

November 2009

## TO ALL CUPE CHARTERED ORGANIZATIONS

### INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – DECEMBER 3

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

CUPE members with disabilities have let us know that it is all about accessibility. We know that for our members with disabilities, a primary issue is ensuring that their worksites, and all CUPE events, are truly accessible. In June 2005, the Ontario government introduced new accessibility legislation in the form of "*The Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act*". There is currently an independent review of the legislation to determine whether it has been effective in building an accessible province by 2025. Its goal is that Ontario businesses and organizations that provide goods and services will have to meet accessibility standards in the areas of customer service, transportation, information and communications, the built environment and employment. The Ontario government estimates that 1.85 million of its people have disabilities, a number expected to grow as the baby boomer generation ages. While the first standard for customer service is now law, the remaining standards are being formulated.

In the area of employment, the goal of the legislation is to help employers create equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, with standards being set with direct input from persons with disabilities around that province. The committee known as the Employment Accessibility Standards Development Committee was formed to develop employment accessibility standards that organizations must meet.

CUPE welcomes this unique legislative initiative on the part of the Ontario government and hopes that other jurisdictions in Canada will follow with a similar long-term plan to enhance accessibility, not just in the physical sense, but employment accessibility for all persons regardless of whatever disability they may have.

Within CUPE itself, we are proud of the fact that we have made significant headway with respect to accessibility. Our Persons with Disabilities National Working Group has provided the National Office with constructive feedback about accessibility issues, and

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two of its members audited this year's convention site in advance, to identify and deal with potential accessibility problems. We were pleased to learn that there were no accessibility complaints forwarded to the National Office at this convention. We are getting it right.

The convention membership was also very enthusiastic about the awarding of the Disability Rights Activism Award to Sister Catherine Peters from British Columbia's Hospital Employees' Union (HEU). Catherine's dual involvement in the labour and disability rights movement is a true inspiration.

The Union Development Department is working with the Equality Branch to develop a disability sensitivity course and a course dealing with the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities. It is our hope that CUPE locals and District councils will take advantage of these courses which will be rolled out in the coming months.

Your local can help support its members with disabilities in a number of ways:

- By developing a local disability rights committee;
- By increasing education awareness about disability rights issues through duty to accommodate courses and the like;
- By obtaining the poster about disability rights as well as other informative materials from the Equality Branch at CUPE National;
- By ensuring that the voices of our members with disabilities are heard at the bargaining table, either by ensuring that a person with a disability is on the bargaining committee or by consulting with members with disabilities about bargaining proposals that could be put forward to respond to their specific needs, including accommodation processes and long-term disability plans.

It was the United Nations that originally set December 3 aside as the International Day for Persons With Disabilities, with a view to creating awareness, understanding and action for the legal and social rights of persons with disabilities. By learning as much as possible about the needs of all CUPE members, and by providing recognition, support and acceptance, we can work together to ensure that CUPE is a Union for *all* workers.

In solidarity,



PAUL MOIST  
National President



CLAUDE GÉNÉREUX  
National Secretary-Treasurer