

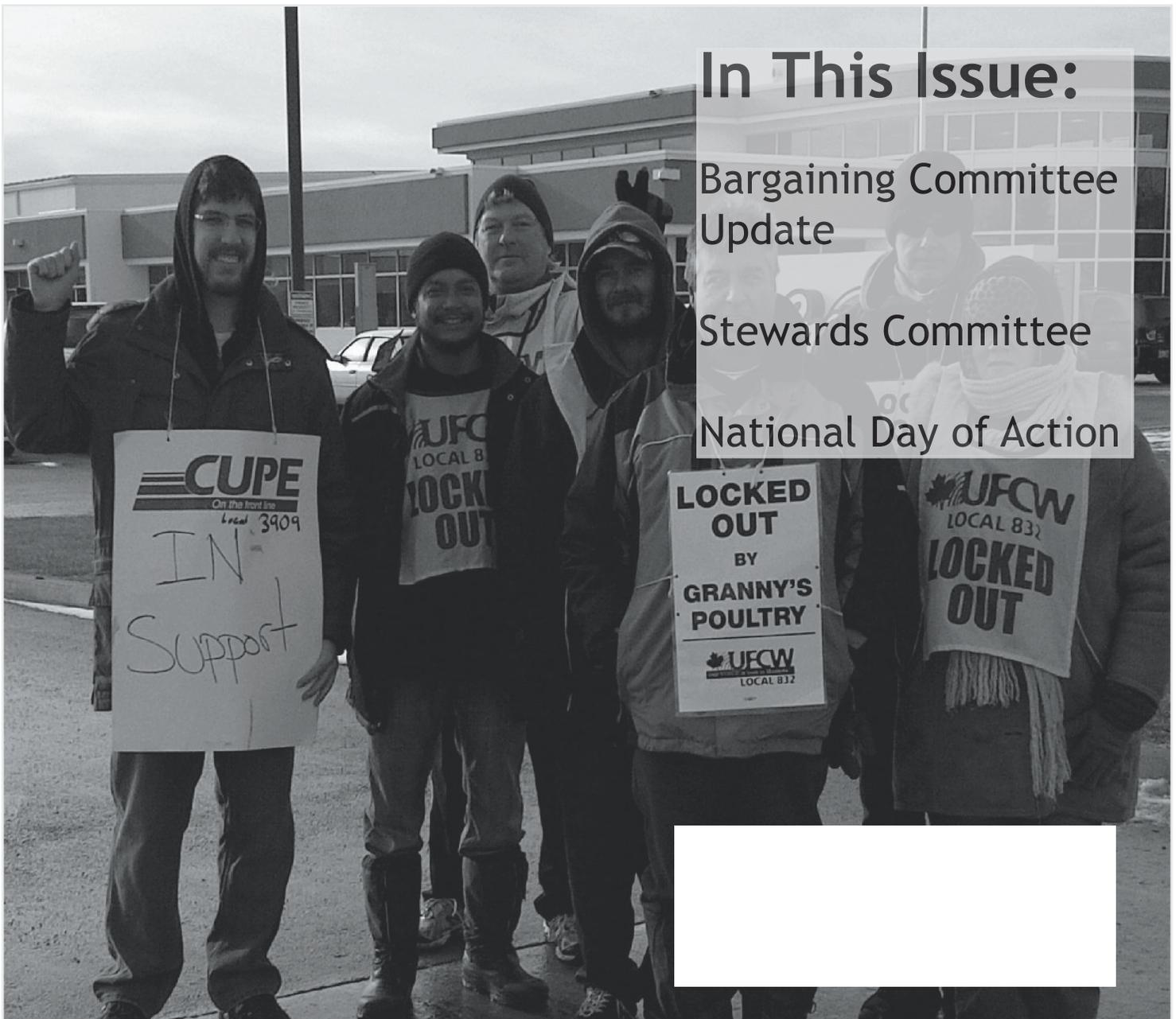
# The Spark!



January 2012

## 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



### In This Issue:

Bargaining Committee Update

Stewards Committee

National Day of Action

# The Spark!



January 2012



## In This Issue

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### Local News

Welcome.....	3
What's New With Unit 2.....	4
Steward's Committee.....	5
Around the Local.....	6
Mr. Block.....	7

### National News

National Student Day of Action.. .....	8
Do Canadian Universities Discriminate against their own Graduates?. .....	10

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Cover Photo: Brian Latour, VP Unit 1 at CUPE 3909, showing our support for workers at the Granny's Poultry Hatchery who were locked out by their employer for over two months over winter.

# *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.

# *What's New with Unit 2*

## A Report from Your Bargaining Committee

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Your Unit 2 Bargaining Committee has agreed upon dates to bargain with the employer in February and March and will soon commence negotiations for a revised Collective Agreement covering the terms and conditions of employment of Sessionals (Instructors, Librarians, Counsellors, etc.).

The Committee has put together a lengthy list of proposals which we will be serving on the University when we begin negotiating. These proposals come from the requests and suggestions that were put forward by the membership in the survey which was done last summer as well as calls and concerns received from the members over the period of the last contract. Some of the main issues we will be addressing with the University are as follows:

- 1. Wages:** There are two major issues with Sessional Instructor wages/stipends. The main concern is that not only are they very low (2<sup>nd</sup> lowest in Canada – thank you University of Winnipeg for keeping us out of last place), but there appears to be no rationale behind them. While the agreement contains a minimum stipend for Instructors, some courses are paid above the minimum and there is no obvious basis upon which such decisions are made. The second issue is that a Sessional Instructor does not receive incremental increases despite the fact that our demographic survey indicated that a large percentage of our members have been working as Sessionals at the U of M for more than 5 years with some having worked here for several decades. Furthermore, other academic employees at the University including librarians and faculty as well as public school teachers get incremental raises. The concept of an incremental raise reflects the notion that experience results in greater proficiency in teaching and should therefore be rewarded.
- 2. Right of First Refusal:** Job Security is definitely lacking. Not only do we have very weak language on Right of First Refusal (RFR) but it appears that the language we do have is very seldom used by our members as the University has failed to advise them of their entitlement to this right. RFR has been an issue in Sessional bargaining across the country and our Brothers and Sisters at other universities have achieved gains on this front that need to go into our agreement.
- 3. Hiring Practices:** There have been many concerns raised by our members as to how positions are posted and awarded.
- 4. Benefits:** Benefits are virtually non-existent for Sessionals. As our jobs are neither temporary nor transitory as evidenced by the length of service questions in our survey, we need better access to benefits.

## *What's New with Unit 2*

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5. **Other Issues:** We have had a number of recent calls and had discussions with members on issues pertaining to lack of Professional Development funds, lack of office space and access to computers, questions concerning Intellectual Property Rights, tuition waivers and sick pay. Our proposals address all of these issues.

6. **Union Rights:** The Union will also be addressing issues regarding the processes and procedures within the Collective Agreement which do not meet the needs of the Union to properly represent our members and which also hamper the ability of our members to do their job.

**We cannot predict what is achievable or not achievable** but we want to assure you that we will be putting forward all of the main issues that you have brought to our attention. We are anxious to get started.

It is important to also point out that sessionals are an important and valuable asset to the University and should be treated as such. Your Bargaining Committee is committed to changing this mindset on the part of the employer. It is not acceptable!

### **Stewards Committee**

We are currently in the process of setting up a stewards training session for the stewards committee. We hope to put together an exciting training session for stewards and others interested in workplace advocacy. There are still vacancies in many departments, so if you are interested in becoming a steward, please contact the local.

The stewards committee is a great way for you to get involved with your union and have a voice in union affairs. In addition, the stewards committee will be an important communications link between the membership and the local executive, and will hopefully help increase awareness of the union and your rights at work.

For more information about the stewards committee, please contact the local at [cupe3909@gmail.com](mailto:cupe3909@gmail.com)

# AROUND THE LOCAL

## Staff Benefits Committee

Currently, there are 113 CUPE 3909 members who have an open active certificate in the pension plan. All employees are informed of this opportunity in the employment confirmation letter. If you have not yet joined the pension, please go to [http://umanitoba.ca/admin/human\\_resources/staff\\_benefits/](http://umanitoba.ca/admin/human_resources/staff_benefits/) for more information or call the Staff Benefits Office at 474-7428 to have them send you the form.

We have one representative on this committee, but all meetings of the Staff Benefits Committee are open to members of the University of Manitoba community to attend as non-participating observers subject to the limitations of space and orderly conduct. If you have any expertise in this area, please contact the office or one of the members of the Executive.

### Administrative Duties

- (a) appointing Trustees of University of Manitoba Pension Plans by majority vote
- (b) appointing a member of the Staff Benefits Committee to participate as a member of the Pension Committee;
- (c) making recommendations on the establishment of new benefits or on the maintenance and changes for all of the staff benefits listed in Policy: Staff Benefits Committee;
- (d) commenting on specific staff benefits proposals, including financial matters that impact the staff members and/or University, referred to it by the Board or the Vice-President (Administration);

- (e) providing an annual recommendation on the level of post-retirement adjustments, if any; and
- (f) annually reviewing the financial performance and making recommendations on premium changes for the following Staff Benefit Plans:

- (i) Group Life Insurance (Basic, Dependent and Optional);
- (ii) Long Term Disability Plan and LTD Catastrophic Loss coverage;
- (iii) Accidental Death and Dismemberment;
- (iv) Supplementary Health and Dental Plans; and
- (v) In the event that no recommendation is forthcoming the University will take the necessary actions to ensure that the integrity of the group benefits program is maintained, including financial issues.

## In order to improve communication, Local 3909 will be holding monthly forums for Sessionals as follows:

February 3rd      2 to 4 PM  
217 University Centre

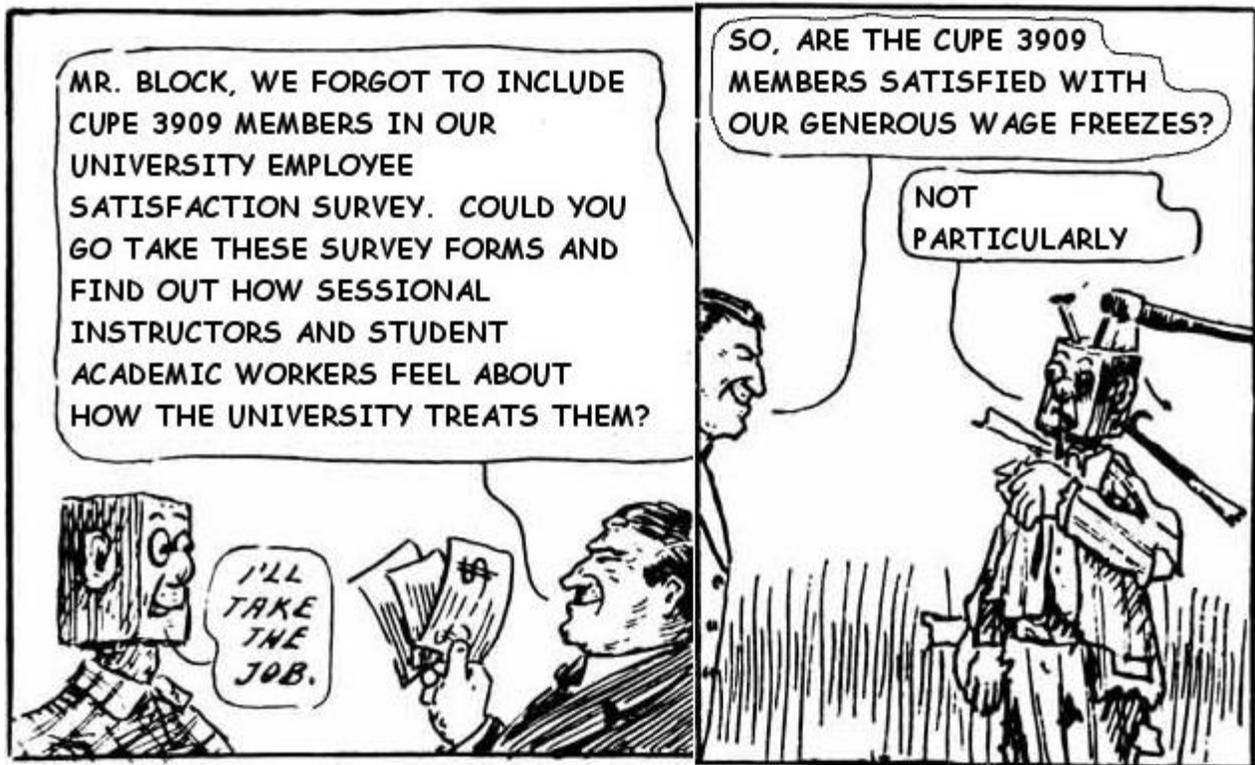
March 2nd      2 to 4 PM  
217 University Centre

April 13<sup>th</sup>      2 to 4 PM  
217 University Centre

Watch for more upcoming sessional forums

# Mr. Block

He learns about employee satisfaction at the University of Manitoba



Mr. Block is a cartoon character who was created in 1912 by Ernest Riebe, a German-American immigrant and member of the Industrial Workers of the World. In honour of Block's upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, he is being brought to the pages of The Spark!

To the best of knowledge, Mr. Block was the first comic book intended as explicitly revolutionary propaganda. Little is known about cartoonist Riebe. He was born in Germany, emigrated to the U.S., joined the IWW, and seems to have lived mostly in or around Minneapolis, and perhaps later in Chicago.

Riebe's Mr. Block cartoons were an illustrious forerunner to the "underground" comics which began to appear in the 1960s. Their bitterly satirical examination of the working world through the eyes of a wage-slave is familiar to modern readers of Dilbert.

"Mr. Block is legion," wrote Walker C. Smith in 1913. "He is representative of that host of slaves who think in terms of their masters. Mr. Block owns nothing, yet he speaks from the standpoint of the millionaire; he is patriotic without patrimony; he is a law-abiding outlaw .. [who] licks the hand that smites him and kisses the boot that kicks him .. the personification of all that a worker should not be."

**ALL OUT FEB 1** REDUCE TUITION FEES • DROP STUDENT DEBT • INCREASE EDUCATION FUNDING  
**NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION**

On February 1st, the University of Manitoba Students' Union will be hosting a Day of Action for Canadian post-secondary education at our Fort Garry Campus. This event is one of many like it that will be held on February 1st across Canada. The ALL OUT Feb1 event falls under the Canadian Federation of Students' Education is a Right campaign and Universities and colleges across Canada will be organizing unique events to mobilize and lobby on many different and diverse topics specific to each campus. The purpose of this "Day of Action"

is to demonstrate to all levels of government, as well as to the University Administration that students have the right to organize and speak out on issues of concern.

Nationally, the day of action is based upon The Education is a Right campaign, which is the manifestation of students' collective vision for a well-funded, high-quality, public post-secondary education system that builds a fair, and equitable society.

The University of Manitoba is OUR PLACE, lets ensure that students are made the priority!

## What are the Issues?

### Public Education

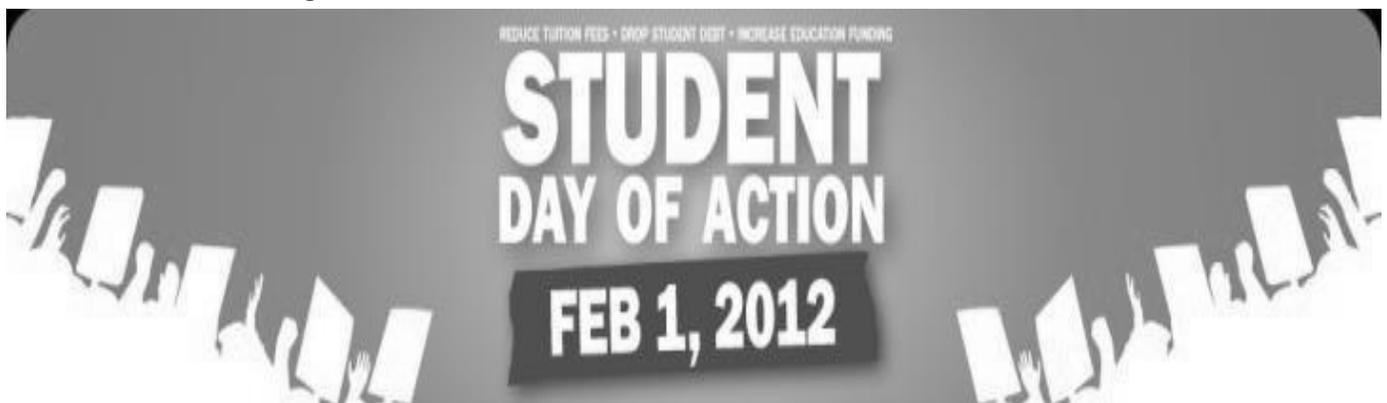
- Increased government funding for our post-secondary institutions
- Increased grants and Bursaries
- Eliminate Interest on Student loans
- Provincial regulation of international student fees
- Lift the cap on PSSSP to allow for more Aboriginal students to access funding

### Privatization

- Transparency and accountability of PRIVATE Partners on Campus
- Who owns it?
- Who profits
- Who Pays

### Transportation

- Increased public transportation options
- Flexible, safe and affordable parking options



# Day of Action (Continued)

What is UMSU Doing?

Leading up to the National Day of Action on February 1st, UMSU will be on the ground educating students on the very important issues that affect each and every one of us. Be prepared to see posters up, and students discussing goals of the ALL OUT Feb1 National Day of Action!

In the 2 days directly prior to the Day of Action, January 30<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, we will have a presence in University Centre doing tabling and spreading the word about the Day of Action. We will be creating banners, posters, and postcards that students can contribute to that will be delivered to the Legislature on February 1<sup>st</sup>.

On February 1<sup>st</sup> we will be taking over the University Centre right in front on GOSA (Gallery of Student Art)

**9:00am – 1:00pm: FREE Coffee and hot chocolate and the opportunity to ask questions and find out more about the issues that affect you as students**

**10:00am – 12:00pm: Speakers Series**

**11:00am – 1:00pm: FREE Hot Dog Lunch**

**11:15am – Bus tickets will be provided for those students who are interested in going downtown to meet up with the University of Winnipeg and the St. Boniface University and march to the Manitoba Legislature.**

Interactive tabling to provide you with the opportunity to have your voice heard by making buttons, signs and t-shirts to represent the issue that is closest to your heart. There will also be very knowledgeable speakers discussing the goals and objectives for the National Day of Action.

How can YOU get involved??

First of all, we need you! We need you to come out with UMSU on February 1st, and take to the streets to support our message. If you can, volunteer! Contact Sara or Bilan at [feb1@umsu.ca](mailto:feb1@umsu.ca).

The goals of the 2012 National Day of Action will only be accomplished by raising our message loud and clear, to the media, to the public, and to our elected officials.

UMSU has been successful in achieving Academic Amnesty for February 1st, which will mean you can freely participate in any and all National Day of Action events and not face academic penalties for missing class or assignments/tests if you speak to your professor beforehand. This was granted by the University Senate, so please speak to Nour, [ypa@umsu.ca](mailto:ypa@umsu.ca), if you have any questions about this.

The last Student National Day of Action in 2007 resulted in \$300 million in new grants for post-secondary students. Let's see what our strength in numbers can accomplish on February 1st, 2012!

# Yes, Canadian universities do discriminate against their own graduates

Editor's Note: In 2009 University Affairs published an article, "PhD: To What End" which argued that Canadian Universities discriminated against their own philosophy graduates by preferring to hire foreign-education PhDs, thus placing Canadian-Educated PhDs on the "sessional treadmill" and creating an artificial labour surplus. The following is a response to this article and the debate that has ensued surrounding it

by Douglas Mann Courtesy of University Affairs

Louis Groarke and Wayne Fenske's analysis of the woeful lack of success of graduates of Canadian philosophy programs is entirely accurate. I did very similar research myself several years ago, and came up with similar numbers. The only flaw in the article is the authors' timidity in drawing the obvious conclusion that Canadian universities discriminate against hiring their own graduates. The other horn of their dilemma – that Canadian graduates are "inferior" – would be very difficult to prove in a systematic fashion. My own experience is that much of the vast "potential" of these prestigious foreign hires fizzles away once the person in question gets tenure.

I graduated from a middle-level Canadian PhD program in the late 1990s. Even though I've taught 75 courses, published three books and over 90 articles (half of them academic), I've never gotten an interview for a tenure-track job. I've taught in six disciplines at five universities and colleges, and have gotten a few limited-term contracts, but have never been within shooting distance of the plum jobs reserved for graduates of foreign programs and the University of Toronto. When I apply to a tenure-track job today, I'm about 95 percent sure that I've out-published the entire appointments committee that sends me a rejection letter three months later. Many of these people are the graduates of the so-called "prestigious" foreign programs that defenders of the system laud.

Enough about me. What's interesting about this article is not so much the conclusions the authors come to,

which I think are unassailable, but the shoddy, arch-conservative criticisms from some of the commenters. Even though these arguments often come from people in positions of authority at the departments Dr. Groarke and Dr. Fenske attack and are thus little more than ideological defenses of personal economic and political capital, I'll take on their main points seriously and counter them one by one.

1. The Neo-Conservative Argument: "Canadian English-speaking doctoral universities represent only a small fraction of the worldwide total. The fact that 30 percent of those hired come from Canadian programs isn't proof of anti-Canadian discrimination – instead, it's proof of pro-Canadian bias!"

My jaw dropped when I read this argument repeated over and over by the article's critics. Yes, Canadian PhD programs probably don't spit out more than five percent of English-speaking philosophy graduates. But assuming that this figure is somehow relevant reduces academics to the social status of migrant farm workers. It may be the case in neo-conservative economics textbooks that labour is perfectly mobile, but in the real world people often feel a sense of loyalty to the land of their birth. This may be the result of a connection to family, friends, patriotism, a love of the city or countryside of their homeland, or a feeling of comfort in a liberal democratic state with a reasonable social safety net such as Canada. The critics assume that anybody is willing to move anywhere in the world for a job. This assumption is plainly false, and

## Yes, Canadian universities do discriminate against their own graduates (cont'd)

is so conservative that it would make Dick Cheney grin with approval.

Added to this is the fact that the Canadian state has long supported Canadian content programs in various aspects of culture and media, these being fairly successful in building local publishing, music and TV production industries. Why would such programs not be relevant to academic life, where at least in history, sociology, economics, political science, literature, media and popular culture having a lively knowledge of Canadian content is very relevant? Not to mention having people in the sciences who can actually speak English. So a pro-Canadian hiring policy can be supported ethically as being in the public good.

Further, if you think about it, it's very unlikely that the Americans heading north to take Canadian positions are, in fact, the "cream of the crop" from Ivy League institutions. Why would a hotshot Harvard or Yale graduate want a job in at a Canadian school they've never heard of if they have a chance to be hired at a "prestigious" American school? Most of the hires from south of the border are, in fact, middle-of-the-pack scholars with little teaching experience and next to zero publication record. I've proven this to be true in the 50 or so times I've looked up CVs of people who have gotten on short lists or gotten hired to Canadian jobs I've applied to – 90 percent of the time they are generic candidates with about a year's worth of teaching experience and one to three publications (and no books), sometimes without even a finished PhD (which raises the separate question of age discrimination).

Added to this is the niggling question of facts. My

one glimpse through the dense fog surrounding hiring procedures came during my doctoral days, when I noticed that 80-90 percent of people applying to an open tenure-track job at a middle-level Canadian school were either Canadian, had Canadian PhDs, or both. Several critics have pointed out that this is a mystery we'll never penetrate; one even suggested that maybe 10 percent or less of applicants to Canadian jobs are from Canadian programs. This is nonsense.

My challenge to the critics is this – if I'm wrong that the majority of applicants to Canadian tenure-track jobs have Canadian PhDs, prove it by releasing figures that break down the origins of applicants to each job. This isn't a mystery. It's a secret: there's a difference. As far as I can see the facts support Dr. Groarke and Dr. Fenske. So the "30 percent hired" figure for Canadian graduates is very low, and provides prima facie evidence for discrimination.

2. Bad Causality: "Inferring causality from the facts presented in the article is impossible. The authors are committing a host of statistical sins. Hey, maybe those applying from outside Canada actually have stronger CVs and that's why they all get hired!"

My jaw is getting sore from all this dropping. As any student of Hume knows, constant conjunction IS an element of causality. If three percent of non-smokers and 50 percent of smokers get lung cancer, one can safely guess that smoking is bad for your health. Of course, the other element needed to show causality is some sort of causal mechanism. And we have at least two: first, the neo-colonial mentality in Canadian academic institutions that everything

# Yes, Canadian universities do discriminate against their own graduates (cont'd)

American or European is better; second, that like hires like. If hiring really were an impartial, discrimination-free process, it's almost impossible that a department like the University of British Columbia could have hired only one Canadian graduate. Instead, it's far more likely that departments dominated by Americans hire more of the same via the old school tie, ideological affinities, or personal connections, perhaps so they can discuss the intricacies of college basketball in the corridors. The department I graduated from had, at the time, about ten Americans, two Canadians, one German and one Brit. The four or five least-published and least-effective teachers in it were all American. The two Canadians were both well published scholars.

3. The Silly Non-Sequitur: "Not all Canadian profs are competent."

This is irrelevant: if you take any large group of people sharing some common factor, some of them are competent, and some of them are incompetent. But at least we can spell the word "competent." Probably the worst philosophy conference paper I ever heard was by an American grad student studying at U of T; I've heard several colloquia presentations where tenured presenters managed to talk for a half hour and say nothing, while I've also heard some very interesting papers presented by unknown Canadian graduate students.

Again, the relevant comparison for competitive Canadian graduates isn't with the best Harvard PhD student, who is unlikely to venture north; instead, it's with the A-minus graduate from the Indiana University or the State University of New York who can't find a good job in the U.S. Having met some of these A-minus types, they're certainly not any more astute scholars or

harder workers than the best graduates from Queen's University, the University of Waterloo, or Simon Fraser University. Yet they get hired over such graduates.

4. The More-Study-Needed Fallacy: "We need a qualitative study of the hiring process, from dossier creation through the nature, tone and quality of letters of reference, to attitudes towards interviews, and a trans-cultural analysis of how candidates, Canadian and non-Canadian, fare in this complex process."

The interesting thing about this suggestion from a university official, which sounds so reasonable, is that it excludes the most important element in the hiring process: the attitudes, values and rationale of those doing the hiring. It utterly fails to question those in power as to why they make the decisions that results in what looks like to any reasonable outsider as discrimination. "Dossier creation" and "attitudes towards interviews" by a Canadian candidate don't matter if the cards are stacked against him or her from the start.

In short, Canadian universities, especially philosophy departments, are neo-colonial and neo-conservative institutions that systematically ignore qualifications and practice discrimination in hiring tenure-track professors. Funding shortages have forced them to employ a large army of sessional teachers and grad students to do the drudge work: teaching large undergrad classes, marking essays and exams. That's what the Canadian PhDs are for, to serve as a reserve army of the semi-employed. As others have said, it's a caste system.

Douglas Mann is a sessional professor of media studies and sociology at the University of Western Ontario.