Actions: Provide sample "letters to the editor" for your members. Circulate the phone numbers for call-in shows. Alert members when special election coverage is looming, such as CBC Town Halls, national leaders' debates and local broadcasts.

A last word

Your actions count. Whether you live in a big city or a small town, you can influence the election outcome. The cumulative effect of your efforts is to build a bigger, stronger movement for change by electing a federal Parliament that is more responsive to your needs and those of your community.

Every vote counts, and now more than ever. Changes to elections financing legislation mean that political parties now benefit from every single vote cast. In other words, your candidate doesn't need to win the election to make your party stronger.

See you on the campaign trail and at the polls!





Here are some questions you may wish candidates to consider as you talk to them, attend forums, write your letters, etc:

1. Do you favour the privatization of public services? Why?
2. Are you in favour of a National plan to provide medications for Canadians? (e.g. Pharmacare)
3. Are you in favour of a National public-not-for-profit Childcare program?
4. Are you in favour of more or less private sector involvement in Healthcare? Why?
5. Do you believe that there should be public funding for students for post-secondary education?
6. Do you believe that free trade agreements have benefited Canadians? Why?
7. Do you believe that Canada should ship water to other countries, including the U.S.A.? Why?
8. Do you feel that the Employment Insurance benefits are readily accessible to those who need it? Why?
9. Do you believe that the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security is sustainable for future generations?
10. Do you believe that poverty is a problem in Canada? If so, how will you address it?
11. Do you feel that “the disappearing middle class” is a problem that that has to be addressed?

Brought to you by Alberta’s Anti-Privatization & Political Action Committee: Greg Ingram, Michelle Day, Kirk Oakes, Jan Valentine, Victor Patton and Don MacAskill.