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News Release

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New 33,000 member independent Canadian union created through decision of Canadian OPEIU members to separate from U.S. International union

Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union gains support of 74% of members for Canadian autonomy in just one month

Bal Harbour, Florida – A new 33,000 member independent Canadian union – the Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union – was created today when the Canadian National Committee of the Office & Professional Employees' International Union (OPEIU)'s unanimously voted to separate from the U.S.-based union and declare Canadian autonomy.

The new union will use the acronym COPE, says Jerri New, who becomes the union's national president and continues as president of BC-based COPE Local 378, formerly OPEIU 378. The Canadian National Committee made the decision during the International union's convention in Florida, she said.

New said that the Canadian National Committee declared autonomy using a provision of the International's constitution that allows Canadian members to decide to separate.

"We have had overwhelming support from Canadian members since this campaign began one month ago," New said. "More than 74% of our members in Canada have signed autonomy authorization forms and today we have made the historic decision to form a national union."

"Our members have democratically decided that it is time for Canadians to control our own union, in our own country," New said. "Despite regrettable attempts by the International union's executive to stop us from exercising our right under the constitution to become autonomous, we have succeeded with the strong support of our members."

New said COPE, which has members across the country, will continue to be affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress and provincial federations of labour. She said there will not be any changes in ongoing contractual relations with employers or in members' dues. A first convention of the new union will be held in Canada this fall.

"All existing collective agreements between employers and OPEIU locals will continue as before and union members' dues will remain the same," New said. "This is only a change in union name and structure." In Quebec the union will be known as Syndicat Canadien des employées & employés professionnels et de bureau and by the acronym SEP-B.

Serge Cadieux, the current director of SEP-B-Quebec who was acclaimed national COPE Secretary-Treasurer, said: "The new union has taken the necessary steps to make sure that in any labour dispute, all COPE members will get the same benefits as before."

“Furthermore, the creation of this new union means the over \$3 million formerly paid to the OPEIU in the United States will stay in Canada, for Canadian members,” Cadieux added.

COPE Local 378, formerly OPEIU Local 378, represents about 11,000 members in British Columbia, including workers at ICBC, BC Hydro, Terasen, Accenture, Hastings Racecourse, TransLink and other employers. Employers elsewhere in Canada include the Mouvement Desjardins, Laurentian Bank of Canada and Gaz Metropolitan in Quebec; Saskatchewan’s SGI Insurance; in Ontario: Ticketmaster, the Ombudsman, the Community Care Access Centre; and credit unions, trade union offices and other public and private sector employers across Canada.

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