

FACULTY TIMES

A Newsletter of UWOPA

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Faculty Times welcomes contributions and letters to the Editor. We look forward to lively responses and debate on issues related to UWOPA and its membership.

Bernd Frohmann, *Editor*
frohmann@uwo.ca

President's Report

by Paul Handford

As the first term of another academic year draws to a close, summer seems but a dim and distant memory ... it seems hard to credit the fact that the officers of UWOPA are now well past half way through their terms (1 May-30 April). It has been a busy summer, as I shall recall below, and the present year promises its excitements too, for this, as you will all know, is a time of negotiations towards our second Collective Agreement. These are ongoing, and I make some remarks on their progress and conduct below.

More or less as I was taking office, UWOPA filed a formal complaint with the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) about the Employer's refusal, up to that point, to begin bargaining towards our second Collective Agreement. Many of you will know that, at a meeting with a representative of the OLRB on 3 July, it was agreed to adjourn the complaint *sine die*. In this context, that means that the complaint has been put in abeyance, though either party may request that it be revived, possibly with additional complaints, during the following twelve months.

Towards the end of May, it became apparent that UWOPA was to be presented with a petition for a mail ballot on motions to rescind the goals of two sets of negotiating proposals: Appointments and Child & Family Care. The ballot was duly held, and the results (both rescind motions failed) were reported in mid-July. This was an important event for

several reasons and it has stimulated the Policy-Governance Committee to engage in deliberations on the practical consequences of having duly-passed and public negotiating positions open to such highly-visible question in the period immediately before the opening of formal negotiations.

It seems that UWO may be aberrant among Canadian universities in having a constitution that allows referenda in this way: it appears to be more usual that decisions taken at General Meetings can only be overturned by motions introduced at later public meetings, with mail ballots being restricted to votes on constitutional changes and the like. We may expect some interesting and vigorous debate when this matter comes to a General Meeting of the Membership.

Negotiations

Negotiations actually began in July. I think it fair to say that UWOPA remains unhappy with the overall rate of progress in negotiations. Bargaining Bulletin #18 reminded us that much of the summer went by (needlessly in our view) without our teams meeting, since the Employer's team insisted that we could not begin talks—or even set up an agenda for meetings—until we had presented our entire non-monetary package. Once we got started, we have been doing precisely what we had maintained we could and should have been doing since March:

identifying groups of articles for discussion, beginning to lay out positions, and examining each other's proposals and arguments.

But that is history. What has happened since we got started in July? Rather less than we might have hoped. This is not to say that we have made no progress: far from that—indeed, we have come to agreement on some substantial items (see BB #21 & 23; http://www.uwo.ca/uwofa/bb2/bb2_02_23.html), have since signed off on Academic Responsibilities of Members, Alternative Workload, Annual Performance Evaluation, Application of Tri-council Policy, Closure or Reorganization of an Academic Unit, Employment Equity, Promotion & Tenure and Reduced Responsibility. Thus far, however, we have been dismayed at a great reluctance to come properly to grips with some issues that we see as extremely important; this is a source of serious disquiet.

Altogether, it has become clear that the Employer is taking a very hard-nosed approach, and we have already been treated to the liberal use of the term "impasse", something that has greatly surprised our team, since there has been rather little on the record substantive exploration of the items that seem to have provoked the use of this word. It seemed to us entirely premature to be using such a loaded term. But perhaps this is nothing more than an expression of the new, "professional" conduct of negotiations by our new, professional Chief Negotiator for the Employer and Director of Human Resources, Alex Mercer who came to us from the CBC.

Many will recall that last time, the Employer's team was headed—most professionally, too—by the VP (Administration) and fellow academic Peter Mercer. Time will tell what difference this all makes—whether it is just style or real substance.

Finally, we were both puzzled and upset that the Employer's team saw fit to introduce into the discourse the notion of an apparent deadline (7th November) beyond which we must presumably seek third party assistance. As we now know, this probably was nothing more than simply "playing the negotiations game"—perhaps trying to unnerve the Association—for the sky did not fall on 7th November (see BB#23). Quite what was achieved by this ploy is for the Administration to say; from our perspective it merely served to signal a degree of disengagement from the real business at hand—that of reaching that new

agreement which, sooner or later, we must achieve. For the present, we look forward to further bargaining sessions (first one of 2003 set for 3rd January) and to being able to report to you that we have a realistic schedule for completing our bargaining work.

What is on the table?

Looking at this from another perspective, one might have been forgiven, having read Western's Strategic Plan, *Making Choices*, for supposing that negotiations should be going along swimmingly—many of the Employer's commitments to competitive salaries, sound retention policy, making the campus more family-friendly and valuing our part-time faculty, chime pleasantly with our own proposals (see www.uwo.ca/univsec/SPTF2001/faculty.htm). Perhaps we do not all have the same understanding of the word "commitment".

For the record, it might be worth recalling what issues are on the table in this round of negotiations. The Association has tabled 34 articles dealing with a wide array of issues. Some amount to little more than house-cleaning of the Collective Agreement, while others address vital aspects of the lives of faculty on this campus. Noteworthy issues yet to be discussed and/or resolved include the following:

Compensation. Since 1990, we have dropped to sixth out of six in the Bovey Group—the "research-intensive universities in Ontario (Guelph, McMaster, Queen's, Toronto, UWO and Waterloo); tenth of ten in the largest ten universities in Ontario; twelfth out of all Ontario's 17 universities (see BB#26 at http://www.uwo.ca/uwofa/bb2/bb2_02_26.html). Clearly, without dramatic changes, we are going to remain an ever-less competitive place, with such sinking material rewards for our efforts, and all that it implies about the value that the Employer places on its professoriate. We are, of course, happy to hear the nice things that our President says about the university's faculty—as, for example, when responding to the ranking of universities reported in the *Globe & Mail*—but actions, as ever, speak louder than words: thus far, this university has been getting a tremendous bargain out of its faculty and staff. The Employer's initial Compensation offer (see https://secure.clusterspan.net/uwofa/cgi-bin/initial_salary_positions.cgi) suggests that it is not yet seriously interested in making UWO a competitively-remunerated place.

Renewal and Retention. This obviously relates to

item 1 (how can we hope to attract and retain high quality faculty with non-competitive salaries?), but also it has to do with basic policy towards replacing retirements and other faculty losses with corresponding positions. We are greatly concerned by a widespread trend towards the generation of what has been called a "two-tier" university: a relatively small number of "research stars" (who get reduced teaching and enhanced salaries) and a much larger group, many of them non-tenurable—essentially disposable—contract academic teaching staff who, whether tenurable or not, get a much different deal from their employer. We see in the Employer's recent "Making Choices" document a commitment to renewal; however, we find no mention of the nature of the appointments which it aspires to make: probationary or Limited Term/Limited Duties.

UWOFA intends to resist any move towards the two-tiered approach to campus development: we adhere to the view that both research and teaching are of crucial importance to the university's life, and that it remains vital that both pursuits be part of the academic responsibilities of most of the faculty on campus — that is, by tenured and probationary faculty. Retention is a complex problem that involves making sure that the university continue to provide an environment in which all of us can feel a continuing stake, one which makes it easy for us to resist the temptation to move on to pastures more congenial.

Workload. Again, this has many connections with 1 and 2. Enrolments have escalated while faculty numbers (and course supports) have declined, leading to an increase in student/faculty ratio (by about 25% over the last ten years). The result: increased workload, both through increased class size and through loss of teaching and marking assistance.

Thus far then, although we continue to make progress in negotiations, we are moving at a pace slower than we'd like, and that we feel to be reasonable. Further, we are disturbed by several signs from the Employer's side that suggest that some of our concerns are not really on the discussion map. Nevertheless, UWOFA remains committed to the negotiation process, and believes that with good will and serious intent, we can reach a satisfactory contract.

Another Vice-Provost at Western

This summer saw the advent of a new senior administrative post: Vice-Provost (Policy, Planning & Faculty). We are told that this officer ".....will report to the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and will be responsible for developing and implementing University budgetary and operational policy and consolidating the University's academic planning. He will also supervise the Office of Faculty Relations". Time and practice will show what relation this post will actually occupy with respect to Deans, the Provost, the Senate and the Board of Governors, and what policy and planning initiatives the incumbent will develop.

Most significant for us at this time, perhaps, is the fact that the incumbent of this new position, Alan Weedon, is the senior academic on the Employer's negotiating team. In general it might be hoped that the new office, and its conjunction with the negotiations, will result in a clearer articulation of, and concern for, the central importance of the work and views of faculty in charting the future course of this university. On the other hand, one might easily speculate, given recent campus history, that this position might turn out to represent a reincarnation of the Employer's past concerns to micromanage the activities of faculty: this would represent a renewed attack on faculty control over faculty work and the uses to which it is put. We fervently hope that this will not prove so; we hope that academic priorities and planning at Western will genuinely represent and involve all who actually carry out the academic work.

Where Kafka meets Plato

Speaking of controlling your work, I imagine many of you will have spend much of your precious summer jumping through the hoops provided by one of the Employer's new games: finding an array of majors, minors, specializations and such that fits with Employer

approval. And a very tricky game it has proven to be too, since the rules have changed repeatedly and with little notice as the game has progressed.

Recall that this notion of a campus-wide degree structure was initially floated, in other incarnations, over the past few years, and has been rejected more than once by the rank and file of faculty, whether individually or through faculty-level representatives. Notwithstanding this clear and consistent expression of misgivings by those of us who actually do the work of teaching, this seemingly undead initiative was passed by Senate in the spring of last year and, accordingly, imposed.

We were assured that this system was to be simply available to all units to be adopted—or not—as made local practical and/or pedagogical sense. Alas, this was not to be: as I know from my own experience of things at the local unit level, many hours of precious faculty time have been squandered in an almost Kafkaesque search for the bureaucratically-correct plan. Maybe things have not been so difficult in some parts of campus, but it has been a genuine source of irritation and frustration for many of us. Many of us teach in vigorous, popular and highly-regarded programs and have wondered all along what it is that might be so broken as to need such an expensive fix.

This whole exercise should convince a skeptic of the disdain with which our opinions are sometimes viewed by the Administration. One is reminded of the forced formation of Greater Toronto, regardless of referendum results. Specializations, Minors and Majors may make excellent local sense—I make no principled argument here—but I should have thought that one might rest assured that the excellent minds to be found among the unit Undergraduate Education Committees would find their way to the development of such innovations without the Procrustean imposition of any administrative plan. In short, it strikes many of

us as an unnecessary stamping of some Platonic form on an academic reality that will, nevertheless, persist in being local, peculiar and messy. And, while we're at it, the timing couldn't be much worse either, given our struggles, with slim means, to prepare for the advent of the so-called double cohort.

This little story represents in microcosm the nature of the central struggle on this and many campuses in Canada and elsewhere: the proper and effective control of our work and the defence of the proper means to carry it out. Add in the proper compensation for our working efforts, and you have the kernel of our current bargaining efforts.

What are our prospects in this struggle? Let me quote from the *Faculty Times* issue of last fall: "Since negotiating is about power relations rather than about right and wrong, or a search for The Truth, this means that how the two sides can go about achieving their respective ends is necessarily very different. This is because, while the administration wields enormous financial power, we have, in the final analysis, simply our resolve ... This all boils down to the simple fact that if we are not prepared to defy the administration with serious resolve when they try to bully or stonewall us on issues that the Membership believes to be important, then we can expect little from negotiations beyond that which the administration has already decided it will readily concede—and that means things that won't cost it much. We must all be absolutely clear about this." Our negotiators can only deliver to us what we make clear to them we are prepared to fight for. In solidarity, we might achieve great things; in disarray, we shall surely receive but crumbs.

Paul Handford is President of UWOFA. He is a member of the Department of Biology.

Letter to FT

Oct. 7, 2002 — After the *Bargaining Bulletin* (#18) was circulated outlining some of the obstacles encountered during negotiations, I was surprised to see that there were no letters dealing with this in the *Western News* the following week. A week later, I found out why. I wrote a letter to the editor of the *Western News*, and was told that it could not be printed.

If I cared to write a letter expressing general concern with the pace of negotiations, that could be printed; as long as negotiations were still going on, however, *Western News* preferred not to print more specific comments on the process. I was also informed that another faculty member had submitted a letter the previous week that similarly could not be printed. I am

curious about how many other faculty members have had this experience, and I would like to see UWOFA keep track of how many letters are rejected by *Western News*. I thought that *Western News* was a forum available to all of the UWO community, but perhaps I was mistaken ...? — *Kim Clark, Department of Anthropology*

Number Two in the Hearts of Students; Let's Try for Last in the Minds of Professors

by Ernie Redekop

The recent *Globe & Mail* poll on the responses of students to Canadian universities will certainly encourage the public-relations flacks at this university to come up with yet another slogan as vacuous as the notorious "Leading. Thinking," a motto invented by someone who was busy doing neither. This uplifting exhortation inserts such a significant hiatus between the two acts that one can only wonder whether there might be any connection at all between the two—aside from the mild suspicion that "thinking" should perhaps come before "leading," a sequence not always observed by the leaders of our administration. To help the administration to "Major in Itself" in its never-ending search for banality in language, I might suggest some new slogans: "Never Mind. Queen's. Toronto is Only. Number 29" or "We Always Said. We Were. Probably Second-Best. We Are Humble." Perhaps, to borrow from the old Avis ad, we could emblazon the following on our letterheads: "When You're Number Two. You Have. To Try Harder."

Of course, we are all proud of a prestigious poll that suggests that we are serving our students well, although I have to point out that UWO's first-place standings are in such categories as "student services" and "buildings and facilities," followed closely by a second-place standing in "quality of technology." In the categories "career preparation" and "financial assistance," UWO placed eighth; in "university atmosphere" we were sixth; and in what I would consider the most significant category, "quality of education," we placed sixth as well, behind (in order) Waterloo, Queen's, Guelph, McMaster and Wilfrid Laurier. I notice, coincidentally, that the first four of these universities also pay their professors a lot more than UWO pays us—not that there is any necessary connection between level of pay and "quality of education" (Toronto was only eighth in this category).

The temptation for our administration, of course, will be to bask in the brief fall sunshine of this poll and either to neglect the serious

problems that face us all or to apply the usual handy solutions found in the well-thumbed copies of *Every Administrator's Guide to Management Rights*, recently republished in a new edition entitled *Management Rights for Dummies*. Having recently returned from a meeting of the OCUFA Board and the annual meeting of the CAUT Defence Fund, however, I observe rather more storm-clouds than sunshine across the country.

There are remarkable similarities between the problems we as an Association face in our negotiations with our administration and those faced by our sister associations across this province and across the country. Our colleagues at Laurentian University, narrowly escaped a strike, thanks mainly to a 98.5% vote in favour of striking, but also, in part, because of the vigorous intervention of the Defence Fund. They also faced a serious attack on academic freedom at the University of Sudbury, federated with Laurentian, and were forced to call for another strike vote. Meanwhile, our colleagues at Wilfrid Laurier University gave the WLU Staff Association \$100,000 in support of the striking staff, which for over five weeks picketed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, against the administration's proposal to contract out staff positions—a proposal similar, at least in spirit, to our administration's attempts, in the name of "flexibility," to turn back the clock on the security of part-time faculty positions at this university.

I have mentioned only two cases. There are others, cases in which university administrations openly and candidly have decided to disregard both the letter and the spirit of collective agreements, thus making a mockery of bargaining and governance. In university after university, administrations are insisting on extending "management rights" into every nook and cranny of university life. The attitudes, even the language, of these administrations are so similar that one is forced to wonder whether or not there is one Canada-wide template to which all administrations subscribe, perhaps derived from a Khmer Krom document floating around

the Internet. In far too many instances, administrations regard salaries and benefits for faculty members as that part of a university budget which must remain as "flexible" as possible, and which should be an ever-decreasing percentage of a university's actual expenditures. For our Part-Time Members this attitude is particularly threatening; but it also accounts for our administration's refusal, for the better part of a decade, to correct what one of our Members has called "the mid-career sag," among Full-Time Members, viz., the low salaries of Members in the 40-50 age group. It also accounts for our administration's consistent refusal to worry about the ever-decreasing ranking of our salaries among research-intensive universities in Ontario.

Other Ontario university administrations are taking their responsibilities toward their faculty members rather more seriously than ours is; recent settlements at McMaster, Waterloo, Windsor, Guelph and other Ontario universities indicate that this is indeed the case. It is quite true that this university, like all other universities in this province, has for three decades been severely underfunded by the provincial government; this is a point that OCUFA has been making effectively for years. In these very years, the plethora of presidents that constitutes the Council of Ontario Universities has been unwilling until very recently to press the argument against underfunding with provincial governments, when the realities of the double cohort have finally forced the presidents to tell the government truths they had been reluctant to utter. Despite the now universally argued fact of governmental underfunding, however, the plea of poverty sits poorly at this university. It is time for this administration to reject its new industrial relations mode of bargaining, to stop treating the employees as varieties of commodities in some larger market in academic futures, to attempt at to restore the academic collegiality it is undermining and to get serious about Western's position on the cellar steps in the ranking of professorial salaries in this

province. Western may be second today in the hearts of students, but its administration's ranking in the minds of professors is steadily decreasing.

I mention these things because the *Globe & Mail* poll may tempt the odd administrator on this campus to suggest that management rest on its rapidly fading laurels, to imagine that at Western (as Voltaire's Pangloss might put it) all

is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. To bring us back to some more reasonable view of reality, I quote the pontification of Pangloss just before he is hanged. In Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*, Richard Wilbur and John LaTouche give him these lines: "Ladies and gentlemen, one final word. God in his wisdom made it possible to invent the rope, and for what

purpose but to make the noose? And, glory be to the greatest of all philosophers, for what purpose is the noose but . . . aaargh!"

Ernie Redekop, professor emeritus, Department of English, is a former president of UWOFA, one of UWOFA's Trustees on the CAUT Defence Fund and Chair of the Board of OCUFA.

Disciplining Dissent

by Janet Ingram-Johns

If not a marriage made in heaven, it might at least be a capital kind of relationship.

Journalism met academia over three days November 1-3 at Ottawa's stately Chateau Laurier to debate the curbs in Canada on freedom of expression and to try to figure out what can be done to shake them off. Around 100 print and broadcast journalists and university teachers and students were brought together by CEP—Communications, Energy & Paperworkers of Canada—and CAUT—the Canadian Association of University Teachers, which like CEP has its base in the nation's capital.

The conference title was "Disciplining Dissent: The Curbing of Free Expression in Academia and the Media". Topics ranged from corporate takeovers to journalism schools to "the chill on campus and in the newsroom" and included a provocative keynote address by the Secretary-General of the International Federation of Journalists, Britain's Aidan White. Other speakers included pioneering psychiatric-medicine researcher David Healy, Director of the North Wales Department of Psychological Medicine, who is best known in Canada for being hired and then "unhired" in November 2000 by the University of Toronto because he wouldn't agree to tailor research results to suit the drug companies funding the U of T. Also receiving many plaudits was Ian Boyko, national chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, who attacked the academic penalties exacted upon students for the kind of non-academic

activity that makes university bosses and their sponsors uncomfortable.

Podium speeches, floor debate and two workshop sessions focused on the two hot-button issues troubling participants—the stifling strings attached by the private sector to academic funding and the extreme bias (or, at best, lack of diversity) in many areas of the media.

CanWest's name came up relentlessly at the same time as founder Izzy Asper was using a Montreal speech to castigate every notable newspaper and TV station in the developed world (except his) for bias against the state of Israel, although he did not provide one decent shred of evidence. Although, as with most focus groups, there was ample opportunity for participants to air their beefs, most notable was the "crossmosis" between profs and journalists, between academic technicians and broadcast technicians, between students of the fast-moving media and students of other disciplines not known for being hostages to time.

The conference came up with a five-point statement. The first four points ask CEP and CAUT to:

1. Work together to promote and defend freedom of expression, including academic and journalistic freedom;
2. Defend the work of journalists and academics from undue commercial influence and political pressures by (a) promoting public service values in all

media, particularly broadcasting; (b) strengthening and advancing the cause of teaching and research in the public interest; (c) encouraging a diversity of voices in the media in the face of excessive media ownership concentration; (d) ensuring the independence and integrity of academic research through adequate public funding, and (e) developing practical mechanisms for joint action in defence of journalists and academics whenever freedom of expression is threatened;

3. Work with other groups, such as public-sector unions, civil-liberties associations, social-justice and human-rights organizations, in defence of freedom of expression, civil liberties and fundamental human rights;
4. Urge the International Federation of Journalists, Education International and Public Service International to hold an international meeting on freedom of expression for journalists, academics and public servants.

And—to make sure the manifesto does more than paper walls—the fifth point asks the two unions to: Make a commitment to meet within six months to consider further joint actions in support of these objectives.

Janet Ingram-Johns is Vice-President of Local 2000, CEP-BC. Reprinted with permission from the union newsletter.

Strike Vote or Strike: A Few Past Experiences

by Christine White

It has been clear from my observations at UWOFA meetings over the last several months that many faculty members are anxious about the outcome of negotiations for our new Collective Agreement, and the anxiety level increased as we drew closer to the November 7 "deadline" given to us by the administration team. As it happened, negotiations continued after November 7. To reiterate Mike Dawes' wise statement, "sooner or later there will be a new agreement"; we must always keep this perspective.

Having shared the experience of two strikes with my husband (who is on faculty at Trent University), I hope to be able to provide an additional perspective of someone who has "been there and done that". I note here that the first of these strikes was the longest in Canadian history at that time (since surpassed most recently by the University College of Cape Breton). That first strike was the most difficult for faculty to engage in. I was actually present at the meeting to witness the intense agonizing that occurred when the final strike vote was taken. Ultimately the conciliator had convinced them that they "could not expect to achieve anything they were not willing to strike for". They had to overcome many fears, all of which were associated with some kind of loss, for example, money, self-identity as a "professional", precious research time, and the respect of students (in different orders for different people of course). In the end, these fears were negatively balanced against another fear: that of losing their own self-respect, self-esteem and dignity. It was a strange new experience for everyone, and utterly terrifying for some. Once out on the line, resolve was difficult to sustain after a couple of weeks (the strike lasted four weeks) especially in -20°C weather, but the process actually created

increased solidarity—a solidarity that has been maintained and tested repeatedly for over ten years now. They achieved their goals in both strikes. The big issue in the first strike was pension, and in the second it was salary parity with other Ontario universities.

We all hope that an agreement will be reached before we are forced to take a strike vote. However, it is possible that it may become necessary. If that time comes, I hope that the agonizing I witnessed in my husband and his colleagues will not occur, because it really need not. There is a fundamental difference between a strike vote and a final vote to strike (and I apologize if I am insulting anyone's intelligence on this point). A positive strike vote sends a necessary message to the administration's team that we take our own position seriously. The strength of that vote sends an even more important message: *how* seriously we take our own position. Actually deciding to go on strike comes later, but it is much less likely that we will need to make that decision if we give our Negotiating Team the strongest possible mandate. Our current position is to bring the non-monetary items in line with those of other universities and our salaries into parity with the Bovey Six. We should all ask ourselves, is this where we think we belong, and are we willing to stand up for our position?

Back now to the outcomes of those Trent strikes in relation to the fears I observed: in neither case did my husband lose income that could never be made up. There was income from the CAUT strike fund, and we found that bank managers really do like university professors (although it never became necessary for us to do bridge financing). But most importantly, the faculty took the advice not to come to an agreement without a "signing bonus", a device that assures that *neither side*

benefits financially from a strike. The signing bonus provided equal monetary compensation for the amount of time out of work. Fear of financial loss was, therefore, not justified in the end.

The issue of whether professional identity was lost or not was individually reconciled, but I'm willing to wager that most faculty members still view themselves as professionals, even more so, because they managed to maintain their dignity. With a few exceptions, their sense of collegiality increased. Yes, research time was lost, but not completely. Although lab-based data gathering was halted, people were still able to do some of their writing at home. More importantly, the university's research environment was enhanced by the outcome.

There was much debate over the harm the strikes might do to the students. Needless to say, no students lost their academic year because of the strike. No doubt, many were unhappy, but a great many also came out to support the faculty, feeling that ultimately, a more satisfied faculty would result in a better education, just as a happier parent is usually a more effective one. Furthermore, both contracts resulted in improved working conditions and salaries, making Trent a more attractive place for new faculty, and helping to retain those already there. In the long run, the students gained from the strikes.

My final message is: first, consider seriously the difference between a strike vote that gives our negotiating team the strength it needs to successfully arrive at an acceptable agreement, and a final vote to go on strike; second, do not make a decision based on any fear other than that of losing your dignity.

Christine White is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology.

Report From COCAL V: Coalition for Contingent Academic Labour

by *Claudia Vicencio*

On Oct. 3-5 I attended COCAL V, the fifth and largest to-date conference of the Coalition for Contingent Academic Labour, held in Montreal. For Part-Time and other contract academic staff working in universities, this conference represents an exciting and welcome—even inspirational—advance in the struggle to become visible. Over two hundred participants attended from faculty unions and associations from across Canada, the US and, for the first time, Mexico.

Visible? Contract Academic Staff? What am I talking about?

Don't worry, this is not a article railing against the many injustices indignities part-timers face. We'll leave that for when we talk about negotiations, and solidarity. This is simply a report on a conference.

What is COCAL?

COCAL emerged between 1996 and 1998 as a loose network or coalition of activists involved in contingent faculty issues. Its primary functions thus far have been to share information, to educate our colleagues and the public, and to build solidarity among the scattered ranks of faculty activists. In some places it consists in city-wide coalitions, in others, in single unions. The Coalition brings together 40 part-time university and college teacher organizations in the United States and Canada. In English Canada, participation has been spearheaded by the Contract Academic Staff committee of CAUT. The Academic unions in Quebec are also actively involved—in fact, COCAL V was jointly hosted by CUPFA (Concordia University Part-Time Faculty Association, with 700 members) working together with CAUT and the FNEEQ-CSN (National Federation of Educators in Quebec, comprised of 72 unions, over 23,500 members.) The Coalition operates with an ad hoc steering committee, relying on the principle of local autonomy as an effective way for dealing with the wide variations in working conditions, political traditions and language.

COCAL has been at various times a listserv (join at adj-l@listserv.gc.cuny.edu), an

occasional conference (the Montreal meeting being the grandest so far), and a week of coordinated activity known here at Western as Fair Employment Week. In October of 2001, approximately 300 campuses in Canada and the US held actions or events to mark the week. Our own campaign was quite low key—an information table in the atrium at UCC, an information leaflet, a film about the plight of “Road Scholars,” and a poster campaign. Some of you may still see the posters pinned up on colleagues doors: they say things like “Part-Timers are Academics Too” and “If I Wanted to Work in a Sweat Shop, I'd Buy a Sewing Machine.” COCAL participants voted to hold another round Fair Employment Week actions in the spring of 2003.

The aim of the conference was to examine the growing trend toward casual labour in higher education in the context neo-liberal globalization. It is clear that contract academic workers—contingent faculty, part-timers, limited-term contract holders, adjuncts (whatever we get called)—are having an effect on the shape of academic unions throughout North America. According to Richard Moser, Field Representative for the AAUP, “until recently faculty unions and associations were not very interested in organizing contingent faculty because of the high costs and low financial return associated with such activity. By articulating the long-term consequences of the erosion of tenure and exploitation of contingent faculty, COCAL activists help to effect a shift in attitudes and policy so that all the major unions and associations are now engaging in contingent faculty organizing.” Here in Canada, FNEEQ-CSN has represented increasing numbers of contract academic staff since 1969. CAUT member organizations now represent part-timers in 16 universities, and organizing efforts over the past two years have been steadily directed at CAS, with Wilfred Laurier and Acadia certifying most recently. Efforts continue at Moncton (currently before the labour board) Algoma, Memorial, Mount Allison and Winnipeg. Acadia reached a first contract

settlement only days after the conference, after winning a 100% strike mandate. Members of their negotiating team were present at COCAL V with the express purpose of finding some workable bargaining strategies. COCAL has become one way that contingent faculty members have struggled to create new forms of solidarity to compensate for what is often lacking in the workplace.

The conference covered a wide range of topics. Plenary sessions addressed issues of mobilization, the state of contingent academic labour across North America, globalization and academic freedom. Workshops gave participants an opportunity to work through such widely applicable issues as effective collective bargaining, integration and governance, and the contentious question of career paths from part-time to full-time employment, to more specific concerns such as distance education and conditions for language or fine arts instructors. This may seem like humdrum news, but the reality is that until 1998 or so, faculty activists often labored in isolation with few sources of information and a limited conception of what was possible or even desirable. Now a victory in Canada or California is a victory for what has become an entire movement and a learning opportunity for all of us. The COCAL meeting in Montreal gave participants a sense of inspiration and solidarity.

For me, one particularly exciting aspect of the meeting was the presence of leaders from STUNAM, the union representing some 30,000 academic workers at the Autonomous University of Mexico, almost 20,000 of whom are temporary or part-time. Their participation not only makes of COCAL a truly pan-North American coalition, but this group brought with it a daring challenge: to turn our collective attention to the implications of globalization for higher education, and particularly to NAFTA plans for privatization. There was talk of holding COCAL VI in Mexico City.

Claudia Vicencio is a member of the UWOFA Board. She studies Law at Western.

UWOFA OFFICE

Lauren Tremblay, Professional Officer

Phone: 661-2111 (ext. 86960), email: laurent@uwo.ca

Jane Laforge, Administrative Officer

Phone: 661-3016 (ext. 83016), email: uwofa@uwo.ca
