



CUPE on Strike!

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Intro – 3 CUPE Locals, 2073 CHS, Local 1750 – OCEU (WSIB), Local 5525 (Supportive Housing Unit)

Timestamp – 1:25 – 1:36 Mara: My name is Mara Waern, I'm the president of local 2073, I'm an employment consultant.

6:37 - 9:03 (Summary of why we are Striking)

Mara: At Local 2073, 206 workers across the province provide Deafblind intervention, counselling, senior services, Audiology, employment services, literacy, settlement services and technical devices for Deaf, Deafened and hard of hearing individuals, family members and the general community. We've been on strike since April 28th. This round of bargaining the employer is only engaged in surface bargaining, meaning the employer went through the motions of negotiations without a genuine intent to reach a fair agreement. They gave us, on March the 4th a proposal that said which they called their best offer and by mid-month they said that it had expired and there is nothing on the table. There has been nothing on the table since. Negotiations between CHS and 2073 were minimal with only 6 hours of bargaining before the employer filed for conciliation and subsequently called a no board. Effectively this initiated our strike. After 17 days from the no board CHS chose to change the terms and conditions of our collective agreement. No longer allowing vacation time or other leaves. If anybody takes any time off they made it clear there was threat of

discipline or dismissal if any employee was off for any amount of time. 2073 feels the employer has engaged in surface bargaining. CUPE filed and unfair labour practice complaint with the Ontario Labour Relations Board citing violations such as bargaining by ultimatum and bargaining in bad faith. But at the heart of it the workers are overworked, we're doing the work of 2 or 3 people. Our clients are feeling that they are not getting the service level that they deserve and quite honestly they're not because our resources are stretched so thin. So this strike isn't just about a fair contract which we definitely want but we want our clients needs to be recognized by the employer and to come to a resolution that is respectful for the clients and the employees.

15:40 – 17:22 Interviewer: What message do you want to tell your clients about your strike?

You know it's Mara with 2073, this is a magnificent question because were a provincial union and we're only 206 employees spread across the province, so I welcome the opportunity and the venue to maybe reach more of our clients. And what I would like them to know is that we know how much our clients depend on the vital services that we provide and we never take your trust for granted. It's with heavy hearts that we have had to go on strike but we want to be honest with you and the community and that's why we have made this difficult decision. We're fighting for respect and fairness and the future of the services that you rely on, with the cutbacks in staff we have had over the last 10 years it's difficult to give the clients the services that they deserve. CHS has cut staff, limited Deaf leadership and reduced access to services that you the clients count on. We would like a fair contract that values the work we do and the community that we serve. We want to restore and strengthen services, not interrupt them but like you, we believe in building a better and more accessible future for Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing people across Ontario. We thank all of our clients for your patience and understanding during this difficult time your support means the world to us and with your support we will a future for our services and look forward to a day that we are decreasing barriers for our communities and feeling we are truly a community again.

22:48 – 27:39 Interviewer - What skills are your workers learning during the strike and how is the strike changing their perspectives?

At 2073 I think what we are learning is resilience and self-respect and community and a lot of this has really been taken away from us as well because in 2020 with COVID the employer sent us home to work. Which at the time was great because it still allowed us to service our clients but when that happened the employer began to shutter any offices where the lease was coming up never to open again. We've lost more than half of our offices and all the staff are working from home. So each individual is siloed. We used to feel like a CHS family and we used to feel like a team and we were. But when you work from home you don't meet your new workers. On the line we are learning to be a family again! But our members are learning incredible skills; advocacy and public speaking, we're learning how to speak our publicly, sometimes for the very first time and you know the leader of the union like myself and other members of the bargaining unit. CUPE is offering support to us and we are offering to support to people who are prepared and ready to speak out about their rights, their work, and the communities that they serve. That is very invigorating to know much we are the same and how committed we all are. Along with feeling resilient and having our self respecting, gaining that sense of community you know striking takes courage. Standing firm in the face of uncertainty

builds emotional strength especially for the workers who felt over worked and undervalued, we are reclaiming that on the line and that's incredible to hear people speak with strength and in support of the union. And of support of their rights and the type of work that they would like to be doing for our clients. Our clients...our members are engaging with other locals, labour allies, local labour union councils and community activists. We're learning more about larger struggles for justice, equality, and accessibility and every time I see our people coming from our local to the justice for workers meetings and seeing them get involved in these larger movements I'm proud of them. Because I know that they are learning more about unionism and I'm so proud to lead and stand with them. I know that the strike is changing even our perspectives of how we see ourselves in our work. We have a stronger sense of collective power. I see that on the lines that I visit, many realize I am not alone, we are stronger together. The shift in that type of perspective can be life changing for some of the members. I'm now seeing future leaders, I'm seeing a revitalization of the union, I'm seeing that people care about the union. They are coming out to our general membership meetings that we are having weekly, where it is like three quarters of the members are there and it is just makes me so proud. We are reclaiming the value of our work after being told for years there is no money, there is no increases to funding, be grateful for **what you have left**, that's a caveat that I am adding, for what you have left in your collective agreement because for years since under the leadership under Julia Damania our collective bargaining has been take aways so we've been told to make due with less and members are reclaiming the pride in their work and demanding fair compensation. It's really strengthening to see us acting in solidarity and having that goal that we want a fair contract, we don't want take aways. We want to be able to provide good services, we don't want to be doing the work of 2 or 3 people. So, um, I think that all of this is giving us hope and possibility. Striking isn't just about the protest; it's about imagining a better future. Many members walk away with the belief I believe daily that we have the possibility of change and that change is possible and everyday we often say "One day longer one day stronger" and I am living that and it's invigorating.

32:12 – 39:28 Interviewer: What does winning the strike look like to you?

For the workers of Canadian Hearing Services, CUPE 2073 I would already say, that in ways we are winning in this Strike. And I say that because the strike itself is sparking broader conversations about accountability, Deaf leadership, and inclusion. Those are the paramount pillars of client services. So the rest of it, it's actually a really bold and timely reflection at this point in the strike to say what does winning look like? For CUPE 2073 winning the strike doesn't just mean returning to work, it means returning with dignity, fairness, and I renewed sense of power. And by power, I mean being able to provide the service that we want to be able to provide to our clients at services levels that our clients expect. Um, so what we really want, the outcome we need a fair collective agreement, wages that reflect the cost of living, that seek to diminish the 16% that we have fallen behind inflation rate over the last years. We need a multi-year contract, we need job security, respect and better working conditions. For all roles, from American Sign Language/Langes de Signs Quebec Interpreters, employment consultants, counsellors, admin staff, and more. We need language in the contract that protects workers' rights and promotes transparency from management and language that ensures the workers will benefit from any remedy to Bill 124. But this isn't just about money, it's about recognition. For the essential work that CUPE 2073 workers do

every day. It's about shifting the power dynamic, winning means CHS changes how it deals with its workers. We need to end the power of top-down management and surface bargaining. We need our voices to be heard. We need to say when we are doing the work of 2-3 people that it is not about statistics, it's about the people that we serve, and we need management to understand and hear that and act on it. Because we also feel burned out and we take sick leaves trying to rejuvenate. We don't want to do that. We need a workload that we can manage. So, we need to restore the trust between the workers and the leadership that we can be listened to. That we can bring things up and they will be acted on. And that they will work with us to create a level of service that's great for the clients and more than acceptable for us. Showing CHS in the public that workers will not accept disrespect or performative negotiations. And we have seen that in some of the media releases that the employer has done. I mean you can twist numbers to say anything you want, you can use statistics the way you want but at the end of the day it is disrespect for us workers because we all know how hard we are working for clients and trying to meet those statistics that are imposed upon us. That we're meant to be goals for people's individual but when we're two or three workers those goals are unattainable, and we feel undervalued and feel stressed. We need to rebuild a community based CHS and that is part of winning. You know a place where 2037 members aren't just employees because a lot of them are part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and for those of us that do contribute that have full hearing we need to be part of these communities and we need to feel included and that is what winning looks like. Winning means protecting the services that the clients rely on; interpreting deaf-blind supports, counselling employment supports by ensuring that the staff are respected and retained. Right now at wage levels people come and people go and the expertise gets lost and we need to have to build new staff up again again and again. We can't keep doing this, we need to train staff for the future and we need them to be part of our future because we are a community and we are not just numbers at an office. We don't make widgets, we support people. Um, we need to push for more Deaf leadership, that's an outcome of this strike. I'm seeing a growth in the movement from the Deaf community; they want a voice on the board of directors, they want a voice in upper management. We need culturally fluent services and accessibility, we need to restore ourselves to CHS's original mission: as a community first organization, not a corporate brand. We need a stronger and more united membership, and we are well on the way to doing that. For me winning means also what is happening in the union. We have members that are more informed, more connected and more empowered and that's winning. We have new leaders that have stepped up, that's winning. A culture of solidarity has taken root and that is one culture that will shape future negotiations, we are not going to bow down and go away and take whatever you put on the table and don't allow us to have a voice and bargain back. We need to bargain together! I've always told the employer we are two sides of one coin, you have management on top and on the reverse side you have the workers. Together we are one, you can't have one side without the other. So, future negotiations have to be way more respectful than this one. Um, finally I have a winning message to other locals, you don't have to accept crumbs, to employers; you can't run essential services without respecting the essential workers. My heart goes out to Stephanie's group. To the public these fights are about justice, not contracts. Harry I am hoping you get what you need out of your strike and hope that your employer listens to you. I know that we are overworked and that we are all in this together; we're all workers we all work for our communities and we will share ultimately in the power that we gain in this strike and knowledge that we attain.

43:29 – 48:52 Interviewer: What other kinds of concrete support do you need from the public, other union members to help you win this fight? (Deaf community support)

Mara again from 2073, you know Stikes are not won in isolation, they are won when the community steps up along side the workers and say “we’ve got your back”. For our success depends on now just holding the picket line but on building public pressure and demonstrating broad visible support. We need support from the clients community support members, our fellow workers, I need you to stand strong and I know you will. I need others to show up at our picket line, like I said we were once over 450 workers, today we are 206. If you can show up at the picket line, if you have a lunch hour, if you want to get a little extra walking in, you want to walk with us we welcome that. Some of our lines have only three people, four, five people. Getting any visitors who walk along is incredibly supportive and it’s incredible emotional, our members get really excited about that. Your physical presence matters, when supporters join the picket line, especially clients and fellow unionists, it sends a strong message to CHS. This fight has the public’s attention and support, it’s important. Bring signs, bring noise, bring encouragement, even a quick visit matters. We need people to speak out publicly, share your support on your social media using hashtags like #CUPE 2073, #SupportDeafWorkers, or #FairContractNow. Post message, photos, videos explaining why the workers matter to you! Ask others to re-share, it helps to build momentum. Write letters to media, a letter to the editor of your local paper or media outlet helps to get the message beyond the union networks. Especially impactful are letters of support written by our clients, family members, or allied professionals. So I am calling on all of you we have supported, supported our clients, and therefore made accessible services you call it out and recognize that the work that we do has been important and if you can support us that would be awesome. Always, you can donate to the strike support fund, a lot of our members expenses have gone through the roof and strike pay is not enough and our hardship fund exists to help members meet their very basic bills so that they don’t get their hydro cut off, that they don’t lose connection with keeping one phone active, some people if you don’t pay your car insurance you can have a very difficult time to get insurance and get cut off. So we have with very essential things like that, people donating to strike funds is very important. Your contributions from the community and allies help our workers to stay out longer and stronger so in advance if you can reach in and donate a little to the picket lines we thank you. Um, for others please mobilize your own unions even if you are not on strike or your organizations, if you are in a union pass a motion of solidarity and let us know. Donate, organize, organize a delegation to come to the picket, we’d love to see you there. I’ve networked with some labour counsels, I’d love to connect with more labour counsels. Remember we are spread out across the province. So it really emboldens the members, I see the good work labour counsels do and I’d really like labour counsels to reach out to us. We would like to be part of you. Often Deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing workers they also feels marginalized so we need to know we can be important to your groups so please reach out to us and let us know you’d like to be involved with us too and please support us. Student groups, accessibility organizations, we are your brothers and sisters in helping to remove barriers, you can issues statements and take public actions, please do. Reach out to the media, make it know, I thank the Ontario Association of the Deaf, they’ve published and open letter, they’ve also posted it on YouTube in Sign Language. We need to challenge CHS’s narrative, if people think that things are ok we need to we need to help correct that record, we need to remind people that

workers want to get back on the job, we do, but with fair conditions that protect both the staff and the services that our clients rely on. And you know if you don't have a lot of time and you know a worker reach out personally, a kind message or a card to a striking worker can lift spirits. Solidarity isn't always loud, sometimes it is just a quiet reminder that you are not alone and people support you.