

The Spark!



September 2011

Official Newsletter of CUPE Local3909

Proudly Representing Teaching Assistants, Grader-Markers, Tutors, Librarians, Lab Demonstrators, Seminar Leaders, Student and Sessional Instructors at the University of Manitoba



Proudly representing
student and sessional/contract academics
working at the University of Manitoba

Calling All Members!

The fall General Membership Meeting has been set for

**Wednesday, September 28, 2011
1:00 - 2:30 pm
GSA Lounge (217 University Centre)**

Executive Reports include:

***Collective Agreement Negotiations
Financial Reports
By-Laws Revisions
Website Development***

PLUS!

The Unit 2 Survey Draw
- 8 GB iPod touch -

***Food Buffet
*Coffee, Tea
*Cold drinks**

The Spark!



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Welcome

Welcome to all new members of CUPE 3909. This Union Local exists to provide a collective voice during negotiations for the collective agreements that govern your employment and to protect and enforce those collective agreements during the period of your employment. We invite you to call or visit the office if you are seeking information relating to the Local's operations and/or your workplace and membership issues. There are two general membership meetings per year and all our members are encouraged to attend. Our newsletter is designed to keep our members informed of information of interest to CUPE 3909 specifically and the labour movement in general. The Spark is published ten times per year and is sent to you via the listserve or through interdepartmental mail.

Unions are, by nature, participatory and respond to members' demands. For this reason, it is important that you communicate all of your questions, concerns and issues to the office or to the executive. Most importantly, please read your contract and the Collective Agreement for your bargaining group (Unit 1 if you are a Teaching Assistant, Grader/Marker, Tutor, Lab Demonstrator, Seminar Leader, or Student Lecturer; Unit 2 if you are a Sessional Instructor, Sessional/Part Time Librarian, Counsellor, or Music Teacher). If there are points that you do not understand or if you find that during the course of your employment the agreement is violated, please contact the office or email your VP. The Local will help you determine how to proceed.

We Can Help!

- Advice on issues of concern to you as a university employee
- Information and support when you think your rights have been violated
- Investigation and Initiation of formal complaints (grievances) against U of M on your behalf
- Assistance with Employment Insurance Claims
- Referrals to additional sources of help when you have any problem
- Answers to questions about your rights and duties
- Union officers to represent you or accompany you when disagreements arise
- Support for visa students facing bureaucratic hang-ups
- Guidance in dealing with student complaints
- Tips on handling differences with your professor / employment supervisor.

President's Message

Welcome Members of CUPE 3909!

On behalf of your elected executive, I welcome all new and returning members of CUPE 3909. As a student or sessional academic employee of the University of Manitoba you are automatically a member of the union.

As the democratically elected executive of the local, it is our duty to assist you in any way that we can. On behalf of the membership we bargain and enforce the collective agreements that regulate your employment here at the University. If your rights have been violated, or you suspect your rights as an employee have been violated, please contact us immediately. It is our job to fight for you, so please let us know when we can be of assistance. Whether it is filing a grievance on your behalf, joining you in a meeting with a supervisor, or simply clarifying your rights in the collective agreement, we are here to work for you.

As a Union we face many challenges. Workers at the U of M continue to face the specter of reduced course offerings, larger class sizes, greater reliance on pre-recorded lectures and fewer TA hours as a result of the U of M's continued "Resource Optimization Projects." While the full effect of these projects on CUPE 3909 members as workers has yet to be seen, we know that these projects have led to the privatization of many university services to date.

Another major issue for our Union this year is the upcoming contract negotiations for Unit 2,

sessional academics. The contract for sessional academics expired at the end of August 2011, and the bargaining unit will be negotiations with the University in the coming months to try and reach a new agreement. Given both the climate for private sector collective bargaining in Manitoba, where two-year wage freezes are the norm, and the hardline tactics used by the University in last year's Unit 1 negotiation, we expect this to be a difficult round of bargaining. As we learned with Unit 1, the University only made the most basic concessions once the membership showed their support of their bargaining committee with an overwhelming strike mandate. Look for regular updates from your bargaining committee over the next several months.

I also wish to remind you that our Union is a progressive economic and political organization and that it belongs to you. Your Union is only as strong as its membership is active and organized, so I invite you all to get involved with your Union. Attend membership meetings, get involved in awareness campaigns, join committees, become an activist and volunteer to pound the pavement, stamp the envelopes, put up posters, hand out pamphlets, and all the other hard work which makes your Union work.

On behalf of the executive of CPE 3909, I wish you all the best for the coming year.

In solidarity,

Matt McLean, President

Unit 2 Update

Report on Unit 2 Bargaining

The first thing to report is that an unprecedented number of CUPE 3909 Sessional Membership Bargaining Surveys were completed and returned. The Local would like to thank everyone for taking the time and effort to do this. This will put the Union on a very good footing for negotiations. These numbers give us power. Your interest and concerns with the issues give us confidence. The surveys were very long and detailed and we were impressed with the amount of time and thought that went into your answers to our questions. Many members provided us with innovative and well-reasoned approaches to the problems that our membership face.

As the new Unit 2 Vice-President I was blown away by the length of time many of you have worked as Sessionals. We cannot be considered a group that just passes through on our way to something else. We

are professionals. This is what we do. The level of education, training, initiative and commitment that we bring to our jobs is phenomenal. Despite the shameful lack of appreciation given to us by our employer, we maintain a high level of passion for education and for our students.

These negotiations are about appreciation. They are about respect. We deserve both. You have taken the first step. You have spoken to us in large numbers and told us that you need and deserve more. Your Bargaining Committee has listened and will take this message to the bargaining table. We appreciate your support.

NOTE: The draw for the 8-GB iPod Touch will take place at the CUPE Local 3909 General Membership Meeting that will be held on Wednesday, September 28th from 1 PM to 2:30 PM in the GSA Lounge (217 University Centre).

Have a Story to Tell?

Want to share your experiences as a sessional or student worker at U of M?

Submit Content or story ideas to sec.cupe3909@gmail.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

PENSION COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

If you are a member of the University of Manitoba 1993 Pension Plan you should have received, at your home, a letter with a call for the election of one (1) active member to the new Pension Committee. Enclosed was a ballot which you must return by Friday, September 23, 2011. In fact, this is the second time the University is running these elections, the first attempt having been made at the end of April 2011. Campus Union executives from CUPE 3909, UMFA, CAW, and AESES objected to the first elections process because at that time there were problems with the nominations procedure and many pension contributors did not receive the announcement. In the case of CUPE 3909 workers, the Union insisted that this important mail should be sent to our home address, as the nature of our employment means that mail delivered to a university address does not always reach us in a timely manner. A further problem that the Unions identified is in the make-up of the new Pension Committee. Unlike other benefits committees, the Pension Committee does not allow for a representative of each of the Unions on campus, and in fact makes no special allowance for a representative from the unionized sectors which make up the majority of the University of Manitoba workforce. In order to ensure that the committee will include one member who will be representing the concerns of unionized labour, **we are recommending that eligible members of CUPE 3909 choose UMFA president, Dr. Cameron Morrill.**

NEW COURSE NUMBERS

The Local has received calls regarding departments that have eliminated long-standing courses only to create new, differently titled and numbered courses with almost identical content. While departments may find this necessary in order to update programs, it may affect your employment. If you are a student within your Job Security Period (JSP), your collective agreement guarantees you continuance in an appointment provided the course exists (if it ceases to exist, a similar position should be offered). A changed course number may jeopardize your continued employment. If you are a sessional instructor and you have taught the same course five times in five separate academic terms (as of September 2005), your collective agreement guarantees that you will receive Right of First Refusal (ROFR) for that course. Minor changes (including changes to content, title, and number) should not affect your ROFR, nor your running tally towards achieving ROFR. The Local is currently working on a Policy Grievance related to this issue in the School of Art where two 9 credit hour courses have been divided into a number of 3 and 1.5 credit hour courses. **If you have information regarding similar changes in your department, please contact the Union with as much detail as possible (i.e. course numbers, descriptions, syllabi, outlines, etc.)**

Comment: Solidarity is not a slogan, it's a necessity

George Buri - Recording Secretary

The survey recently taken of unit 2 members confirmed to the bargaining committee that conditions facing sessional lecturers at University of Manitoba are unacceptable and intolerable, as they are at every University across this country. It is encouraging, however, to find evidence that sessionals have not internalized this state of affairs. In other words, we know that we deserve better. We know that we are just as capable teachers as full-time faculty. We know that we work just as hard and in many cases perform not just teaching duties but all the same roles as full-time faculty including research, publication and service to the University. The reason for our inferior treatment is structural, not personal. In short, there simply are not enough full-time faculty positions being offered to keep up with the number of qualified applicants and cash-strapped university administrators increasingly rely upon cheap sessional labour in order to meet their course offering requirements. At U of M, the number of full-time faculty is lower than it was in 2003, although enrolment has increased consistently since then and sits at the highest level since statistics were first kept in the 1960s.¹ Across Canada the situation is the same. Ontario recently reached the highest enrolment level in history, passing the record “double cohort” year of 2003.² However, full-time faculty hiring has not kept pace. Although recent statistics are difficult to find because each Canadian university counts “part-time” faculty differently, as of the last available year, Statistics Canada reported that hiring of part-time faculty had risen 10% and full-time faculty declined by 8%.³ In other words, more students are being taught in larger classes but fewer full-time professors and more sessionals.

Simply knowing the cause of the problem is not enough, however. We need to find solutions that will force the University to reverse this trend. First of all, we must realize that this problem is not going to go away on its own nor can it be fixed through individual initiative. Universities can and will continue to hire sessionals rather than full-time instructors simply because they themselves have created a market in which supply outstrips demand. The “invisible hand” of the so-called free market will continue to drive down wages as more and more Masters and PhD students graduate, are unable to find full-time work and are forced to accept sessional teaching at whatever wages are offered. However, the hand that is suppressing wages is not so invisible. Universities are actively encouraging the creation of a labour surplus by continuing to admit record numbers of students into graduate programs. Since 1999, graduate enrolment in Canada has increased by an average of 5.3% per year.⁴ Thus, the University is producing its own cheap casual labour force and being compensated through government funding for doing so.

Workers facing a situation in which they are afraid to demand a fair wage because someone else who is qualified for their job can easily replace them have historically had only one effective tool for fighting back: a Union. However, in the case of academic workers, the idea of unionization often runs against the individualistic ethos that we are imbued with during our academic training. Graduate school is generally an individual, isolating and competitive process. Students are aware from the outset that the only path to graduation lies in producing original research.

Other graduate students are likely to be regarded as competitors rather than colleagues because the quest for unique and innovative research is a zero-sum game (“If someone else publishes in a new field first then my research will be considered derivative”). In this atmosphere, it is no wonder that academics become accustomed to finding individual solutions to career related problems. Many sessionals believe that the path to higher wages and job security is purely an individual one and that if they continue to research, publish, teach and generally show their superiority vis a vis others in their cohort they will eventually be rewarded with a tenure-stream job. Worse yet, they come to believe that their position as sessionals is a result of personal failure or academic inferiority. What these people fail to realize is that every other academic who wishes to get off the sessional treadmill also feels the same way and is taking the same actions that they are. Everyone is seeking to research and publish and the pool of prospective candidates for full time work is simply getting stronger and stronger. This is why people call it a “treadmill”. One can run faster and faster and find that one is still not getting anywhere.

We cannot move forward as individuals unless we move forward together. We cannot act to improve our conditions unless we act collectively. We only

win as individuals if everyone wins. The sort of mentality required for a successful labour union is exactly opposite of the ethos of individualism promoted by the academic world. We need to see our colleagues and future colleagues not as threats to our jobs but as partners in a project of improving the University system through activism. We need to act as a well organized and disciplined unit and through active grassroots participation demonstrate the strength of our Union to the University. We need a Union membership that is informed and ready to take action when necessary. The record participation level in the Unit 2 survey demonstrated that we have a membership who are willing to do all of these things. Given our situation, “solidarity” is not just a slogan, it is the only option.

(Footnotes)

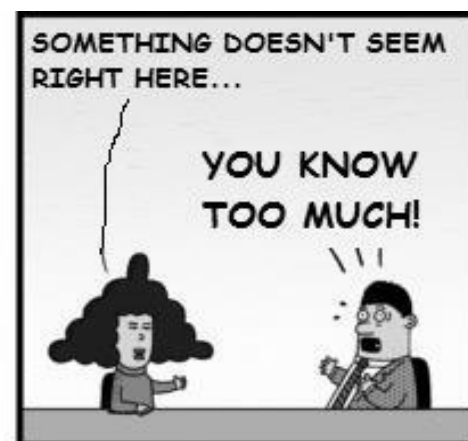
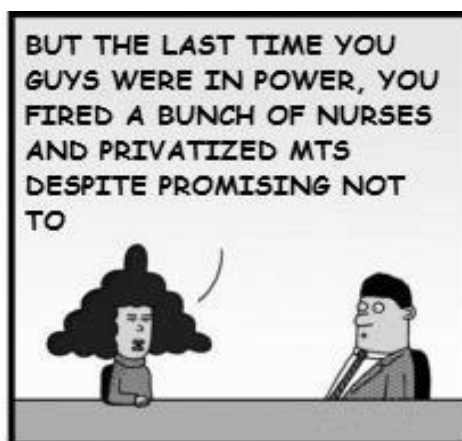
¹Talia Joundi, More students entering University in Manitoba, *The Manitoban*, Sept. 21 2010; Nick Martin, “Profs’ study slams U of M for ‘sexism’”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Aug. 29 2011

²Julia Johnson, “University enrolment hits all-time high”, *Ottawa Citizen*, Aug 30, 2011

³Sandy Farran, “It hurts when you call me professor”, *Macleans*, March 22, 2007

⁴ Canadian Association for Graduate Studies. (2011). 39th Statistical Report: 1999-2008. Ottawa, ON

Dilbert Detoured By Q. P. Worker



Paul Moist, Head Of CUPE, Takes Stock On Labour Day

By Rachel Mendleson, Huffington Post, 9/3/11

The post-recession world has not been kind to organized labour. With corporations and governments under pressure to cut costs and reduce deficits, unions have been lobbying hard to garner wage increases and protect pensions. But with dwindling numbers of Canadians sharing in the gold-plated benefits unions are fighting to protect, the battle for hearts and minds may prove to be the tougher one. In advance of Labour Day, Paul Moist, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Canada's largest labour group, discusses the challenges facing the labour movement in the age of austerity, why CUPE is working to connect with Canadians, and what Jack Layton's passing means for Canada.

Unionization, particularly in the private sector, has been declining for the last 15 years. How has this affected their collective bargaining power? And are there other consequences to the overall drop in union membership?

Paul Moist: There's a huge correlation historically in Canada between a worker having a defined-benefit pension plan, which about 36 per cent of the workforce does, and [being in a union]. Over 80 per cent of the Canadians today that have a defined-benefit pension plan are connected to a union.

A lot of private sector jobs have been lost, and a lot of private sector employers have been backing

away from sponsorship of a defined-benefit pension plan. So if there's less unionization in the private sector, and if the general trend in the private sector is less sponsorship of defined-benefit pension plans, that has a consequence for the public sector just on sheer politics. There are forces in the country that say, "Well, if private sector workers don't have a pension plan, why the heck should government employees," which I think is purely a ferocious political response.

Since the recession it seems like that "ferocious political response" you described has become a lot more commonplace. Unions used to be seen as the everyman, doing battle for the regular guy, but now, when the public gets a glimpse of the benefits unions are fighting to protect, they realize how far removed it is from their reality. What happens to a public sector union like CUPE when the general public is no longer on side? How can you prevent that from happening?

PM: If we allow ourselves to be pigeonholed as greedy public employees, or allow [other] people to define us, we're going to be in choppy waters than we are now. I think if we're able to connect with people about "What kind of a community do you want?", and we're prepared to be responsive to what we hear from Canadians -- not trying to shape their views but reflect what they tell us -- we're much better positioned.

Interview with Paul Moist (Continued)

We won't put all of our strategic tools in the bag of collective bargaining, as important as that is. In Ontario right now, we're running a campaign about the state of our hospitals. We'll have resources that go to [promote] public medicare, the Council of Canadians, the society of seniors who want more long-term care, child care. CUPE is not front-and-centre on all these issues, but we're making a contribution to all these policy areas.

Why did CUPE spend lots of money on the Canadian Pension Plan debate [when m]ost of our members have a private workplace pension? Because we believe all Canadians should have a viable pension option. Get down on that level, and CUPE's not a four letter word when you're talking about bread and butter issues that matter to people.

If we can't connect with the community, then the frame may be set by those forces in society that chip away at us over wages and pensions. But the average worker in Canada who doesn't have a pension or a union doesn't want a unionized worker to do badly.

What about the conflict from within? The Canada Post strike was in part a response to a proposal to create two tiers of workers -- a situation that has reportedly caused a lot of unrest among autoworkers in the United States. What threat does this trend pose to the well-being of unions as a whole? How concerned are you about the turmoil this can cause?

PM: We will not easily go down the road of a wage increase for all of us working today and a new tier of wages for future CUPE members. We don't agree to that as a rule.

Flight attendants -- most Canadian carriers with the exception of WestJet are CUPE members -- they came to us in the mid-80s because they had lost a couple of strikes. When we inherited Air Canada, there was a two-tier wage system in place. All the flight attendants who were pre-1980 had a certain wage level and all the ones that were hired after had a lower one. Well, we fixed that in two rounds of bargaining.

So we're not going down that road easily at all with any employers. It's a prescription to have future union members who have no respect for the union. We're not going to go there.

You've mentioned pensions a couple of times. In the labour disputes that we've seen during the last couple of years, pensions always seem to be front-and-centre. To what extent do you think pensions are the major issue, and will remain so for some time to come?

PM: I think that the pension question will remain front-and-centre from a public policy point of view. I don't expect the private sector employers, especially the small employers, to quickly change tack and start sponsoring pension plans, so I think there will have to be government leadership on this issue. Politicians of all stripes I talk to say they know there's a looming problem in Canada. It's in no one's interest for someone to work their whole life and not be unable to sustain themselves in retirement and there will be ... huge pressure on governments from a service point of view.

The retirement insecurity debate is one where the positive solution is to try and fix things for 65 per cent of the workforce who don't have a regular pension plan at work, not the political knee-jerk response from some who say if they

Interview with Paul Moist (Continued)

don't have it, public employees shouldn't have it. It's an issue that goes way beyond the boundaries of union membership. Most workers in Canada kind of know they're not saving enough for retirement, and kind of know they have to, and they find it very difficult without a system to plug into.

We've been able to connect with Canadians on the retirement insecurity debate, which I think is positive.

With the move toward government austerity and deficit reduction, the privatization of public services -- everything from Manitoba Hydro to Toronto garbage removal -- has been a hot topic. How is CUPE positioning itself to function and forward the concerns of unions in such an environment?

PM: We historically faced pressure at CUPE to contract out and privatize since we were formed in 1963. The stakes are maybe a little bit higher right now with these so-called public private partnerships for major pieces of public infrastructure -- kind of a leasing of debt to the private sector -- for everything from bridges to buildings the government occupies.

We spend a lot of time equipping this organization to at least debate the merits from a fiscal point of view and a policy point of view of privatization. You mentioned Manitoba Hydro. Our union represents some of the workers there. We surveyed Manitobans, and 90 per cent of them in no way, shape or form want privatization of Hydro.

It's more of a traditional struggle going on

in Toronto. They've made their choices, they won't be confused by the facts. We're just going to have to tough that one out, and demand that there be a transparent discussion. Future rounds of bargaining in Toronto will determine the security or not of the members' jobs so Toronto is in a bit of a unique situation.

Privatization may be one of the more expensive long-term consequential decisions that a municipal politician makes. All we say is make it with your eyes wide open. We've won some and we've lost some, but we'll continue to speak up.

The loss of Jack Layton was felt by all Canadians, but it was particularly significant for the labour movement. What's his legacy, and what kind of hole does he leave?

PM: He leaves a big emotional, and frankly physical leadership hole for the NDP. But eight years ago when he became the leader, outside of municipal circles and the Greater Toronto Area, he wasn't well-known. What did he do in the last eight years? He built and modernized the NDP. It's [now] a modern, well-functioning, well-oiled machine, and he himself grew in the minds of Canadians.

I knew Jack Layton on a personal level and I will miss him incredibly. But professionally speaking, I know what Jack Layton would say if he was eavesdropping on this conversation -- keep building. We're going to keep building this thing. I think that's the greatest legacy Layton's given us.

Job Action at University of Sherbrooke

Workers have been without a Contract for 32 months

On August 30th, the union representing University of Sherbrooke support staff decided to extend its previous 72-hour strike in 24 hour increments. The bargaining committee felt that their only option was to continue with pressure tactics until significant progress is made towards an agreement acceptable to the two parties. "Unfortunately, our employer has not yet budged enough on the main issue, namely, wage increases on a par with inflation that would bring us into line with other Quebec universities. It needs to pick up the pace: the school year is nearly upon us. Our 1,400 members are determined to continue striking until concrete, reasonable offers are within sight," said Stéphane Caron, president of SEESUS-SCFP / CUPE 7498, the union representing University support staff.

About 1,300 support staff have had no contract for nearly 32 months; for 120 research staff, it has been 62 months. Earlier this summer, they held two 24-hour strikes and one 60-hour strike. Despite the escalating pressure, the employer has kept wage offers well below the inflation rate.

On Wednesday, August 31, from noon onward, five unions representing University employees will hold a major demonstration at both the

main and the Longueuil campuses as a show of solidarity. SEESUS (support and research personnel), APAPUS (professionals and research professionals), SCCCUS (lecturers), SPPUS (professors) and AIPSA (engineering lecturers and professors) have joined forces to press the administration to reach negotiated agreements that provide competitive working conditions to all University employees.

In October 2010, 88 percent of the 1,400-plus SEESUS members decided in favour of pressure tactics, even if that meant striking. Most have had no contract since December 31, 2008; research support staff have been without a contract since June 26, 2006.