

CANADIAN
UNION OF
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
B.C. DIVISION
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public employee

Solidarity
Supplement
INSIDE



building for the future

PROTECTING
PUBLIC
POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION

CUPE's

15,000 workers in B.C. post-secondary institutions were left wondering about the impact of a substantial reorganization of the provincial ministries for colleges and universities in October.

For the first time in 20 years, colleges and institutes were separated from universities into two distinct ministries. In addition to concerns about putting up new barriers between institutions, CUPE and other public education advocates questioned whether the new cabinet and ministry structures would better address problems caused by underfunding, crumbling infrastructure, and rising tuition and student debt.



building for the future

Solid support for better funding

The B.C. government has been given much good advice on what is needed to properly protect public post-secondary education – none of which included creating two new ministries. In consultations on the 2011 B.C. Budget, the legislative committee on Finance and Government Services heard from many post-secondary stakeholders about issues and solutions. The committee recommended that budget 2011 focus on reducing student financial barriers with needs-based grants and restoring the Annual Capital Allowance for post-secondary institutions to pre-2009 levels.

Colleen Garbe, president of CUPE 116 at UBC and co-chair of CUPE's Universities Coordinated Bargaining Committee (UCBC), says that the need to invest in infrastructure is critical. "CUPE members take care of the buildings, grounds and facilities at universities and colleges throughout the province," she says. "Failing to invest in maintaining these incredible assets is very short-sighted and does a disservice to students and the public who use our institutions."



Operating funding also needs to be increased. Per student grants (inflation-adjusted) to post-secondary institutions have fallen by almost eight per cent since 2001. CUPE and others have called on government to restore funding to 2001 levels and to cover future inflationary costs for colleges and universities.

Jerry Oetting, president of CUPE 2081 at Camosun College, notes that despite its supposed business savvy, the Liberal government doesn't seem to realize that investing in post-secondary education is smart economics. "Camosun returns \$3.80 to the community and the economy for every dollar invested," he says. "Funding education should be a cornerstone of B.C.'s economic policy."

Kelly Shopland, CUPE 3479, Aboriginal Advisor, North Island College (TOP LEFT)

Gary Yang, CUPE 2278, Laboratory Teaching Assistant (Physiology) at UBC (LEFT)



ALL TOGETHER NOW On the cover (left), three CUPE locals at UBC are working together to raise the profile of members' work, including a joint advertising campaign. The UBC ads are modeled on the University of Victoria locals' joint campaign (opposite). Visit cupeworkingtogether.ca and www.universitieswork.ca

Focus on quality

Post-secondary funding was frozen in the 2010 B.C. budget, with no adjustment for inflation. The result will be cuts to services and yet another round of tuition increases. "Chronic provincial underfunding has pushed universities to sacrifice quality in order to balance the budget," says Craig Ashbourne, president of CUPE 4163 at UVic. Ashbourne, who co-chairs the UCBC, says there are solutions. "We need policies that



Wayne Pountney, Trades Toolroom Technician, CNC, CUPE 4951

support quality, from limits on class sizes to a greater focus on training and professional support," he says. "Students will benefit from more stable teaching, a greater degree of personal interaction with instructors, and the ability to attract the best and brightest from across the country."

Contracting work in makes sense

At North Island College on Vancouver Island, CUPE 3479 vice-president Michelle Waite talks about the benefits of contracting work in. "In the past, all of our general maintenance work was contracted out," she says. "With the support and information from other CUPE locals we were able to create our first position within the college and the union. The feedback on all sides has been very positive."

At the University of Northern BC, senior carpenter and CUPE 3799 member Ron Pelletier recounts the experience of building the university's aboriginal gathering place. "We ini-

tially made the decision to go in-house, rather than contract work out, because it was cheaper," he says. "But the benefits were so much more than financial. We were able to make changes as we went along and respond to requests and new ideas because we were not locked into a contract with specific design and materials. The end result is a much more beautiful and authentic space to welcome aboriginal students and the broader university community."



CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill at UBC with Colleen Garbe (CUPE 116) and Nancy Forhan (CUPE 2950)

While many creative solutions are found locally, CUPE National representatives Leann Dawson (universities coordinator) and Ian McLean (colleges coordinator) say that provincial government bargaining mandates, including the zero wage mandate, interfere with the ability to address the real issues facing CUPE members. All CUPE locals in universities and colleges are in the process of bargaining new agreements. Respect and fairness at work, job security and protecting health benefits are key bargaining issues.

Throughout the post-secondary sector CUPE locals are working together to coordinate bargaining, to raise the profile of the work members do on campus and to protect public post-secondary education. The 'universities work because we do' campaign has been rekindled, including a new universitieswork.ca website. A similar college sector campaign is getting underway. CUPE members know how important public colleges, institutes and universities are and are committed to keep up the fight to protect a strong public system.



Gary Harvie, IceMaker, UBC, CUPE 116