



**CAPE President Claude Poirier's Presentation at
CAPE's Annual General Meeting
November 26, 2013**

Word of welcome

Good evening and welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees. As usual, the meeting will be held in both official languages. Interpretation services are available, of course, and you can get the necessary equipment from the technician beside the interpreters' booth.

There are a number of items on the agenda this evening, including the President's Report and the Professional Services Report. Because these two particular items are covered in detail in CAPE's Annual Report, however, we will try not to spend too much time on them so we can focus more on certain recent events, in particular the federal government's tabling of Bill C-4 and the impact this legislation will have on your rights as public servants and union members. We can tell you about the plans that CAPE and its partners have for dealing with the many attacks being launched by the government.

As to the agenda item concerning constitutional amendments, we will summarize the proposed amendments to CAPE's constitution and answer any questions you may have on the subject. Documentation explaining these changes was sent out to you along with your ballot.

At the end, we will open the floor to other business and issues not already discussed during the course of the evening.

A few presentations, I will ask everyone at the head table to introduce themselves:

Before we move on to the reports, I'd like to thank employees and managers of CAPE. The organization has come a long way in the past few years and you played a central role in our achievements.

President's Report

As I said just now, if you want to know what kept us busy over the past year, I would urge you to read the Association's Annual Report. This evening, I have decided instead to speak to you about the various actions taken by our employer, the government of Canada. And speaking of the government, I want to take this opportunity to thank ministers Tony Clement and Jim Flaherty, as well as their boss Prime Minister Stephen

Harper. Their efforts to destroy the public service and break the unions have resulted in a level of public service mobilization that has rarely been seen before. This proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that solidarity is more essential than it has ever been in the face of adversity. If ever we needed a reason to justify our work, our politicians have certainly provided it.

Because, make no mistake about it, what we are witnessing is a growing effort by our dear government to wipe out the gains achieved by public service unions through collective bargaining and to fundamentally alter other benefits that are not covered in your collective bargaining agreements.

This is a first for us: an employer willing to betray its signature on a collective agreement in order to achieve its new ends: specifically, levelling down its employees' terms and conditions of employment. That is what is going on now. Not only has the employer decided to renege on its commitments, it is also using its legislative powers to change the rules of the game and tilt the playing field in its favour. Furthermore, to add fat to the fire, it is constantly lying to the Canadian public about the situation in the public service, while insulting at every available opportunity the union leaders duly elected by public service workers to represent their interests.

There has been slow but steady momentum in this direction since 2006. A succession of program reviews was followed by the first wave of cutbacks. Then the government struck a heavy blow in the 2012-2013 budget, when it announced the elimination of 19,200 public service jobs, as well as unilateral changes to the public service pension plan that will see the split in contributions shift progressively from 60/40 to 50/50. In addition, new pension plan members will have to wait five more years before they can retire. During this same period, Treasury Board negotiators came to the bargaining tables with only one mission: get rid of public servants' severance pay. I have participated in the negotiation of collective agreements for many years, and believe me this last round of bargaining was by far the most difficult.

But why would the government stop there when it can continue to whittle away at public service workers' benefits? And of course the employer rushed to do just that. The 2013-2014 budget announced the government's intention to eliminate the existing accumulated sick leave system and replace it with a short-term disability plan.

And if that wasn't enough, bills attacking the labour movement began to proliferate. First Bill C-377, under the pretext of transparency, would force unions to publish all of their financial information on a Canada Revenue Agency website. I use the expression "pretext of transparency" because there is clearly some form of subterfuge going on. As members of a union, you are entitled to this information. But in reality, what the employer wants to know is whether unions are contributing to political parties other than the Conservative Party of Canada...

Then there is Bill C-525. In the broadest sense, the aim of C-525 is to make it more difficult to form a union and easier to disband a union. And we have not seen the end of these attacks. The delegates to the recent Conservative Party convention adopted a series of motions designed to harden the government's position on the "big bad unions" even more. One of the measures being considered is the elimination of the "Rand formula." People often ask me to explain the concept of the Rand formula, which was named after Supreme Court Justice Ivan Rand. In the 1940s, when Justice Rand was called in to arbitrate a labour dispute between the Ford Motor Company and its 17,000 striking workers in Windsor, Ontario, he ruled that all employees who receive the benefits of a collective agreement must pay union dues whether they belong to the union or not. Seems logical, don't you think? But the members of the Conservative Party of Canada want to eliminate the Rand formula. Why?

Let's look at the history of the Conservative Party of Canada, which came into being when the Progressive Conservative Party, which was on its last legs, merged with the Canadian Alliance, formerly the Reform Party of Canada founded by Preston Manning. Note that the word "progressive" was dropped from the party name at the time of the merger.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the descendants of the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance would favour lowering taxes and reducing the role of government, and would use tax cuts to achieve that reduction.

This is precisely the approach taken by the Harper government. Remember that in 2006, when these former Reform Party members came to power, they inherited a budget surplus of about \$13 billion and a debt of approximately \$400 billion.

Elected on the strength of their promise to lower the GST by two percentage points, they made good on that promise through successive one-point reductions and completely eliminated the Liberal budget surplus in the process. They also picked up where the Liberals left off in lowering corporate income tax. This left a major revenue shortfall when the economy went into crisis in 2008-2009. Needing to intervene vigorously in the Canadian economy in order to address that crisis, the government was forced to borrow and thus generated enormous deficits which persist to this day.

If the Reformists needed a reason to pare down the size of government, this was it: eliminate the deficit – just conveniently "forget" to explain to the Canadian public that the current government created that deficit through its own incompetence. It is the proverbial case of the fireman who sets fire to public buildings in order to justify his job. We have seen this before in our lifetime, and we will undoubtedly see it again.

Over the years, unions have had to defend themselves more and more vigorously against abuses by an employer that, because it is also the government, controls the purse strings and can pass legislation to realize its political agenda. It comes as no

surprise, therefore, that the anti-labour bias of the party currently in power continues to come to the fore.

As you will see later when the meeting agenda moves on to Bill C-4, it is now our turn to take the ball and raise our game to a new level. The Canadian Association of Professional Employees has always been steadfast in maintaining a position of neutrality. We have always avoided getting involved in politics, even indirectly. But now a political party that holds a majority in the House of Commons has declared open war on us and has made it abundantly clear that it will give no quarter and take no prisoners.

The Romans had a saying: “Si vis pacem, para bellum” – “If you want peace, prepare for war.” Under attack from the Barbarians, the Romans decided it would be best to fight them on their turf.

We are being attacked by a new tribe of Barbarians: the anti-union Reformists. Public service employees must continue to assert their rights at the bargaining table and through grievances and complaints. If we are to put a stop to these Barbarians and their relentless march, however, it is clear that we will have to bring the war into their backyards, where they know they are most vulnerable: their electoral districts.

In the coming weeks, CAPE and all other public service unions will be asking you to take part in information and mobilization activities. I urge you to participate actively in these activities and to disseminate information to everyone around you.

We must do everything we possibly can to reverse this tide and make it clear to the members of this government that more than 60 percent of the electorate did not vote for them in the last election.

Solidarity is our only option.

Thank you!