

UWOFA

Bargaining Bulletin

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 4

July 5, 2010

Intolerable Acts

On Tuesday, June 22nd, more than 200 faculty members met with UWOFA's Chief Negotiator, Prof. Mike Dawes, to discuss the Administration's desired changes to our working conditions at Western. It was an enlightening General Meeting. Prof. Dawes explained that the Administration has put forward a series of linked proposals affecting Academic Responsibilities, Annual Performance Evaluation, Conflict of Interest, and Discipline. At the heart of these proposals is the institution of a new, unelected committee – the University Review Committee (URC) – that would be populated exclusively by four members of the senior administration.

Under the Administration's proposal, some faculty would be subject to multi-year surveillance by the URC – and, potentially, to disciplinary action – if they receive a “below acceptable” rating in any one area of academic responsibility in any one year. The Administration also wants to tie all post-tenure performance, including sabbatical eligibility, to a pre-tenure performance “standard” that will be evaluated by the URC, not by peer review or specialists in the field.

The Administration wants to claim the prerogative of determining what sorts of service faculty members may pursue beyond the immediate walls of UWO. The Administration wants to define the boundaries of acceptability when it comes to “intimate” relations between consenting adults on this campus. They also want to place unprecedented regulations on faculty behavior by proposing that faculty must “act respectfully” both on and off campus. Moreover, it is clear from these proposals that the Administration views personal relationships and demeanor as part of a faculty member's Academic Responsibilities.

The Administration also wishes to expand teaching positions for non-UWOFA members as part of the Collective Agreement.

Taken alone, any one of these proposals would give pause to a significant constituency of the faculty. Taken together, they are an alarming attack on collegiality, self-governance, and academic freedom. No other university in Canada is

subject to such regulations. The faculty in attendance at the General Meeting voted unanimously to support our Negotiating Team in its effort to resist these initiatives, and indeed, the managerial mindset behind them more generally. Whether or not the Administration realizes that these kinds of proposals will never fly around here, we are left with a question that begs to be answered.

What is behind these intolerable proposals?

A number of possible answers suggest themselves. There is, most obviously perhaps, the stealth attack on tenure argument. Next in line: the Sheer Bloody-Mindedness of it all. The “disciplinary assembly line,” as it has been called, has been very carefully manufactured to bring a number of Collective Agreement articles together to get more and ever more of us positioned for perennial tenure and disciplinary review. There is also the arrogant condescension on display here: whether we need a note to permit us to examine theses at other universities or decanal oversight on our personal relationships, it seems in this iteration of negotiations that a new will-to-power has emerged.

Any one of these analyses is accurate as far as it goes. But does any one of them go far enough to capture the sense of outrage they have collectively prompted in the faculty?

There is a name we can give to this sense we all have. Indeed, it seems on careful analysis to be the only word to explain some other big questions so many of us have about these Intolerable Acts. Why does it seem a good idea to subject the faculty to this stuff? Why would anybody think any self-respecting faculty would put up with such outrageous nonsense? What is really behind all of this?

One word answers all of these questions, and answers them, sadly, with remarkable precision.

Contempt.

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