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AUPE Local 012 Essay

An organized body of employees unite as a collective to negotiate conditions of employment – this is known as collective bargaining. These organized bodies are separated into two different categories: public and private sector unions; each pursuing diverse approaches, outcomes, and priorities. However, one goal remains constant among unions, regardless of whether they are public or private. This is to ensure workers' rights are protected and advocated for. What distinctly identifies whether a union is public or private is who the union serves. Public unions typically speak for government employees at every level, including federal, provincial/state, and local, whereas private unions represent employees in independently owned firms.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) shows how public sector unions use collective bargaining tactics, focusing on defined benefits, fair wages, job security, and health benefits. Furthermore, the CUPE bargaining strategies champion resisting privatization and garnering the support of the public. A contrast to a non-public union like the CUPE is the United Auto Workers (UAW), which is privatized. UAW advocates more so for cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), defined contribution bonuses, profit sharing, job security from layoffs, fair workloads, and protection against outsourcing. Additionally, UAW's approach to negotiations focuses on capitalizing on industrial gains and the company's economic performance to compensate workers' efforts.

Unions' ultimate aim is to protect their workers; however, unions adjust their goals depending on whether they represent the public or private sector. Public unions in industries such as hospitals, schools, and municipalities have the goal of attaining fair wages, long-term employment guarantees, sufficient staffing, and defined benefits. For example, education workers' salaries in Ontario over the past decade have plummeted 11% behind inflation rates. Additionally, this would equate to over \$4,000 in income for an average CUPE worker in 2021, as per the Canadian Union of Public Employees (2022). CUPE educational employees not being fairly compensated due to inflation led to

a strike of 55,000 members (Wilkinson, 2022). The provincial legislature passed Bill 28, which prohibited a strike and insisted on a contract. However, the CUPE strikers ignored this bill and persisted in striking despite the hazard of receiving significant fines. The influence of the CUPE strike brought it to the attention of other unions. Such as the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), which led to contributions. For example, more support for in-person strikes and solidarity funds (Wilkinson, 2022). This not only enhanced the coverage and voice of this rally but also represents how impactful the CUPE is when it commits to a goal for its members.

Due to the sheer support for this wage increase, the Ontario government repealed Bill 28. Next, the strike was noticed on November 16th, 2021, but the outcome was not finalized until December 2022. The CUPE workers were able to ratify a four-year deal that increases the wage by 3.59% or 14.4% compounded over the four years. This was feasible through a \$1 hourly wage increase to 55,000 workers (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2022). The Ontario education workers' strike exemplifies the lengths the CUPE will go to ensure their members not only get fair compensation but also long-term employment and sufficient staffing to support the education system properly. Through calculated pressure from strikes, solidarity with other unions, and a strong political presence to challenge Bill 28, the CUPE collective bargaining approach not only achieved its goals but also protected its workers.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) displays the contrast of the CUPE, with the UAW being a private sector union that has differing goals from a public one. The UAW represents workers in the automobile industry with ties to General Motors (GM), Stellantis, and Ford. A universal goal of private unions is to ensure workers are directly benefiting from company profitability. Additionally, other goals for private unions are to achieve cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), profit sharing, defined contributions, bonuses, and protection from outsourcing/layoffs. The automobile industry saw a "30% (increase) after the pandemic started. The average new vehicle is now close to \$50,000." (Domonoske, 2023). The car industry's new standard of cost went up, which enlarged profits; however, no wage increases were applied to UAW Detroit workers. So the UAW's main advocacies

are revealed from this predicament. Initially, the UAW pushed for a 40% pay raise over a four-year period. However, the big three car companies only offered half of what the UAW was requesting—20%. The way the negotiations went did not lead to any resolution, so UAW members went on strike on September 15th, 2023.

Though on October 25th, 2023, the strike produced significant results. A tentative agreement was reached. A part of this deal was an immediate 11% salary increase in the first year of four, with a total 25% salary increase over the next four and a half years. Additionally, \$5,000 would be given as a ratification bonus, and the return of COLA would occur. (Wikipedia-United Auto Workers strike, 2023). When including the COLA percentage, the true increase in salary would be 30% over this four-and-a-half-year agreement. To exemplify how impactful this strike and new agreement were for union members. A non-permanent worker at Ford would be making \$16.67 on average, but after this agreement, it would go up to \$24.91; furthermore, they would attain job security. (Wikipedia-United Auto Workers strike, 2023). This strike epitomizes how the UAW collective bargaining goals are to provide fair compensation tied to the company's profits, ensure job security, implement bonuses, and secure COLA.

The way public and private unions differ in goals is due to the bodies of people they represent and what particular benefits they need. Additionally, the goals set are based upon the pressures or challenges a union member faces in the workplace. The CUPE, or public unions, for instance, represent publicly funded jobs. They hold an emphasis on fair wages, sufficient funds to provide public services, resistance to privatization, maintaining and hiring effective employees, and long-term job security. This is illustrated by the CUPE challenging Bill 28 to ensure teachers in Ontario are receiving fair compensation for their educational duties. While, in contrast, the UAW does advocate for some similar core principles like fair wages and long-term employment, however, the UAW differs in that it advocates for profit sharing, COLA, and bonuses given based on company success. This is embodied by the 2023 UAW strike in Detroit. Union members fought for a wage increase due to the automobile market growth in cost. A successful strike achieved the UAW's goal of providing its members with 30% higher wages, COLA, and long-term employment.

The two unions both required a strike to achieve their collective bargaining goals; however, both parties utilized their leverage in different ways when formulating a strategy. Furthermore, differing pressures were applied to each union that also affected their role in shaping what course of action to take. The CUPE (public union) strategy was to garner public support, unite with unions that have similar goals, such as the OPSEU and BCTF, and apply political pressure to oppose constraints such as Bill 28. This action plan allowed them to champion fair wages and adequate levels of staff in Ontario schools. This strike formed a sense of importance and priority to resolve. Which is exactly what the CUPE wanted—attention to their issues. If the government ignored this matter, it would undermine any politician's reliability and accountability. This strategy, implemented by the CUPE to follow through with their collective bargaining strategy and goals, really exhibits the power of a community backing a cause.

In contrast, the UAW (a private union) cannot rely as much on public support for its causes, since the public is not technically directly impacted by its endeavours. So instead of utilizing public support as a main anchor of force, they leveraged their industrial action and the company's profitability to ensure their goals are met. The Detroit union workers strategized a walkout coordinated to create dysfunction among the Big Three (Ford, GM, and Stellantis) automobile factories. This walkout greatly disrupted the flow of production, which in turn impacted the profit margins of these companies. This put immense pressure on the car companies to comply with the demands of the union members. This is how they were able to achieve a 30% wage increase over four years, COLA, a \$5,000 bonus, and job security (Wikipedia-United Auto Workers strike, 2023). The UAW used precision to exploit the Big Three's economic income in their favour. In brief, public unions to a greater degree utilize the public and their influence to push for their collective bargaining terms, while private unions target the economic presence of a company to achieve their goals.

Public and private unions' priorities when in a collective bargaining phase are typically set differently. This stems from the type of work and the employer that union members encounter in their work environment. This is the determining factor for what a union should prioritize when advocating

for its members. Public unions, such as the CUPE, would place more emphasis on fair wages based on inflation, quality personnel, continuing or achieving high standards of public service, defined benefit pensions, and resisting privatization. Public unions generally desire to amass public support and to ensure that funds are utilized to their full potential. This is demonstrated with the CUPE teacher strike, where educational staff required wages to match inflation rates and to improve the quality of their teaching environments. Conversely, private union members are compensated from company revenue, not taxpayer dollars. So, private union members' wages are based on the success of a company. This means private unions like the UAW would prioritize guaranteed wage escalation based on the company's profitability. Additionally, for there to be COLA adjustments, bonuses, security to ensure no outsourcing or layoffs occur, and to provide profit sharing. This is what the 2023 UAW union members sought after in their strike against the Big Three. The UAW could not rely as much on collective opinion as a public union, due to its income stemming from an independent company and not a government entity. So private unions like the UAW targeted economic pressures rather than swaying public opinion to leverage their collective bargaining goals. This strategy led UAW members to achieve their prioritized objectives with a 30% pay increase, COLA, bonuses, and job security. (Wikipedia-United Auto Workers strike, 2023).

In conclusion, both public and private unions' overarching intent is to protect their workers and advocate for their issues. However, each implements different goals, strategies, and priorities founded on the environment a member is in and the diverse pressures they face. Public unions such as the CUPE generally prioritize wages that equal inflation rates, while private unions like the UAW would prioritize company profitability tied to workers' salaries. In comparison, both advocate for job security and safe working conditions. The main difference is that public unions emphasize more exposure to society to share their issues to ensure support for their political and bargaining effectiveness. In contrast, private unions exploit the economic presence of a company to ensure their bargaining goals are met. Ultimately, while both strategies differ in goals and priorities, they both can achieve the same results, with one being no more effective than another. Since it is solely based on the

environment and pressures a union member faces, that should determine the course of action to be taken to secure meaningful results.

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