

NATIONAL PENSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
REPORT
2010

I had the great pleasure to attend the B.C. Pension Forum Sponsored by SHARE and the B.C. Federation of Labour. A one day workshop was held with keynote speakers, breakout sessions on Economic Update, Plan Communication, investing in a green economy etc.

The second day of our meeting, NPAC met with President Paul Moist to discuss pension issues and how they fit into our strategic direction plan.

In the afternoon and the following morning we finalized our report to the National Executive Board which is included in my report today.

This is my last report as I am retiring from the committee. I have enjoyed my time working with everyone and I wish to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped me during my term. I also wish to thank our National President Paul Moist and members of the National Executive Board both past and present for their ongoing support.

I leave you with this quote.

“Remember our pension is our paycheque for life”.

Thanks again,
Gordon

National Pension Advisory Committee Report to the National Executive Board December 2009

Our campaign on pensions must include work in three areas:

- Defending and improving current workplace pension plans
- Taking concrete steps toward the goal of every member having a defined benefit workplace pension
- Expanding coverage under public pension plans (CPP, OAS and GIS)

Our work on pensions needs to be values based. We need to tell the stories that put a human face on pensions, and work with pension champions (including different champions for different constituencies, and “unexpected” champions)

Why is it urgent?

- We are at a pivotal point where pensions are at the forefront. The number of retirees is rapidly increasing. Everybody agrees, at least, that the status quo is not working.
- There is an attack by corporations, the financial industry and governments who are saying that defined benefit plans are not affordable and increasing CPP benefits is not viable.
- Sixty percent of workers in Canada have no workplace pension plan.
- Private sectors are losing defined benefit plans. The public is being told that public sector workers should not have better pension plans than other workers. The rhetoric is that tax payers who don't have a pension plan shouldn't have to pay for “gold plated” pension plans for public sector workers. Private sector defined benefit plans are being attacked through terminations, two-tiered systems and bankruptcies. Public sector plans are already under pressure after the 2008 financial meltdown and we can expect they will be targeted even more once private sector plans are gone.
- Changes to the CPP (C-51) will force workers to work longer by increasing the penalty for early retirement. For all practical purposes the Bill has been adopted at the federal level but must now be ratified by provincial legislatures.
- 30% of CUPE members (mainly women) do not have a pension plan and will face poverty in retirement. It will be harder to bargain and maintain our pension plans in the future if we do not tip the scale in favour of support for defined benefit plans.
- This follows our Strategic Direction Plan passed by the delegates at the 2009 convention.

Messaging and Communications Strategy

1. The message needs to be clear, concise, consistent, value oriented, simple, not technical, and embrace all citizens not just union members. For example: You can have it. You deserve it. It's obtainable. It's doable. It's affordable. It's your right.
2. A secondary message must counter the current attack on pensions. For example:
 - That the financial community is self serving and lacks credibility after 2008
 - The short-term approach, for example contribution holidays, has worsened the current funding problems in pension plans
 - The defined benefit plans provide small, reasonable benefits for average people
 - Stay away from public sector vs private sector workers -- we all need retirement security!
3. We need a striking visual to communicate the message, for example a rickety rocking chair vs a nice modest glider rocker.
4. Encourage and support Divisions to agree to invite a keynote speaker with a consistent passionate message to speak at their convention and add evening forums for the public.
5. Use alternative media, for example You Tube, Facebook, etc.
6. Test our messaging (for example focus groups) and re-evaluate messages as needed

Building Capacity to Protect and Improve our Pension Plans

We need to reinforce the support provided to all CUPE pension activists, including trustees and advisory committee members.

This will better equip them to draw on the expertise and positive experiences of other parts of CUPE, to identify what needs to be done to make their pension plans more sustainable, and to be able to communicate effectively with the local union leadership, but also with plan members.

This group can be the front line in mobilizing members to protect and improve our pension plans. Because of their comfort level with pensions and because they are often seen as the pension experts in their local, regions, etc., we need to make sure that they understand and communicate the key messages CUPE will be putting forward on pensions at this crucial time (for employer plans as well as public plans).

Who do we need to work with?

We need to build a coalition and develop a consensus on our goals and on our strategies to move the debate in our direction. The coalition needs to be as broad as possible but take into account our interests and values. For example:

- . other unions, federations of labour and associations
- . women, seniors and youth groups
- federal, provincial and municipal politicians who share our goals
- . faith based groups
- . student unions and associations
- . progressive academics
- . large defined benefit plans
- . ethnic associations

And other organizations and individuals who share our goals

We also need to press the federal government to convene a pension summit where all key players and social forces would be present, including the pension industry, business and people who hold views different from ours. Our purpose at that summit would be to try to engage all participants towards our agenda and try to achieve change that would move us forward.

What resources do we need?

The committee strongly recommends that additional resources are needed to conduct a national campaign to chart a new course for pensions. We see a need for:

- Research, communications and union development capacity at the national and regional level to support the campaign
- Co-ordinator to organize from the national office
- Resources for political action, including booking off member activists
- Resources to put in place a proper networking system to:
 - establish and maintain a list of CUPE pension activists (including pension trustees, members of a pension advisory board)
 - put in place an education and communications plan using such tools as web conferencing, phone conferences, E-Mails, dedicated Web site, educational activities and conferences, regional or national meetings, but also direct contact between activists or between activists and CUPE resources (service reps, research or union development staff) so that we utilize the resources of all the activists and staff within our union.
 - build community of practice around our pension issues in CUPE
 - and other related activities as the need arises.

Priority tasks and next steps between now and June 2010

- NEB meeting, December 2009 – discussion of funding and strategies
- As soon as possible, begin consultations with other unions, coalitions, divisions, federations
- As soon as possible, develop and test the message
- For 2010 Division conventions, development of fact sheet and other campaign materials, breakfast meetings with Paul
- All Committees Meeting, end of March 2010, opportunity to address the pension challenge with a keynote speaker and a discussion
- Re-evaluation of campaign progress by the Committee and recommendations to NEB, if required, June 2010