

The Spark!



February 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

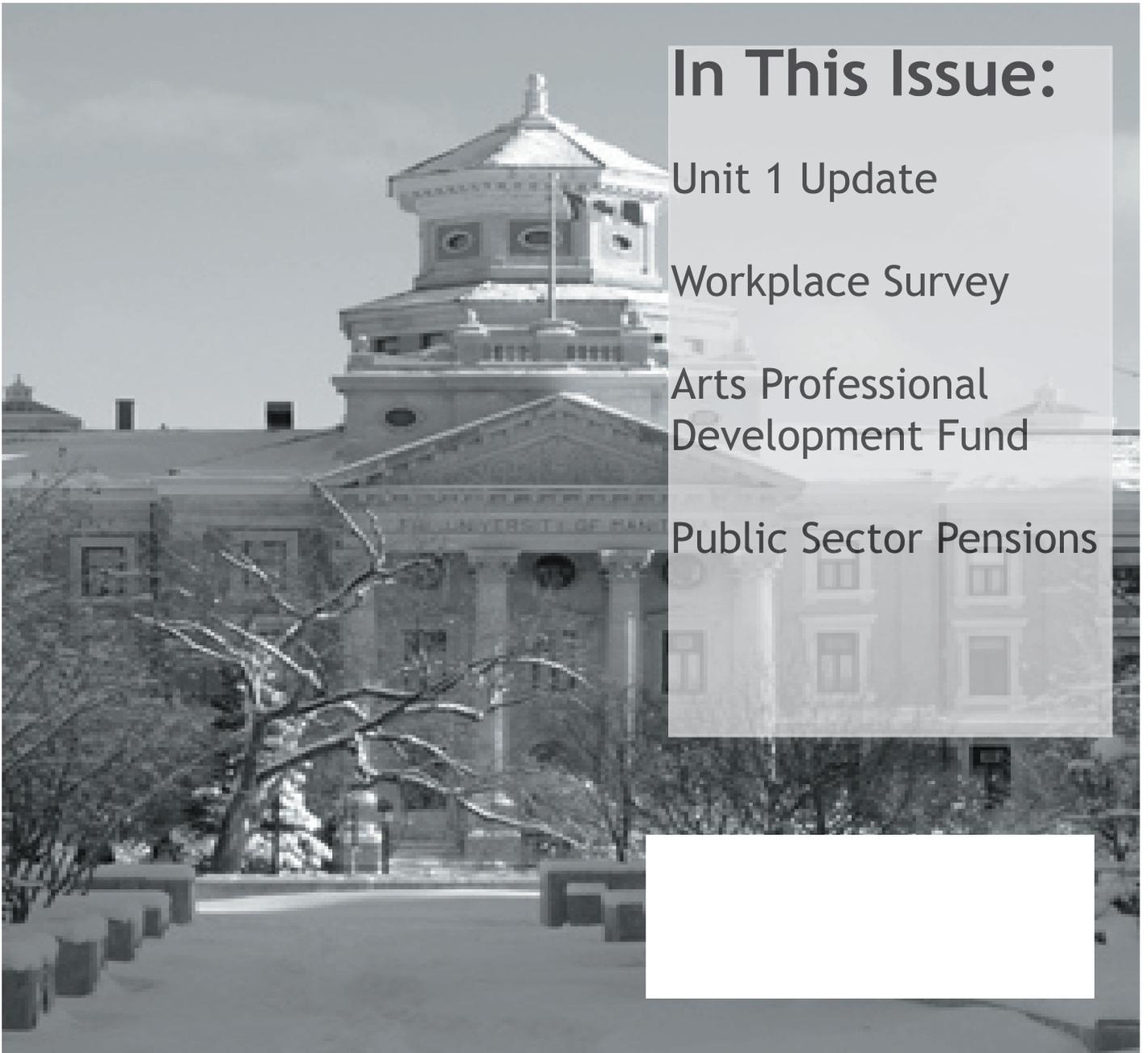
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Welcome

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.

Unit 1 Update

Grievance Filed

The union has filed a grievance regarding a dispute in the language of our collective agreement regarding when an increase in hours for Unit 1 summer sessionals was to go into effect. In our last round of bargaining, we won an increase in hours for Unit 1 summer session instructors. However, there is disagreement with the university over when this change was to go into effect.

Essentially, the issue is over whether the increase in hours for Unit 1 summer sessional

instructors to bring them up to parity with regular session instructors is to come into effect starting in summer 2011 or 2013. The union's position is that summer session instructors should be entitled the same amount of hours as regular session instructors to teach a course, and that this was to go into effect in 2011.

After being turned down by the university, the union has filed for arbitration of this grievance. We are hoping to get this resolved in favour of our members.

A Success Story

One of our members who is a graduate student instructor recently came to the union with questions regarding a discrepancy on the rate per student that Distance Education was paying for teaching one of its courses. This instructor was being paid \$10 less per student than other Distance Education instructors within the department. The lower rate was because the instructor was on a continuance appointment, while everyone else was given a wage increase in their position vacancy notice. The instructor contacted the union, and we were able to solve this matter in favour of the member. CUPE 3909 helped this instructor get the additional \$10/student that was rightfully deserved. Because of CUPE 3909's assistance, the member received an extra \$800.

This is just one of many examples of why you should contact your union with any questions and concerns you may have about the terms of your employment with the University. If the collective agreement is not being followed either intentionally or as a result of a simple mistake, we will advocate on your behalf. Your union works to ensure that members get what they are entitled to.

CUPE 3909 is here to help you!!

Is U of M an “Outstanding Workplace”?

Sessionals Respond to Employer Workplace Survey

In June, 2011 the University sent 333 Sessional Instructors an email survey called “It’s about Us!” as part of the Outstanding Workplace Initiative. While the University was pleased with the 30.5% overall response, “part time academic” responses were limited to 22 respondents, meaning only 1.5% of eligible employees took the time to respond. There are many reasons why a Sessional may not have responded: in June, many of those 333 Sessionals were not actively employed and therefore may not have had access to the UM email account, they may have had trouble determining their employee group (the preliminary survey, on which this survey was based, did not include part time academic as one of the allowable categories and while we may be designated part time, many of us work full time hours), or they may have been deterred by a general sense of disconnect with their employer because they work evenings or through Distance Ed. A large percentage (62%) of the Sessionals who did respond had been working for the U of M for 2 years or less. Our own pre-bargaining survey, mailed out at about the same time to all CUPE 3909 Unit 2 employees on the University’s employee list and which got extremely good response, indicated that a high percentage of Sessionals has been at the U of M for 5 - 15 years. The low response rate from the more experienced Sessional Instructors (only 5%) may reinforce what many of the other survey responses hint at: that while Sessionals are motivated educators, many feel disengaged, disconnected, discouraged and disrespected.

In almost every question related to working

conditions, Sessional responses showed a level of dissatisfaction not seen in other employment groups. While 14% of Sessionals are satisfied with their jobs, this was significantly lower than the 33% - 45% range that answered positively in other groups. Sessionals are less likely to recommend the U of M as an employer and we are considerably less convinced that this is a great place to work. On the positive side, Sessionals are far more likely to “feel good about what we achieve at work” (91% - the next highest group scores 10% lower) but the least likely, by far, to imagine that our work is important to the success of the university. (Interestingly, senior administration has the highest score on this question: 93%.) This seems to be a contradictory statistic, but other responses help contextualize our response. It is because of the way we are treated in terms of compensation, benefits, and professional development and opportunity that we find it difficult to consider ourselves “important” to the University, or rather, it is hard to believe that the University considers us “important”. In fact, we are immensely and increasingly important. Faculties are more and more reliant on our expertise, dedication, and labour. Our numbers and our contributions to the University are growing but our salaries, working conditions, benefits, and the respect we are afforded, remain stagnant.

In almost all questions related to respectful treatment we responded 10% - 20% lower than other employment groups. 64% of Sessional respondents believe that employees are not treated equitably by the University and only 41% of Sessionals

Is U of M an “Outstanding Workplace”?

(compared with an average 60%) believe that the Respectful Workplace and Learning Environment Policy has been effectively implemented.

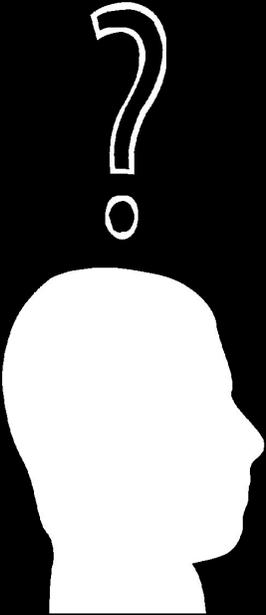
In questions related to professional and career development, Sessionals were one third as likely to agree that there are appropriate supports for career or professional development, half as convinced that there are good learning and development resources, and almost three times less satisfied with opportunities for career or professional advancement.

Half of all Sessional respondents are unhappy about our pay, compared to 67% of all employee groups that agree that they are fairly paid. We remained neutral on the subject of benefits, probably because the majority of us do not meet the restrictive requirements to qualify for part-time benefits. And while other employee groups agreed that the University offers a good pension and health

and dental package (80% and 86% respectively), Sessionals responded at approximately half that satisfaction rate.

In almost every survey question, Sessionals are glaringly less pleased than other employee groups. The CUPE 3909 Executive has long been aware of the general dissatisfaction felt by Sessional Instructors and the Unit 2 Bargaining Committee is prepared to negotiate a Collective Agreement that better reflects the important contributions Sessionals make on campus. We hope that the University has taken notice of our responses to the “It’s about Us!” survey and stays committed to making the University an outstanding workplace for everyone.

More information regarding the survey and responses can be found at:
http://umanitoba.ca/admin/human_resources/lds/outstanding_workplace/index.html



*“I don’t work for free...
 ...I like working as a TA. It’s a great opportunity, and it makes my time here at University a better experience.
 I just think I should get paid for all the work that I’m being asked to do.”*

What’s your story?

If you have a story about working as a TA or Grader/Marker and **not getting the pay you are owed for any reason**, please send it to us at cupe3909@gmail.com.

The best story will be included confidentially as part of our ongoing series of ads in the Manitoban, with the author winning a prize.

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AROUND THE LOCAL

Stewards Committee Update

The new CUPE 3909 stewards committee met for the first time on Feb 7th for the first Stewards Training session. Attendees from various departments learned about how the union operates and how to be an advocate for fellow members on workplace issues.

The members of the stewards committee are:

Anthropology: Alexandra Klales and Amy Scott

Chemistry: Sara Omar

Civil Engineering: Debarshi Das and Sofiq Hasan

Environment and Geography: Tatiana Kozlova

History: Karl Koth

Linguistics: Shannon Price

Mathematics: Brian Corbett

Political Studies: Adam Reisacher

Psychology: Debra Lall

Statistics: Mohammad Nourmohammadi

The next Stewards Committee meeting is scheduled for March 6th. If you are interested in attending or becoming a steward, contact the local for more

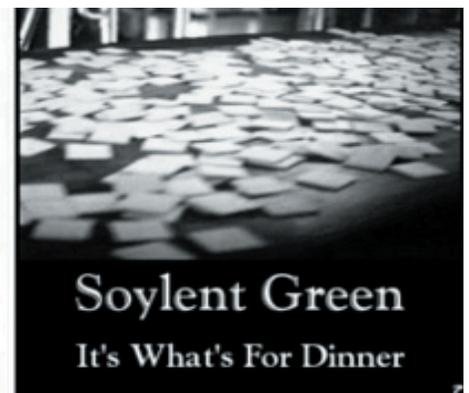
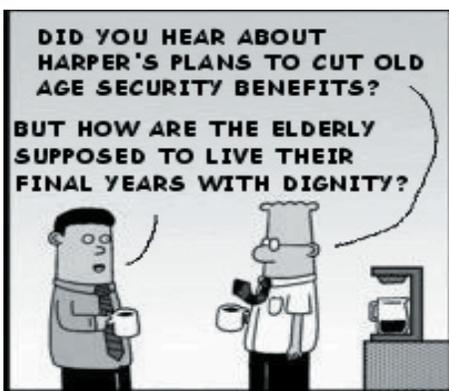
We're Moving!

Unfortunately, due to space restrictions on campus at University of Manitoba, CUPE 3909 has found it necessary to relocate our office off campus. The new location as of March 1st 2012 will be at 150-1483 Pembina Highway. Our new office is conveniently located close to major bus routes leading to the University and offers us more space to conduct our business. If you want to arrange a meeting with the union but cannot make it off campus contact us and we will make appropriate arrangements as our executive members and stewards are working on campus. Our new phone and fax numbers are:

453-5493 phone

453-5505 fax

Dilbert Detoured By Q. P. Worker



Arts Professional Development Fund

On January 26, Sessionals in the Faculty of Arts received a letter informing them that they were eligible for a newly-established Professional Development Fund for the 2011-2012 academic year. This fund provides \$100 for every 3 credit hours taught and provides for the purchasing of “books, journals, and other published works and some items of equipment to be used in performance of your academic duties”. Claims for this fund have to be submitted before **March 15, 2012** in order to be completed before the end of the budget year.

While we are happy to have the Faculty of Arts recognize the importance of granting all teaching employees professional development funds, the manner in which this money has been made available confirms the need for a professional development allowance to be codified within our collective agreement rather than granted on an ad hoc basis subject to qualifications which make it difficult for our members to claim. This letter raised a number of important issues:

- The Faculty of Arts stated that to be eligible for reimbursement, the employee has to present original receipts dated between April 1 2011 and March 15 2012. However, since our members did not know about the existence of a professional development fund until late January, unless the faculty of arts assumes us to be clairvoyant we would not have known to save receipts for the majority of this time. Therefore, a great number of us will likely not be able to be reimbursed for eligible out-of-pocket expenditures which we made before January for which we did not save receipts.

- The original letter was very unclear as to which expenses would be covered and which would not. A conversation with The Arts Budget Office has clarified the issue to some extent. All academic books are covered. Office equipment and electronics such as computers should be covered but any such purchases would remain property of the University (ie. You could buy a notebook computer but it would remain property of U of M after you leave). Travel to conferences is also covered but **ONLY** if this travel has already taken place. (Again the problem of not knowing to save receipts arises)

- Finally, we believe that all of our members should be entitled to a professional development allowance, not just those in the faculty of arts. To our knowledge no other faculty has offered this allowance.

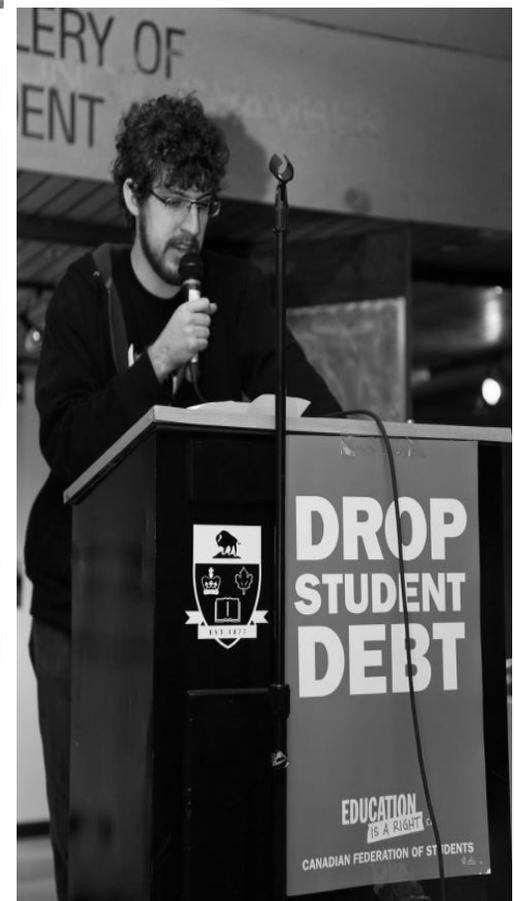
Given the above problems, CUPE 3909 recommends that all members planning on using the professional development fund go to the Arts Budget office (300 Fletcher Argue Building) before making purchases to confirm that they will be covered. We also recommend that all employees in all faculties save receipts for all work-related expenses in the future in case they can be reimbursed at some point.

Your Unit 2 Bargaining team is working very hard to ensure that in the future professional development allowances are made available to all sessional lecturers via a fair and transparent process. If the University has the money to provide a professional development allowance to our members in arts we can see no reason why they should not be able to do so for all faculties.

CFS DAY OF ACTION



This Day of Action was endorsed by CUPE 3909, and VP Unit 1 Brian Latour was one of the speakers at the U of M, raising the issues of Navitas/ICM and privatization on university campuses.



CFS-Manitoba held a Day of Action on Feb 1st, with the slogan “Public for the People”, demanding affordable, accessible, high-quality public education. Speeches and information tables were held in University Centre, and hundreds of students and their supporters rallied at the legislature.

Students, Faculty and Staff at University of Toronto Rally to Support Union

On Thursday, February 16, over 1,000 members of the University of Toronto (U of T) community rallied in front of the office of the Governing Council to support the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3902, which represents 4,200 education workers. In bargaining since June 2011, the union and university administration have been unable to come to an agreement. A strike date has been set for Friday, February 24.

The most important bargaining issue is the declining quality of education at U of T. The size of tutorials and labs has ballooned in recent years, making it difficult for CUPE 3902 members to provide the educational support undergraduates need. Since 2008, the size of tutorials has grown dramatically, with 24 per cent of tutorials now holding more than 50 students, and 42 per cent, more than 35 students.

“CUPE 3902’s bargaining issues resonate with undergraduate students; in particular, the demand for smaller class sizes,” said Hebba Fahmy of Undergrads for 3902. “Oversized tutorials and labs undermine the quality of our education. There’s too little time for interaction among students, and between students and instructors.”

Alongside increasing workloads, members are seeing their real incomes decline against the expensive cost of living in Toronto. These pressures have many graduate students worried about their ability to complete their degrees on time.

“Graduate students make critical contributions to research at U of T, but doing so becomes more and more difficult as financial uncertainty rises,” said Wayne Dealy, chair of CUPE 3902. “Stable and adequate financial support would make a significant difference in the ability of graduate students to make ends meet and achieve their academic goals.”

U of T administration has used a loophole in the CUPE 3902 collective agreement to begin deducting up to \$3,200 from the already meager compensation that graduate students receive for conducting their thesis research.

“We’ve been trying to negotiate a fair contract for eight months,” said James Nugent, the bargaining team’s chief spokesperson. “Our goal, shared by all the education workers, students and faculty who have come out here today, is simply to improve the learning and teaching conditions here at the University of Toronto.”

The union and administration will return to the bargaining table early next week.

Editor’s Note: On February 24th, just hours before the strike deadline CUPE 3902 reached a tentative agreement with University of Toronto. This story underscores the importance of solidarity between University workers in order to obtain strong bargaining positions that can lead to successful completion of contract negotiations.

Pension Deficits Aren't the Fault of Public Sector Workers

By Denis Bolduc, Secretary-General Quebec Regional Office, CUPE
This article first appeared in the Montral Gazette Feb. 22 2012

Today and Tomorrow in a Hotel in downtown Montreal, some 600 representatives of the Canadian Union of Public Employees are holding a think-tank session to discuss the future of their pension plans. Our meeting is being held against the backdrop of a rise in public discourse of voices criticizing supposedly “overly generous” public-sector pension plans.

Governments and employers are painting public-sector workers as part of a privileged class, and are moving to strip these so-called privileges from them.

Quebec City Mayor Régis Labeaume is leading the attack. He is urging the Quebec government to change municipal pension plans in order to help cities and towns reduce their operating costs.

Pension-plan deficits are a sad reality. However, changes such as those proposed by Labeaume place responsibility for these deficits on the backs of workers rather than the true culprit: the financial crisis of 2008 and the economic collapse that ensued.

Canada and the rest of the world are emerging from the worst global economic recession since the 1930s. Thanks to stronger regulation and some good luck, Canada wasn't hit as badly as the United States and European countries. But there is no doubt that recovery will be slower and more difficult than in previous recessions.

Huge losses as a result of irresponsible speculation in the stock market are largely to blame for current deficits in pension plans. Banks then lowered interest rates, which in turn affected bond-market returns. This had a bearing on pensions plans because the two most important components of pension plans are stocks and bonds.

We were promised that a “free market” would lead us into an era of unprecedented prosperity. Undeniably, as the Wall St. fiasco has shown, this has not been the case. That said, trade unions know that they must take action and that doing nothing is simply not an option.

So, what should unions be doing?

First, it must never be forgotten that pension plans were built using salary money that employees agreed to forfeit, in exchange for a retirement plan. Some commentators contend that public-sector workers are stealing from the public purse. This misconception is offensive. The money in pension plans was always negotiated as deferred salary. Pensions, therefore, must be looked at on a long-term basis, and solvency of plans should consequently be measured over the span of a career. Deficits in place as this particular moment in time should not be used as an excuse to slash benefits.

CUPE Quebec is one of the first major trade unions to sit down with its members, as we are

Pension Deficits Aren't the Fault of Public Sector Workers

doing this week, to think through the current pension crisis. Pension plans are complex entities and each plan has its own set of rules and regulations.

We shouldn't forget that there was a time in Quebec when there were surpluses in our municipal pension plans. When that was the case, did you ever hear of Quebec municipalities offering to lower taxes because of those surpluses? Of course you didn't.

During those golden years, employers were making their pension contributions using money taken directly out of pension-fund surpluses. There was nothing strictly illegal about this. The surpluses legally belonged to them, just as deficits belong to them.

Municipalities had no qualms about sticking their hands in the cookie jar when it was convenient for them. But now that pension plans are struggling with deficits, municipalities aren't so sure they want sole legal responsibility anymore. That's not fair: workers expect their employers to do the

right thing.

Public pension programs - Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, the Canada Pension Plan or Quebec Pension Plan - are proven successes. However, there is a problem with these plans. They really don't pay out very much. The labour movement as a whole is running a major campaign right now to improve benefit levels. We are advocating a doubling of Quebec Pension Plan benefits, to be phased in over a period of seven years.

Currently, a majority of Canadian workers do not have a workplace pension plan, and one-third has absolutely no savings set aside for retirement. The loss of supplemental pension plans would mean an increase in poverty among seniors, which in return would mean higher costs for the government in health care and social services.

It's about time the general public hears our voice on this issue. These are our pensions.