PUBLIC SERVICE ALLIANCE OF CANADA – BC REGION
ACTIVIST SUMMIT
MOBILIZE MEMBERS • BUILD COLLECTIVE POWER • CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE

Participant Handouts

March 28-29, 2025

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Developed and adapted from PSAC B.C. Education, PSAC Prairies Education, PSAC National Education, and CLC Education

NOTES:

FAQ: Your Right to Be Politically Active

(updated January 2025)

PSAC members, like all Canadians, have the right to take part in the democratic process.

By voting, volunteering, or advocating for policies, you help shape the future of our communities and workplaces and strengthen our democracy. Your participation ensures that the needs and concerns of workers and their families are heard, making parliament more representative and responsive.

This FAQ explains how to exercise your political rights while following any necessary guidelines and restrictions, helping you avoid any issues at work.

Why is political participation important?

A healthy democracy depends on citizens being free to take part in choosing who governs and makes decisions for them. This involvement strengthens democracy and makes sure different perspectives are heard.

By getting involved in political activities, we can help shape policies that affect our lives and communities. This also keeps elected officials accountable, reminding them to act in the public's best interest.

Can PSAC members engage in political activities?

Yes, PSAC members are encouraged to take an active role in exercising their democratic political rights. Examples of permissible activities include:

- Wearing a party or candidate button in public.
- Placing an election sign on your property.
- Giving political opinions in public or elsewhere.
- Volunteering as a canvasser for a political party or candidate.
- Volunteering in a campaign office.
- Taking time off work to work on an election campaign.

- Participating in the formation of party or candidate policies.
- Taking part in election-day activities on behalf of a party or candidate.
- Attending peaceful demonstrations on political topics.
- Soliciting funds from the public for political campaigns and parties.
- Attending a political convention as a delegate.
- Writing letters to the editor endorsing a candidate or party.
- Running for political office.

What are the guiding principles for political participation?

When exercising your democratic rights, adhere to the following principles:

- Do not conduct any political activity on the job.
- Do not disclose your employment with the federal public sector or your specific employer when participating in campaign activities such as canvassing, making phone calls, or communicating opinions about election issues through social media.
- Do not wear your uniform or government identification at public meetings such as candidates' meetings.
- Do not use a vehicle that is marked as government-owned or belongs to your employer while participating in election-related activities.

What about PSAC members covered by the Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)?

Canadians have the right to freedom of expression under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This includes federal public service workers.

You have the right to take part in political activities during an election as long as it doesn't impact your ability to do your job without political bias (and is not reasonably perceived as impairing this ability).

Federal public service workers (except for deputy heads) can support or oppose a political party, help with activities for their party or candidate, and even run for office in a federal election.

However, some restrictions apply to PSAC members covered by the Public Service Employment Act, specifically:

- Political activities should not be carried out during your working hours.
- There are guidelines if you wish to be a candidate in a federal, territorial, municipal, or provincial election.

In addition, public service workers, including those who work for the federal government, will need to consider whether public comments they make or political activity they take part in impact their duties of loyalty and impartiality to their employer.

Public comments or political activity may impact these duties when they are critical of the current government or address topics that are relevant to the employee's job duties with the government.

- Your rights on social media during an election (https://psacunion.ca/your-rights-social-media-during-election)

Different workers will have different limits placed on them based on the nature of their job. In general, workers with higher levels of work responsibilities, higher public visibility in their role, or who do work related to the topics being criticized will be more at risk of breaching, or being perceived to breach, their duties than workers with lower levels of work responsibilities, who do not work in public-facing roles, or who do not do any work connected with the areas being criticized.

Although an employee of the federal or other government may be less likely to violate these duties to their own employer when engaging in provincial political issues, certain objectionable statements or actions not aimed at their employer may nonetheless be considered sufficient for such a violation to take place.

What should I do if I am unsure about a specific political activity?

If you are unsure whether a specific political activity is appropriate, contact your PSAC regional office for guidance.

What if I get in trouble for taking part in political activities?

If you're disciplined for participating in a political activity, you can file a grievance. Contact your Local or Component for help and inform your PSAC regional office right away.

Are there additional rules for running as a candidate in an election?

Yes, there are separate and special rules if you wish to be a candidate in a federal, territorial, municipal, or provincial election. Ensure you understand and comply with these rules by consulting your PSAC regional office.

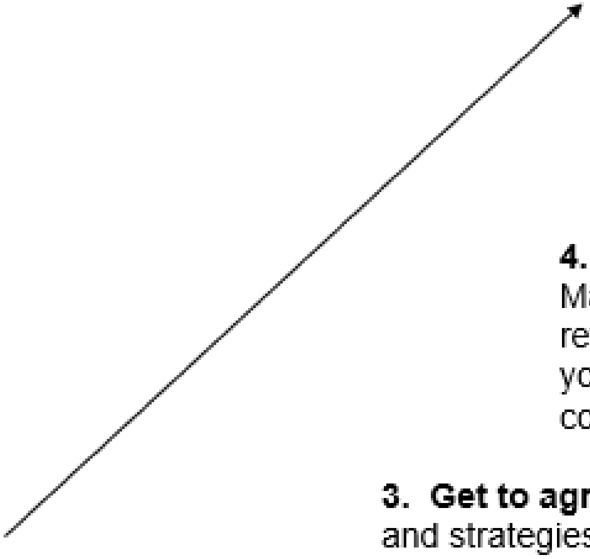
Who can I contact for more help?

If you have questions or need more guidance, contact your PSAC regional office. They can explain your rights and responsibilities and offer support if needed.

Handout 2

The 5 levels of conversation objectives

(Adapted from the model “Build and Win” by Jojo Geronimo)



5. Build a stronger relationship with the union in addition to waging a successful campaign.

4. Get their commitment: Make your ask. Leave time for reflection. If necessary, modify your ask. Record their commitment. Agree on next steps.

3. Get to agreement on the union's projects and strategies, and on the importance of being part of a union.

2. Engage the members: Build greater trust. Have an exchange of views. Demonstrate your concern by listening to what matters most to member (Note: at a deeper level, you are listening to the member’s hopes and fears, frustrations, values and beliefs).

1. Connect with members: Establish initial rapport and trust. Get to know each other and find out basic information about the member (e.g., type of work, shift hours, etc.). Get the member to talk about their concerns and what matters to them.

Handout 2

Solidarity Skills - Tough Conversations

(from the CLC Tough Conversations workshop, 2025)

The term “Solidarity Skills” was coined by Kai Lai, an educator with the United Steelworkers (USW). These are essential skills for union leaders and activists. They are a set of eight interrelated communication skills that help union leaders and activists navigate interpersonal and group conflict.

Skill 1 – Framing the issue

- Purpose: Engages another person in a discussion, without making them angry or defensive.
- Method: Name the issue using clear, specific and neutral language that is forward looking, not personal, and that doesn’t favour one person’s side of the issue.
- Examples: Change the following sentences:
    - “You run a terrible meeting”, to “chairing the meeting.”
    - “You never respond to my emails”, to “how we communicate with each other.”
    - “Why do I have to do everything?”, to “division of labour.”

Skill 2 – Body language

- Purpose: Helps control the environment, keep the space calm. Can de-escalate if emotions are running high. Creates a safe space for someone to be vulnerable and take a risk when talking to you about something that is important to them. Allows the other person to hear what you’re saying without being triggered by your body language.
- Method: Use body language to show calm, attentiveness and sincere interest in what the other person is saying.
- Example:
    - Face the speaker.
    - Look at the speaker with calm and openness.
    - Nod your head while listening (be careful to not show agreement).

  - Use encouraging sounds and words such as “Uh-huh” “I see”, “I understand”.

Skill 3 – Open-ended questions

- Purpose: To get more information about the other person’s perspective. To help the other person feel heard.
- Method: Ask questions that cannot be answered with “yes” or “no.”
- Examples:
  - So, what do you think about that? How does all this make you feel?
  - What is the difference between the situation then and now?
  - When you were given a disciplinary note, how did your workspace look?
  - What were things like before the incident?
  - You mentioned that a supervisor was involved. Why is this important to the story?

Skill 4 – Summarizing and restating key points

- Purpose: To emphasize important information by slowing down a conversation and not getting overwhelmed by information. The other person feels heard and is able to focus on what is most important. Summarizing works well when you’re not sure what to do or say next.
- Method: From your notes or by memory, every now and then, summarize or restate the person’s key points. Check to see if you are right. Follow up with an open-ended question about one of the main points.
- Examples:
  - Thanks, you’ve told me a lot. The main things are that you went to your manager about the situation (first point), you asked him to deal with it (second point), and that nothing has been done so far (third point). Is that right? Can you tell me more about the second point?

    - From what you've said, when you elected your executive, you wanted the local to take more action (first point). You're frustrated because even though they are trying their best (second point), some people are just disrupting union meetings and throwing them off their agenda (third point). Is that right? What's the result of the union meetings?

Skill 5 – Reflecting emotions/expressing empathy

- Purpose: To acknowledge how the other person is feeling, and how strong their emotions are. To defuse strong emotions so the other person can stay in the discussion. To predict possible future behaviours. And because emotions are important information in a conflict.
- Method: Name the speaker's emotions and ask the speaker to confirm that you're right. Follow up with an open-ended question.
- Examples:
    - You felt betrayed (emotion) when you heard that after twenty years working next to your co-worker, she spread a rumour about you behind your back. Is that how you feel? How did you feel about your co-worker before this happened?
    - It didn't seem like a big deal at the time, but you felt encouraged (emotion) and more confident (emotion) after speaking about it, am I right? How did your feelings change after what happened next?
    - You said that you were so angry (emotion) you were prepared to quit or do something else desperate, right? What is your "anger meter" telling you now?

Skill 6 – Understanding and valuing interests

- Purpose: To surface what's going on underneath the conflict. To understand the values, hopes and expectations that are at play. To correct incorrect assumptions and beliefs that are getting in the way of people understanding each other.

- Method: Be curious and ask questions with an open mind until you fully understand the other person's interests. Check to confirm that your understanding is correct.
- Examples:
  - Underneath everything you've told me, it seems that you're really looking for respect (interest). So, respect is an issue for you. Would you say that's true?
  - Beneath it all, it's like he's trying to build some solidarity (interest) in the local, even though the way he's doing it irritates people. So, the issue here is building solidarity in a positive way. Am I right?
  - So, by filing your own grievance, you're saying you're also doing it for everyone else in your department because really, everyone could benefit (group interest), not just you (personal interest). So, the issue covers both interests. Is that how you see it?

Skill 7 – Generating options, choosing a solution

- Purpose: To identify all the possible solutions to the conflict, with a view to choosing the solution(s) that meets both parties' needs.
- Method: Both parties brainstorm and make a list of all the possible options for a solution, no matter how outlandish or unrealistic. Then, assess options in whatever way the circumstances demand (for example, cost, need for others to be involved, etc.). Next, choose the options that meet both your interests, check to see what is doable, and clarify the selected option(s). Ensure all details are clear, and (if appropriate) write it up.
- Example:
  - One member wants to call the party a "Christmas party" and the other wants to call the party a "holiday party."
  - Step 1: Brainstorm list of all the options to resolve the conflict. Call it Christmas party…. call it holiday party…. call it something else…. mention all the seasonal holidays in the invitation…. hold a party at a different time of the year…. hold

    two separate parties….old a special membership meeting and vote…. flip a coin…. paper scissors rock…. have no party…. do whatever the employer does…. alternate years.
  - Step 2: Look at the list. Eliminate options you don't want to pursue. Look at the rest. Will any work for both parties? Variations on any? Keep talking, asking questions, and trying to understand each other. Be prepared to keep trying until you find a solution! It's worth it!

Skill 8 – Setting limits, taking action

- Purpose: To respond assertively in a situation when other skills don't work.
- Method: Describe problematic behavior (be specific) and describe impact of the problematic behaviour. Then give a warning and a consequence. As needed, follow through with consequence, or say what you need to happen in the future.
- Example:
  - Describe problematic behavior (be specific).
    - You've been shouting at me since you arrived.
    - You interrupted after you asked me to explain something to you.
    - This is the third time we've met to file a grievance based on your doctor's note. You still don't have your doctor's note.
  - Describe impact of the problematic behaviour.
    - Shouting at me only makes me feel angry at you, and I can't help you when we both feel this way.
    - Interrupting means that I can't give you the information you need, because lunch-hour is almost over.
    - Not having your doctor's note means there is no basis for filing a grievance.
  - Warning and consequence.
    - If you continue to shout at me, this meeting's over.

        - If you continue to interrupt, I will take it that you don't actually need the information you say you want.
        - If you don't give me the information to file your grievance, I won't follow up with you anymore.
    - Follow through with consequence (if problematic behavior doesn't stop) or say what you need to happen in the future (if it does).
        - In future, I want to make sure we hear what each of us has to say. Can we speak to each other in a respectful tone? I want to be helpful to you.
        - In future, please give me what I need to file the grievance. You know that we both face timelines for filing it I want to keep your trust in representing you effectively.

Setting limits and taking action in a difficult conversation on a polarized topic

These conversations can be especially stressful because they involve conflicts over personal values and take place in a context of heightened emotions and heightened rhetoric. There is a sense that the stakes are high, and that people are on one side or the other. Influencers in the media, social media and governments stoke these divisions and put pressure on people to choose sides.

Because of these dynamics it is important to keep your well-being at the forefront and enter the conversation with a safety plan in place. Your mental health and physical safety can depend on your being ready to set limits and take action if the conversation becomes unproductive, toxic, intimidating or threatening in any way.

While these sessions are encouraging us to listen to and try to understand positions we disagree with, we need to be prepared to interrupt someone to set limits and take action.

When to interrupt:

- The other person is blaming, accusatory, or inflammatory.

- The other person is talking about things they heard other people say – encourage them to focus on their experience.
- The other person's story is too short or too general – ask open ended questions to draw out more information.
- The other person's story is too long, too detailed, repetitive, or off topic – try to summarize and then ask a question that gets them back on topic.
- The other person is interrupting you, disagreeing, or showing a lot of negative or aggressive body language. Say what you are noticing (as above) and ask if they can respect what you are saying, like you respect what they are saying. Remind them that this is not the same as agreeing, and say this process is a chance to try working through their conflict in a different way than how they usually are with each other.

If you notice **you** are doing any of the above things, pause, apologize if helpful, and start again in a more productive way.

If the behaviour continues, use the technique above to end the conversation cleanly and firmly.

Handout 3

Scenarios – a one-on-conversation

Activity Instructions: Choose one of the four scenarios.

- **Small Group** – 10 Minutes to discuss how they might approach this conversation using the ***"The Five Levels of Conversation Objectives"***. Identify possible **"Solidarity Skills"** that would be useful for scenario. Take notes of your discussion.

- **Combined Group** - Join another group with the same scenario. Take 10 minutes to discuss - **Strategies they identified that would help them move through the one-on-one conversation in the scenario. What would work? What would be challenging?**

Scenario 1:
Ravinder is the President of his local union. Ravinder's national union sends out an e-newsletter about the importance of the upcoming election. Scottie is a member of Ravinder's local and is furious about the email – he asks Ravinder why his union dues are going towards politics.

Scenario 2:
Ramiro sits on the executive of his local union and is attending a meeting where they are discussing how to engage with the upcoming federal election. The President, Doris, suggests that they continue with the tradition of publishing a "report card" with each party's record on worker issues. Ramiro feels this is too political, and that the union should just stay out of politics.

Scenario 3:
Niall is a unionized public servant working for the federal government. Their department's steward, Garfield, approaches them in the lunchroom to ask if they will attend a rally in support of anti-scab legislation. Niall refuses, saying they are a public servant and must remain non-political – and that they expect their union to do the same.

Scenario 4:
Beverly recently began working and has joined a union for the first time in her working life – and she is keen to get involved. She has been friends with the local Conservative candidate, Chad, since high school. Chad gives Beverly an invitation to attend a rally with Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre coming up next week. When Beverly excitedly gives this invitation to her local union President, Toby, he scoffs and throws the invitation away. Beverly is upset and confused.

The Common Good

(*First published Mon Feb 26, 2018*)

In ordinary political discourse, the “common good” refers to those facilities—whether material, cultural or institutional—that the members of a community provide to all members in order to fulfill a relational obligation they all have to care for certain interests that they have in common. Some canonical examples of the common good in a modern liberal democracy include: the road system; public parks; police protection and public safety; courts and the judicial system; public schools; museums and cultural institutions; public transportation; civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of association; the system of property; clean air and clean water; and national defence. The term itself may refer either to the interests that members have in common or to the facilities that serve common interests. For example, people may say, “the new public library will serve the common good” or “the public library is part of the common good”.

As a philosophical concept, the common good is best understood as part of an encompassing model for practical reasoning among the members of a political community. The model takes for granted that citizens stand in a “political” or “civic” relationship with one another and that this relationship requires them to create and maintain certain facilities on the grounds that these facilities serve certain common interests. The relevant facilities and interests together constitute the common good and serve as a shared standpoint for political deliberation.[1] When citizens face various questions about legislation, public policy or social responsibility, they resolve these questions by appeal to a conception of the relevant facilities and the relevant interests. That is, they argue about what facilities have a special claim on their attention, how they should expand, contract or maintain existing facilities, and what facilities they should design and build in the future.

The common good is an important concept in political philosophy because it plays a central role in philosophical reflection about the public and private dimensions of social life. Let’s say that **“public life”** in a political community consists of a shared effort among members to maintain certain facilities for the sake of common interests. **“Private life”** consists of each member's pursuit of a distinct set of personal projects. As members of a political community, we are each involved in our community's public life and in our own private lives, and this raises an array of questions about the nature and scope of each of these enterprises. For example, when are we supposed to make decisions based on the common good? Most of us would agree that we are required to do so when we act as legislators or civil servants. But what about as journalists, corporate executives or consumers? More fundamentally, why should we care about the common good? What would be wrong with a community whose members withdraw from public life and focus exclusively on their own private lives? These are some of the questions that motivate philosophical discussions of the common good.

This article reviews the philosophical literature, covering various points of agreement among traditional conceptions of the common good, such as those favored by Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, Adam Smith, G.W.F. Hegel, John Rawls and Michael Walzer. It also covers some important disagreements, especially the disagreement between "communal" and "distributive" views. It concludes by considering three important topics in the literature: democracy, communal sharing, and competitive markets. In order to understand the issues, it is helpful to start by distinguishing the common good from various notions of the good that play a prominent role in welfare economics and welfare consequentialist accounts of political morality.

- 1. First Contrast: Welfare Consequentialism
- 2. Second Contrast: Public Goods
- 3. Why Does Political Philosophy Need This Concept? Defects in a "Private Society"
- 4. Central Features of the Common Good
    - 4.1 A Shared Standpoint for Practical Reasoning
    - 4.2 A Set of Common Facilities
    - 4.3 A Privileged Class of Common Interests
    - 4.4 A Solidaristic Concern

    - 4.5 A Nonaggregative Concern
- 5. Common Interests (i): Joint Activity
- 6. Common Interests (ii): Private Individuality
- 7. The Common Good Perspective: Communal or Distributive?
- 8. The Common Good in Politics: Democracy and Collective Decision-Making
- 9. The Common Good in Civic Life: Burden Sharing and Resource Pooling
- 10. Markets, Competition and the Invisible Hand
- 11. Conclusion: Social Justice and the Common Good
- Bibliography
- Academic Tools
- Other Internet Resources
- Related Entries

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/common-good/#CommGoodPersCommDist

The Common Good Approach regards all individuals as part of a larger community. As such, we share certain common conditions and institutions upon which our welfare depends. For society to thrive, we need to safeguard the sustainability of our community for the good of all, including our weakest and most vulnerable members. Some things that nurture a healthy, functioning community are: stable family life; good schools; affordable nourishment and health care; effective public safety; a just legal system; fair trade and commerce; a safe, well-managed ecosystem; an accessible technological environment; a well-maintained infrastructure; and a peaceful society.

The utilitarian principle weighs the net balance of goodness and harm produced by a certain action on a group of individuals, while this approach tests whether an action benefits or erodes a specific element of the common good. It weighs the effect on the fabric of the community. It encourages us to recognize how the freedoms and support we enjoy as individuals in pursuit of our own happiness are made possible by the sustained welfare of our community life. It invites us to ask what kind of society we are and want to become, and what actions we need to take to achieve that end.

Common Goods Examples

Examples of the common good in a modern liberal democracy include:

1. **Public Roads:** Roads serve as a critical infrastructure, facilitating transportation and commerce. They can connect communities, open new markets, and contribute to overall economic well-being. For instance, Route 66 played a significant role in American history, stretching from Chicago to Los Angeles, helping to spur economic growth and development in the towns along its path.
2. **Public Parks:** Parks provide an open area for the public to unwind, play sports, and connect with nature. They are areas that have been kept in trust for the enjoyment of individuals and families like the majestic Canadian National Parks, which provide enjoyment for millions of visitors each year.
3. **Police Services:** Police departments maintain peace and order, enforce laws, prevent crime, and protect citizens' lives and properties. Case in point, the New York Police Department (NYPD) has decreased New York City's crime rates due to their strategic enforcement practices.

4. **Civil Courts:** Civil courts resolve legal disputes between individuals and organizations where no criminal laws have been broken. The landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education, held in a US civil court, played a critical role in ending segregation in American public schools.
5. **Public Education:** Government-funded schools provide education to all children, regardless of their parents' income. Schools such as

Harvard-Westlake in Los Angeles are funded by the state and offer a premier education experience accessible to all students regardless of their financial standing.

6. **Museums:** Museums preserve and display artifacts and specimens for public education and enjoyment. For example, The Louvre in Paris attracts millions of visitors each year who come to see its world-renowned collection of art and historic artifacts.
7. **Public Transit:** Public transit systems provide reliable and affordable transportation options for all citizens. The London Underground, for instance, is a public service that connects the entirety of the London area and is used by millions of people every day.
8. **Civil Rights/Human Rights:** Civil rights ensure equal social opportunities and protections for all people, regardless of race, religion, or sex. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the United States is a prime example of legislation designed to end discrimination and uphold these crucial rights. Canadian Charter of Freedoms and Rights.
9. **Rules of Private Ownership:** These rules regulate the private ownership of property, specifying the rights, duties, and responsibilities of property owners. For instance, the deeds system in England clearly specifies the proprietorship over the plot and the buildings thereupon.
10. **Natural Resources:** These are materials or substances occurring in nature that can be exploited for economic gain. The oil fields in Saudi Arabia represent an excellent example of a natural resource which has been leveraged to create significant economic prosperity.
11. **National Defense:** This is the security and defence measures taken by a country to protect its citizens from foreign threats. The U.S. Department of Defense comprises a series of military and intelligence departments and agencies that work together to provide national security, as seen during events like Operation Desert Storm.

12. **A Strong Economy:** A robust economy has a diverse mix of industries, low unemployment, and steady growth. The German economy, with its strong manufacturing sector and low unemployment rates, is a clear illustration of this.

13. **Public Health Policy:** These are government regulations and laws aimed at promoting and protecting public health. Programs like the Affordable Care Act in the U.S. represent public health policies designed to extend health insurance to millions of uninsured Americans. Canadian Medicare

14. **Recycling Programs:** These programs are efforts by local jurisdictions or municipalities to reduce waste and to promote the reuse of materials. For instance, San Francisco's recycling program successfully diverts about 80% of its waste from landfills, one of the highest diversion rates in the country.

15. **Internet Access:** This utility allows users global connectivity for communication, education, and commerce. The South Korean government's initiative to provide high-speed internet nationwide is an excellent example of public investment into universal internet access.

16. **Zoos:** Zoos offer the public opportunities for wildlife appreciation, as well as taking part in conservation and research efforts. The San Diego Zoo, renowned for its size and commitment to conservation, is a prime example.

17. **Libraries:** Libraries provide public access to a vast amount of books, electronic resources, and other learning materials. The New York Public Library system, one of the largest public libraries in the United States, is an example of providing extensive resources and promoting literacy to the larger community.

18. **Postal Service:** Postal services are responsible for the delivery of parcels and mail, contributing to a well-functioning communication system. The U.S. Postal Service, for example, delivers to every address in the United States, regardless of geographic location.

19. **Fire Departments:** Fire departments protect life and property by responding rapidly to emergency situations. The Fire Department

of New York City, one of the largest in the world, showcases how this vital service can be effectively managed.

20. **Clean Water Systems:** These systems treat and distribute water for domestic and industrial usage. Singapore’s NEWater, for example, is a renowned system turning treated wastewater into high purity water.

21. **Social Security:** This program provides monetary benefits for the elderly, disabled, and surviving families of deceased workers. The Social Security Administration is a key example of a program providing this essential safety net for those in need.

22. **Emergency Medical Services:** These services provide immediate care for illnesses and injuries, along with transportation to medical facilities. London’s Air Ambulance Charity provides a rapid response to serious trauma emergencies in London and is a key aspect of the city’s emergency medical infrastructure.

23. **Food Safety Regulations:** These laws protect consumers against foodborne illnesses by setting standards for food production and handling. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is an example of an agency that enforces these critical regulations.

24. **Public Broadcasting:** Public broadcasting disseminates information and entertainment to the public through television, radio, and other media tools. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), offers news, education, and entertainment programming to millions of viewers worldwide.

25. **Consumer Protection Laws:** These laws are designed to prevent businesses from engaging in fraud or unfair practices, to protect individuals from scams. An example of this is the Fair Trade Commission in the U.S., which deals with issues that touch the economic life of every American.

Common Good Origins

Different philosophers have distinct understandings of what the common good is.

The concept has evolved through the work of numerous thinkers including Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Niccolò Machiavelli, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, James Madison, Adam Smith, G. W. F. Hegel, John Rawls, and many more.

The first conception of the common good was set out by the ancient Greeks. Aristotle's understanding of the common good, for example, is still widely used today. It refers to something that is good for the community as a whole and can only be achieved if the members of the community cooperate with one another. It can be shared and enjoyed by each member of that community (Dupré, 1993).

Modern Conceptions of the Common Good

The common good tends to refer to a person or group's understanding of what actions are best for achieving maximum good for a group of people.

These shared interests can be material, cultural or institutional.

According to Rawls (1999), the common good is made up of the facilities and interests that the members of a political community consider relevant. These facilities and interests are the mutual center of political deliberation. Similarly, Finnis (2011) uses the term to refer to a set of facilities and a set of interests.

When citizens make political decisions about legislation, public policy, or social questions, they use the conception of the common good outlined above.

They discuss which facilities can claim prominence, how the citizens should expand, contract, or maintain existing facilities, and what new facilities they must create.

However, different groups define it in different ways. For example:

- **Individualistic Societies:** The common good is often defined by the West as the conditions through which all individuals can achieve maximal personal happiness.

- **Collectivist Societies**: Collectivist societies, on the other hand, see the common good as the conditions through which the community as a whole thrives and maintains its integrity, with emphasis on the sacrifice and subservience of individuals to the collective. They tend to be more coercive to minimize the free rider effect (Jaede, 2017).

Common Good Characteristics

According to Hussain (2018), most conceptions of the common good share certain essential characteristics. These include:

1. **A shared pattern of practical reasoning:** the common good is not only about taking the right actions but also about having the right attitude and motivation. A way of thinking and acting that represents the right level of care and concern among the members of the community. To adhere to the conception, the actions and thoughts of the members must align with this pattern.
2. **A set of common facilities:** Most ideas about the common good involve certain facilities that citizens have a responsibility to maintain because they serve shared interests. These can be things found in nature or things created by humans (e.g., hospitals, schools, etc.). The most important facilities are social institutions and practices.
3. **A privileged class of common interests:** citizens are thought to have an obligation to create and maintain facilities because these serve the relevant shared interests. These interests are common because every citizen has these interests to a similar degree. Examples include: the interest in taking part in a certain way of life (Aristotle, Politics), the interest in bodily security and property (Locke, 1821; Rousseau, 1762), the interest in a system of equal basic rights (Rawls, 1999), and many more.
4. **A solidaristic concern:** Most ideas about the common good involve a way of thinking and acting that aligns with the idea of solidarity. Solidarity is a kind of mutual support and cooperation that is often necessary in social relationships. For example, when a friend needs a place to stay, friendship means offering him a place to sleep.

Friendship requires us to think about our friends' needs as if they were our own.

5. **A non-aggregative concern:** Most conceptions of the common good do not treat the satisfaction of individual interests as commensurable.

Conclusion

The term "common good" or "the common good" has no universally-agreed-upon definition. It refers to different things in economics, political science, and philosophy (specifically ethical dilemmas). This article focused on the common good as a philosophical concept. As is evident from the discussion above, this concept is a flexible one even within philosophy.

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How Jane McAlevey Transformed the Labor Movement

The renowned organizer and theorist has a terminal-cancer diagnosis. But she has long been fighting the clock.

By Eleni Schirmer

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Jane McAlevey photographed at her apartment in New York City, in July, 2023.Photographs by Sara Messinger for The New Yorker

This past January, Jane McAlevey spent a week in Connecticut leading an organizing blitz. In union parlance, a blitz is a quick, concentrated organizing effort, designed to engage as many workers as possible in a short period of time. The campaign's goals were ambitious—to bring some twenty-five thousand home health-care workers into a fight not just against their bosses but against the broader social and economic problems weighing on them, including issues such as a lack of affordable housing, insufficient public transportation, and the need for debt relief. For seven days, McAlevey and about two hundred other organizers went door to door, talking to thousands of people—mostly Black and brown women employed by nursing homes, group homes, and home health-care companies. McAlevey and her team told them, "This is a new program to bring power all of you have, but often aren't aware of, to the table."

For McAlevey, one of the nation's preëminent labor organizers and strategists, the project presented a chance to revisit a strategy that she had advanced twenty-some years ago in Stamford, Connecticut, known as the "whole worker" method. In the nineties, a lack of affordable housing in Stamford—located in one of the wealthiest counties in the country—overshadowed nearly every other issue on workers' minds. This was not a problem that could be solved by unions alone, but unions, if strategically harnessed, had the horsepower to fight it. McAlevey began organizing workers in four different sectors—janitors, cabdrivers, city clerks, and nursing-home aides—and determined that they could exert influence through the city's churches. ("Note to labor," McAlevey wrote about this campaign, years later. "Workers relate more to their faith than to their job, and fear God more than they fear the boss.") Soon the city's most powerful preachers were hosting bargaining sessions in church basements. By the time the campaign finished, more than four thousand workers had their first union and new contracts to boot. Their efforts also saved multiple public-housing projects from demolition, won fifteen million dollars for the units' improvements, and secured new ordinances that mandated affordable-housing levels going forward.

In the intervening decades, McAlevey has become not just an expert organizer but a social scientist of organizing's methodology. She has written four books that have become touchstones for a new generation of labor leaders. Rather than instructing organizers to run as hard as they can in whatever direction they happen to be facing, McAlevey emphasizes strategy. She advises organizers to first conduct what she calls a power-structure analysis, which asks who has the power to change an issue (not always the most obvious targets) and what power workers have to influence those actors. She then leads workers through a series of escalating actions, from attending a meeting to wearing buttons to work to joining walkouts: she calls these "structure tests." During the past decade, Amazon warehouse workers and Los Angeles teachers have drawn on McAlevey's approach. (McAlevey informally advised the New Yorker Union during negotiations for its first contract, which was signed in 2021.) If at any point during this past hot labor summer, or the decade leading up to it, you encountered a group of workers strutting on a picket line or jubilantly making demands well beyond the scope of their own wages, chances are that many of them had been reading McAlevey.

When McAlevey went back to Connecticut this past winter, she hoped that the campaign would form the basis for a book about the whole-worker methodology. The project is significant for two reasons. First, it's her most ambitious research effort to date, involving not only tens of thousands of health-care workers but also their churches, tenants' unions, and neighborhood councils. Unions generally limit their organizing sphere to the workplace, leaving broader social issues to political campaigns. But this approach cedes what McAlevey calls the third front of power: workers' relationships to their communities. Without this degree of coördination, workers were unlikely to achieve anything close to their goals, which include winning a twenty-five-dollar-an-hour minimum wage and affordable health insurance.

More fundamentally, the project is likely to be McAlevey's last. In September 2021, she was diagnosed with a high-risk variety of multiple myeloma. Since her diagnosis, each treatment option that her medical team has offered her has failed, faster than expected. Days prior to leading the blitz this January, McAlevey was hospitalized to receive an emergency treatment; she was thought to be living her last days. She persuaded doctors to release her—she had a blitz to lead, and the clock was running out.

For McAlevey, relentlessness is a way of life. She talks fast, swears often, is blunt to the point of brashness, laughs easily. She has little tolerance for mediocrity, particularly on the left. Trade-union leadership, she once remarked, "choose every day . . . to lose." When I was preparing to visit her in New York, on a cloudy April weekend, McAlevey sent me an agenda for my stay: on Saturday, we had drinks with an organizer, dinner at seven, and then all serious conversation wrapped up by tipoff. It was the Warriors vs. the Kings, Game One of the playoffs. McAlevey, who has lived part time in the Bay Area for the past twenty years, is a diehard Golden State fan.

When I arrived at McAlevey's place, a rent-controlled apartment in Manhattan, she welcomed me warmly, in jeans, heeled sandals, and a Warriors jersey. For most of her recent public events, she had taken to wearing a wig, concealing the effects of chemotherapy, but at home she goes without. When I visited, a layer of fine, downy hair was just beginning to grow back.

I sat at the table while she bustled around, making salad and thawing a jar of homemade pesto for pasta. When I had first approached her about writing this piece, she'd told me that she didn't want her cancer diagnosis to appear in the story. This was understandable but not possible: among other things, doing so would require me to strip a thread from McAlevey's life. When Jane was about three years old, her mother, Hazel McAlevey, who was very ill with breast cancer, was taken to live elsewhere, in order to prevent Jane from witnessing her mother's decline. At age forty-four, Hazel died. Jane was five.

The family lived in Sloatsburg, forty miles outside New York City. There, Jane's father, John McAlevey, became a politician, winning office first as the mayor and then as a supervisor in the county. Jane spent most of her early years grubby and unsupervised, trailing her older siblings everywhere. She became dearly attached to her older sister Catherine, who became the family's caretaker as a young adolescent. As her reward for doing all the cooking, cleaning, tending, minding of the house, and minding of the children, Catherine was granted the largest bedroom, replete with a stereo, a television, and a prime location next to the bathroom. "I would do anything to get into that room," Jane recalled. Though the younger siblings envied Catherine's belongings, she was the heart of the family. "We always said she was the most loved McAlevey," Jane recalled, "because she was everyone's sister, mother. She played every role."

Raising seven kids on the wages of one public servant was difficult. When Jane was around ten, her father nearly went bankrupt, an experience that Jane only later understood as an embarrassment. Around this time, he remarried. At odds with her stepmother, Jane left home at age sixteen. As her stepbrother explained, "Jane was always at the bottom of something awful growing up. Her mother was taken off to die. Our father had no clue how to take care of family. And Jane was always at the bottom of the pile."

For a time, McAlevey stayed with her older sister Bri, who was living in a radical co-op in Manhattan, before enrolling at SUNY Buffalo, where she waited tables to pay for her schooling. When Governor Mario Cuomo proposed tuition hikes, she got swept up in campus organizing. As she told me, "I literally could not afford more than two hundred dollars a semester." In her first semester at SUNY, Jane and others packed bus after bus with enraged students to register their complaints in Albany. Cuomo dropped his proposed increase. SUNY students claimed the victory.

Shortly thereafter, McAlevey ran a successful campaign for president of the student body at SUNY Buffalo, as part of a slate whose platform was no tuition increases, no rent increases, no military-defense programs on campus, and no athletic fees. McAlevey effectively began working full time as the president of the Student Association of State University of New York. Divestment from apartheid South Africa had been a priority for SUNY student organizers for more than a decade, but Janice Fine, a former S.A.S.U. student organizer who is now a labor-studies professor at

Rutgers, told me that their efforts had been poorly focussed. McAlevey changed that, shifting the target from the SUNY chancellor, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., to Governor Cuomo. As Fine explained, “We went from targeting somebody who was an appointed official to someone who was elected, someone much more vulnerable to national perception.” In 1985, the board of trustees voted to divest $11.5 million in stock from companies who did business in apartheid South Africa.

McAlevey got her first job in the labor movement running the Stamford, Connecticut, campaign. Afterward, she was hired by the Service Employees International Union (S.E.I.U.) to organize hospital workers in Las Vegas. McAlevey wrote in a memoir, “The union had no discernible power in any field. The workers were weak as hell in terms of anything that had to do with organizing or mobilizing. And I’d been sent there to clean the place up in general, and specifically to organize new hospital workers into the union.”

Inspired by union tactics from the thirties, McAlevey began running open bargaining sessions, in which hundreds of workers sat head to head with the boss. “The idea is to demonstrate to the boss and to the workers themselves that the workers are standing together and the union is in charge,” McAlevey wrote, years later. Rather than having negotiators present demands, she identified workers who were passionate about each issue, and could speak directly to the employer about patient-nurse ratios, schedules, or wages. Fredo Serrano, a local nurse, told me, “Jane could figure out people. She knew what we needed. She knew where the influence had to be. She knew who the leaders were.”

During one session, workers found themselves facing off against a notoriously hostile management negotiator, who was also a vigorous gum chewer. The more irritated he became, the louder he would chomp, scornfully blowing bubbles. “It became an outward sign of his contempt for the workers and for Jane,” Kristin Warner, a fellow-organizer, recalled. During a break, a worker wondered how the negotiator would respond if everyone started chewing gum. Jane and the staff organizers jumped at the idea and ran out to get supplies. The next time the negotiations hit an impasse, two hundred health-care workers in the bargaining room carefully unwrapped their gum and chewed it—one loud, smacking wall.

But McAlevey's vision of a worker-led, militant union put her at odds with the national union's leaders, who hoped that the union would strike a deal with hospital corporate leadership. In the fall of 2006, when Vegas hospital workers were on the verge of a strike, the S.E.I.U.'s national legal leader called McAlevey. "It was a most unusual phone call," McAlevey told me. The legal leader warned McAlevey that the national union had just renegotiated a national labor-peace accord; strikes were now off the table. If the locals disobeyed the national's directives, they could run the risk of being placed under trusteeship, removing much of their hard-earned democratic character. (The S.E.I.U. declined to comment.)

McAlevey told all of the worker leaders to come to her house for an emergency meeting. When they arrived, McAlevey explained the choice: they could follow national orders and call off their strike vote, or they could go forward with their plan and risk having their union doors padlocked by the national leadership. The group agreed to proceed with the strike vote. "Those workers didn't give a shit. We were doing this," McAlevey said. When the team notified the national legal staff the next morning, McAlevey knew that it would be only a matter of time until she would have to leave the S.E.I.U.

Within weeks, Jane received another life-changing phone call: her sister Catherine had just been diagnosed with breast cancer. Jane got on the next flight to New York, where Catherine lived. "We spent forty-eight hours hugging and crying, and then making a plan, with me committing to regularly come home to visit," McAlevey said. Like Jane, Catherine had long blond hair. "I told Catherine's partner that when the first sign of hair falling out happened, to call me, and I'd be there," McAlevey recalled. Weeks later, McAlevey was sitting with her sister at a wig store in New York, holding her hand while her sister's head got shaved, clumps of hair falling to the floor. "Catherine was crying so hysterically, they had to keep stopping with the razor," McAlevey told me. "I just remember thinking to myself, Act like you're going to get through this."

Her sister's diagnosis confirmed a deep foreboding. As McAlevey put it, "I always believed I was going to die in my early forties from breast cancer, just like my mother." In early 2008, roughly a year into treatments, Catherine learned that she carried a BRCA1 gene mutation that is associated with increased risks of aggressive cancer. Catherine's results prompted Jane to get tested. She was positive. Preventive surgeries revealed that she had early-stage ovarian cancer. As McAlevey wrote some years later, "The fuse was lit and burning early in my 40s. Just like my mother. Just like my sister."

Organizing is not an art of telling people what to do, McAlevey explains, but of listening for what they cannot abide.

During the next year, McAlevey recovered from multiple surgeries related to her ovarian cancer and the BRCA1 gene. Stuck at home, she began writing. The resulting book, her memoir, "Raising Expectations," reads like a shotgun spray, a fusillade of labor-organizing battle stories. Some of Jane's mentors, including the sociologist Frances Fox Piven, wanted something more measured. Piven nudged her toward graduate school to work through her insights. So, just weeks shy of forty-five, McAlevey enrolled in a sociology doctoral program at CUNY Graduate Center.

McAlevey spent her second summer of graduate school in the Adirondacks, on a writing retreat at the Blue Mountain Center, to finish revisions of "Raising Expectations." One Friday in August, Catherine and her partner were planning to pick up McAlevey to spend the weekend in Saratoga Springs. But, the day before, Harriet Barlow, a mentor of Jane's and the director of the Blue Mountain Center, approached Jane to let her know that her sister's partner was on the phone. She told Jane that Catherine's cancer was back. "I walked out of the office, and I remember looking at Harriet and saying, 'My sister's going to die,'" McAlevey recalled. The following spring, Catherine passed away.

McAlevey, who had taken time away from graduate school to care for Catherine, returned to CUNY to finish her degree. Shortly after she graduated, her dissertation was published as a book, "No Shortcuts," dedicated to Catherine. "No Shortcuts" describes three common pathways to create change: advocating, mobilizing, and organizing. Advocacy relies on lawyers, consultants, and lobbyists to secure one-time wins, often via backroom deals. Mobilizing draws in activists to participate in rallies or protests. McAlevey distinguishes both of these activities from organizing, which she defines as something stronger and more abiding. For McAlevey, organizing means that "ordinary people help make the power analysis, design the strategy, and achieve the outcome." The book outlines the key elements of McAlevey's method, from conducting a power-structure analysis and stress tests to identifying leaders in the rank and file. But it also offers a radical theory of power. Organizing is not an art of telling people what to do, McAlevey explains, but of listening for what they cannot abide. "Anger is there before you are," the opening page of "No Shortcuts" declares. "Channel it, don't defuse it."

Almost instantly, "No Shortcuts" became an underground bible of organizing. In the summer of 2017, a West Virginia history teacher named Jay O'Neal started a labor-themed reading group with some colleagues. "We were, like, the teaching conditions suck in West Virginia," he told me. "How can we get our unions moving and doing something?" McAlevey's distinctions between advocacy, mobilizing, and organizing gave the group language for their frustration, and her emphasis on power structures helped them decide to target the state legislature. "It's like when you're growing up and you hear, like, a love song, and you're, like, Oh, that's exactly how I've been feeling," O'Neal explained. Within months, O'Neal and his colleagues led a statewide walkout that set off the #RedForEd teachers' strikes. In 2017, the leaders of Los Angeles's teachers' union had a chapter-by-chapter discussion of "No Shortcuts" that guided the buildup to the union's successful strike in 2019.

McAlevey's influence spread to other progressive struggles. Naomi Klein, the leading climate activist and writer, told me that McAlevey's focus on winning helped the movement to reframe the climate crisis as a power struggle. "We're not losing because people don't know there's a problem," Klein told me. "We're losing because there are vested interests who may not be large in number, but they are mighty in their political and economic power." McAlevey's work, she went on, asked, "Where's your war room? Where's your power map? Have you stress-tested?" I recently found myself talking to a McGill professor from Nigeria who studies African diasporic social movements. "Oh, Jane!" she exclaimed, when I told her about this piece. "My Nigerian comrades have trained with her."

Some union organizers similarly concerned with building worker power have wondered if McAlevey's path from union complacency to union militancy breezes over a critical component: union democracy. Mike

Parker—a veteran labor organizer, educator, and author, who died last year—once observed that workers often must win the fight for the union presidency before they can win the fight with the boss. But such struggles get little airtime in McAlevey's work. "It's as if she hopes that current leaders will see the light and 'empower' their members from above," Parker wrote. Others have taken this argument further, charging McAlevey with an overreliance on professional staff at the expense of a radically empowered rank-and-file. McAlevey throws up her hands at this critique. "The idea that you're just gonna beat Amazon when you've never run a campaign in your life is, like, seriously? Gimme a fucking break," she told me.

After Amazon workers in Alabama failed to unionize, in the spring of 2021, McAlevey published a column in *The Nation* about the campaign's weak points. "When there are more outside supporters and staff being quoted and featured in a campaign than there are workers from the facility, that's a clear sign that defeat is looming," she wrote. The piece drew heated criticism. Some saw it as punching down. Union leadership blamed high employee turnover for their failures. McAlevey, however, stood by her assessment. "When you do something that's stupid, I'm gonna call it out," she told me. "I will not take a word of that article back."

What some may perceive as arrogance is perhaps better understood as impatience. McAlevey has no time to waste. In fact, none of us do. She just perceives this scarcity more acutely than most. In recent months, she said, she has been working harder than ever: "I feel great and I feel horrible. I feel frenetic."

In March of 2022, after five months of intensive chemotherapy, McAlevey received a stem-cell transplant. For three months, she sealed herself in her apartment, recovering, but also revising a new book, which had just received peer reviews. Published this spring, "Rules to Win By," which she co-authored with Abby Lawlor, is part theory and part nuts and bolts; its focus is McAlevey's strategy of using big, open bargaining sessions to secure winning contracts.

When autumn arrived, McAlevey, who is a senior policy fellow at the Labor Center at the University of California, Berkeley, joined thousands of her U.C. co-workers on strike. One day, on the picket line, she collapsed—probably the result of a long bike ride the day before, she thought. She went to the hospital, where a panel of blood work revealed that the stem-cell transplant had failed; a treatment that typically results in five to seven years of remission had lasted her less than a year. McAlevey was put on high-dose chemotherapy and underwent radiation treatments on her hip and jaw.

By Christmas, it became clear that the treatment plan wasn't working. The most promising treatment for multiple myeloma was a course of cellular immunotherapy, but McAlevey's doctors believed that her condition wasn't stable enough to make her a promising candidate. "It wasn't worth it to any doctors to get me in their clinical trials," McAlevey told me. Uncharacteristically, she paused. "That was pretty intense."

Shortly after the New Year, a group of McAlevey's closest friends met at her home in California to help arrange her affairs. Together, they packed up nearly fifty boxes of McAlevey's favorite belongings—clothing, pottery, art work, jewelry, books—which would be sent to close friends and family upon her death. The next week, she flew to New York to begin an intensive treatment regimen at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. If this treatment did not take, she would be heading to hospice. Friends and family from around the world lined up next to her hospital bed, crying, telling her they loved her. "I called it death tourism," McAlevey told me. She was grateful for it.

When the treatment ended, with no hitches, McAlevey began negotiating her release. The blitz in Connecticut was to start at the end of the month. "I mean, I hadn't reacted badly to any of their tests or treatments," she told me. "I just wanted them to let me the hell out of here. And my doctor was, like, We're not getting you out of here to go do some crazy thing with a bunch of people, and I said, 'Yeah, actually, you are.' " McAlevey, the expert negotiator, won.

By this past spring, Jane had defied doctors' predictions: she was not dead. This piece of good news coincided with another—"Rules to Win By" was about to launch. On March 25th, McAlevey's friends held a party to toast her accomplishments, including still being alive and completing a book.

The party was at the People's Forum, a political-education and event space in midtown Manhattan. In the morning, fifty or so guests joined a live discussion of McAlevey's legacy for the podcast "The Dig." McAlevey, who was wearing jeans, puffy purple shoes, and a sleeveless, peach blouse, took the stage, along with her interviewer, the *Jacobin* editor Micah Uetricht. Uetricht lobbed slow, arching questions at McAlevey that allowed her to reflect on her life's work. Organizing is a craft. Everyone can do it, but it depends on concrete methods and skills. "Every day, for organizers, there's a strategic choice, the possibility of choosing a way to win. I write books to call people out and say, 'Let's try to win today,' " McAlevey explained.

When the session ended, I looked around the room. A few rows from me, an older, mustached man wearing a flannel shirt caught my eye. I recognized him as Marshall Ganz, a famed labor organizer with Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers campaign, who is widely credited with developing the grassroots model for Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential run. Speaking softly, almost musically, he told me, "Jane and I, we belong to the same church. We fundamentally believe that people have power—not as props, not as resources, but as people with agency." We were among the last guests still in the room when he pulled out his phone and began reading me a Mary Oliver poem that, he said, reminds him of McAlevey. "I look upon time as no more than an idea," Ganz read. "Each body a lion of courage, and something / precious to the earth."

By evening, the rows of folding chairs had been cleared out to make a dance floor, bottles of wine and champagne had replaced the coffee carafes, and hot trays of catered Lebanese food lined the back walls. McAlevey had changed out of her jeans and wore a sweeping red dress and heels, with her head bare. The crowd milled around, sipping champagne, until the party's m.c.s, two comedians, announced the first activity: Icebreaker Jane Bingo. Everyone received a bingo grid with squares containing phrases like "Too intimidated by Jane to hit on her"; "Have a selfie with Bernie Sanders"; "Are also dying."

In a toast, Janice Fine, Jane's longtime friend and comrade, reported that McAlevey had fired her from the party-planning committee. "I was making things too emotional," she chuckled. Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land, a friend of Jane's from graduate school at CUNY and a criminal-justice professor at the University of Winnipeg, teased, "Well, Jane, if you had known your life was going to be cut short, do you think you would have come to Winnipeg three times? Joke's on you." Dobchuk-Land told of a time when Jane took a very pregnant Bronwyn on a vigorous walk to the top of Winnipeg's "Garbage Hill," precipitating Bronwyn's labor. While Bronwyn was in the hospital, Jane cleaned her house, stocked her fridge, and did her laundry. She was the first friend to hold Bronwyn's daughter. "And I believe she planned it that way," Dobchuk-Land said. "To know Jane is to be organized by her." ♦

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https://www.newyorker.com/news/persons-of-interest/how-jane-mcalevey-transformed-the-labor-movement