

The Spark!



March/April 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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Cover Photo Credit: Samuel Kuhn

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.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MONDAY APRIL 30

12 - 2 pm, 224 University Centre

Cupe 3909 would like to extend an invitation to all of its members to attend our annual general meeting. The agenda for this meeting includes annual reports from all of our executive officers, the election of officers and proposed changes to our local by-laws. If you would like to become more involved in the local this would be an excellent opportunity to find out how you can do so. It's also a great way to get up to date on the issues facing our members and the activities that the union has undertaken in the past year.



**We Want YOU -
To write for the Spark!**

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

Sessional Evening

On Monday April 2nd, the Unit 2 Bargaining Committee hosted an evening for Sessionals to get together, meet their colleagues and celebrate the end of the term. Even though it was the end of the term and one of the busiest times of the year, a good number of Sessionals joined the Local Executive for dinner and drinks and conversation. There were several tables full of Sessionals from a wide variety of departments and while conversation was not entirely work related, it did reflect the thoughtful responses to the pre bargaining survey sent out in early summer. Sessionals generally love what they do but feel that their departments do not properly recognize them. Furthermore, it's not always clear what Sessionals are due and what rights they have because departments have been allowed to function without transparency. Finally, it was evident that most members of CUPE 3909 Unit 2 have dedicated many years of work to the University of Manitoba with limited compensation: financial or otherwise.

We planned this evening because it was clear to us from the responses to the bargaining survey, as well as the university's "Outstanding Workplace" survey, that one of the main dissatisfactions Sessionals feel in working at this university is that they are largely ignored. We hope that by meeting other Sessionals and recognizing ourselves and each other as important contributors to the university, we can help strengthen our identity on campus.

We hope to continue to hold get-togethers every term. We believe that it is one way that the Local can give back to the members, create camaraderie by giving them the opportunity to meet their counterparts in other departments, and help to determine what really makes an outstanding workplace environment.



AROUND THE LOCAL

Convention

The CUPE Manitoba convention will be held on May 2-5 in Dauphin. The convention is a chance for delegates from locals from all across Manitoba to discuss and debate the direction of CUPE Manitoba (our provincial component) in the year to come. CUPE 3909 is sending three resolutions for debate: one in support of removing the international student differential fee, one supporting lower tuition fees, and one opposing any graduate fee restructuring which will cause grad students to be paying higher fees. Our delegates this year are Matt McLean (President), Brian Latour (VP Unit 1), and Shannon Price (Steward, Linguistics).

I don't work for free

The "I don't work for free" leaflet campaign is continuing this term. Executives and Stewards will be leafleting the campus before the end of the term to make sure that your supervisors are aware of your rights as workers and as members of CUPE 3909 to be paid for every hour you work. This campaign has been a success at raising the profile of the union, and ensuring that supervisors are aware of your rights.

You may also have seen our series of ads in the Manitoba which describe a number of situations in which our members have found themselves and the ways in which the union can help. We continue to hear stories about TAs and Grader/Markers not being paid for hours they work. If this has happened to you contact your union!

Dilbert Detoured By Q. P. Worker



Students on Strike in Quebec

Over 200 000 Students Hit the Streets to Protest Massive Hike in Tuition Fees

Editor's Note: Over the last few weeks, students in Quebec have organized a campaign of unprecedented size against the liberal government's decision to increase tuition fees in that province by more than 300%. We think that this inspiring example of students standing up for accessibility to education against a neo-liberal agenda that is increasingly turning our Universities into places that serve only the private sector is relevant to our members, many of whom are graduate students facing the prospect of fee increases here at University of Manitoba. What follows is a selection of articles about these recent events.

200 000 March Against Tuition Hikes in Montreal

Courtesy of CUPE Post-Secondary

Two days after an unacceptable budget was presented, an estimated 200,000 people marched through the streets of downtown Montreal to say no to the tuition hikes proposed by the Charest government - in the biggest demonstration in Quebec since the protests against the Iraq invasion in March 2003. The student movement has made its mark on Quebec history.

CUPE and the FTQ offered their full support to the student movement. Members of CUPE locals joined demonstrators, along with CUPE Québec president Lucie Levasseur.

In the morning, the secretary general of the FTQ, Daniel Boyer, attended a press conference in sup-

port of the movement. Surrounded by representatives of other unions and Quebec opposition parties, he explained why the FTQ and its affiliates oppose the rise in tuition. The FTQ sees it as a fundamental issue of fairness: the hikes would reduce accessibility to higher education for middle-class and low-income students. The FTQ also criticised the obstinacy of Quebec, which has refused any form of dialogue with the student movement.

In the evening, at the Metropolis and Le National, a number of artists, including Chloé Sainte-Marie, Paul Piché, Dan Bigras, Martin Leon, Manu Militari and Zapartistes, performed in support of the student cause.

Photo Credit: Graham Hughes Canadian Press



Quebec student strike shows the way to fight fees

By Chantal Sundaram - Courtesy of Socialist Worker Canada.com

Quebec university and college students have shut down their campuses to protest Quebec government plans to raise tuition fees by \$1,625 over the next five years. They are motivated by some important past victories won through the determination and organization of the Quebec student movement.

From 1968 to 1990, tuition fees in Quebec were frozen at \$500 a year. After a hike of about 150 per cent from 1990 to 1993, a PQ government introduced a new freeze in 1994. But that same government opened the door to a new increase in the name of deficit cutting in 1996. It faced a Quebec-wide student strike with mass street protests and gave up that idea. Fees have also increased by \$100 a year over the past five years under the Charest government.

Today's strike comes only seven years after the last one. In 2005, an unlimited student strike shut down nearly every post-secondary institution in Quebec to protest the cutting of \$103 million from bursaries to convert them into loans. The students won, forcing the government to backtrack on a policy it had already passed. That strike received massive public support and was the source of the "red square" badge, worn by thousands of students and supporters, which is also in use today.

Strike organization

The strike of 2005 was, like all student strikes in Quebec's history, organized through mass student assemblies to hold strike votes. In January and February of this year the strike was voted on in mass assemblies, faculty by faculty in some universities, and at colleges (CEGEPs) across Quebec.

Quebec students use a strike vote threshold approach (first used in the 1986 strike) to establish an official start of the strike on each campus. A threshold of 20,000 students in at least seven student unions and on at least three campuses was established for many student unions, and that threshold was met on February 9. Strike votes have continued since then in other faculties and on other campuses, and other, more ambitious thresholds have been met and triggered additional walkouts (for details, see bloquonslahausse.com).

But all of the walk-outs, no matter when they start, are unlimited (or renewable, usually every three days). So the ranks of the strike continue to grow, and will reach its height over the course of March.

On February 23, about 1,000 students shut down the Jacques Cartier Bridge in Montreal during afternoon rush hour, as part of a demonstration of 15,000 people. As they made their way to the bridge, the police aggressively confronted the march, breaking it up with pepper spray, and arresting at least one student.

Solidarité

The success of all of the Quebec student strikes to date has involved not only walk-outs but public demonstrations of strength—whether it be picketing in front of campuses, staging mass demonstrations in the streets, launching sit-ins or occupations of the Ministry of Education and other government offices, and other direct action like street blockades. These actions have received wide support by the Quebec population in the past as a legitimate part of making the strikes a success. But the English Canadian media, including the CBC, has undermined the students' message and defended the police repression at the Bridge blockade.

We have a responsibility to show visible support outside Quebec for the students' struggle. Our support could make a difference to the outcome, and a victory for Quebec students could inspire resistance to tuition hikes across

Labour for Palestine: Why Unions Should Support Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

Since the 2005 call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) in support of Palestinian rights by over 170 Palestinian unions and civil society organizations, unions around the world have responded with resolutions and actions targeting Israeli apartheid. CUPE-Ontario was one of the first unions in Canada to pass a resolution in support of the BDS movement in 2006, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) became the first national union in North America to pass a resolution in support of BDS in 2008. CUPW has also supported initiatives for Palestine solidarity such as the BDS conference in Montreal in 2010, and participated in the aid convoys to Gaza, with members challenging the blockade in order to deliver aid and mail to the people of Gaza.

Other unions have taken even stronger stances against Israeli apartheid. The South African Municipal Workers Union has been encouraging municipalities to support the BDS campaign by declaring themselves apartheid-free zones. In response to the Israeli attack on an aid convoy to Gaza, which left nine activists dead, longshore workers in places such as South Africa, Norway, Sweden and Oakland, California refused to unload Israeli ships.

Clearly, this is an issue which is of concern to union activists in North America. But why? Why are unions around the world taking on this issue? Why should unions support the BDS movement?

First off, the fact of the matter is that the Israeli state

is practicing apartheid (as defined under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid) against the Palestinians. Palestinians living in Gaza have been under a brutal siege for years. Palestinians living in the West Bank have been subjected to a brutal decades-long military occupation, and have been cut off from each other and from their land with a system of walls, checkpoints, and Israeli-only roads. These restrictions on freedom of movement keep Palestinian workers from their jobs, and have a severe impact on the Palestinian economy. Palestinian refugees remain scattered across the region and the world, having been denied their right to return (an inalienable right under international law) for over 60 years. Palestinians have to deal with house demolitions, settler violence, and the bantustanization of the West Bank. While one could write entire articles and books on all the nasty things the Israeli state does to Palestinians (which has been done), this is just a sampling of the day to day apartheid practices of the Israeli state – never mind the occasional outlandish massacre such as the bombing of Gaza.

While it may be far away, this is not an issue which doesn't involve us. The Canadian government is making a name for itself as one of the most vocal supporters of Israeli apartheid on the international stage. Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's racist foreign minister and a vocal proponent of ethnic cleansing, has referred to Canada as a "true friend of Israel." The Manitoba government, led by the labour-backed

Labour for Palestine: Why Unions Should Support Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

NDP, has also been working hard to cultivate political and economic links with the Israeli state through a variety of partnership programs.

Support for apartheid isn't just a big problem with the government, it's also a problem within our movement. Many Canadian unions hold Israel bonds, which are direct investments in the Israeli state. Many union pension funds are also invested in companies which are complicit in and profit from Israeli apartheid. Several Canadian union leaders have gone on record opposing initiatives such as the BDS campaign and the use of the phrase "Israeli apartheid" – an accurate description, rooted in international law, of the Israeli state's practices towards Palestinians.

Fortunately, many Canadian unions are starting to see the light. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers, CUPE-Ontario, the Centrale des Syndicats du Québec, and the New Brunswick and PEI Federations of Labour are just a few examples of unions and labour centrals which have passed resolutions endorsing the 2005 Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions.

This is an important step. While the labour movement in North America may have a mixed record on international solidarity, it is still an important principle for our movement. Unions were an important part of the international movement to end apartheid in South Africa and were involved in the economic, academic, and cultural boycott movement. In one particularly famous incident, Bob Pringle of the Australian Builders Labourers

Federation (BLF) took a hack saw to the goalposts of the Sydney Cricket Grounds the night before a match against the Springboks, apartheid South Africa's national team. Surely, the old saying "an injury to one is an injury to all" is relevant when our brothers and sisters in Palestine are suffering under Israeli apartheid.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign is a non-violent tactic which can work to place economic pressure on Israel to end its apartheid policies. BDS was an effective tactic for international solidarity activists working against South African apartheid, and has the potential to help end Israeli apartheid. The demands of the 2005 Palestinian call for BDS should also be uncontroversial – by calling for an end to the military occupation, ending racism against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the BDS call puts forward what is essentially a minimum program for a just and reasonable settlement to the conflict.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is a global picket line in support of Palestinian rights. Palestinian unions and civil society have asked us to join them in the struggle against Israeli apartheid. It's time our unions take up that call and take a stand against apartheid.

Brian Latour is a member of Students Against Israeli Apartheid at the University of Manitoba, and the VP Unit 1 of CUPE 3909. In the summer of 2010, Brian took part in the Independent Jewish Voices solidarity tour to Israel/Palestine.