



CUPE BC 2022 CONVENTION UNIVERSITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

The Universities Committee consists of the Presidents or designates representing ten locals. These are Locals 116 and 2950 from the University of British Columbia (UBC), Local 3338 from Simon Fraser University, Locals 917, 951 and 4163 from the University of Victoria, Local 3799 from University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), Local 3386 from Royal Roads University, Local 4879 from Thompson Rivers University, and Local 2278, which has members at both UBC and UNBC. The committee functions as the coordinating body for CUPE workers at these universities, and liaises with CUPE workers at other post-secondary institutions in BC and in other provinces. Our meetings provide important opportunities for the committee to discuss common concerns and plan strategies on a sectoral basis.

The Universities Committee met on October 19, 2021, November 4, 2021, and on February 7, 2022, and developed strategies around significant issues facing our sector. The 2021/22 term focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, preparations for 2022 Collective Bargaining, and supporting Truth & Reconciliation.

COVID-19

Post-secondary unions navigated university re-opening plans with their Health & Safety Committees as students were called back to campus in September. Locals saw inconsistent messaging and policies across campuses and lack of personal protective equipment for workers. Members experienced higher levels of mental health issues in the workplace as stress and anxiety built around a safe return to campus. Universities implemented vaccine status declaration policies and rapid testing programs, placing unvaccinated members working in healthcare settings on unpaid leaves of absence to keep workplaces safe. Workers demonstrated their flexibility in adapting back to remote work arrangements, as changing

UNIVERSITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

health protocols surrounding the Omicron variant caused a return to virtual teaching in January. With the COVID-19 pandemic closer to being deemed an endemic, and with restrictions being lifted, members are eager to continue working in hybrid arrangements when the duties of their jobs allow them to do so.

2022 Bargaining Preparations

Most universities' collective agreements expire on March 31, 2022. Locals meet as the Universities Coordinated Bargaining Committee (UCBC) to share updates and strategies. Wages and compensation are a primary concern throughout the sector, as workers are struggling to make ends meet with PSEC mandates limiting the ability for their wages to keep up with inflation and the cost of living. Recruitment and retention issues in post-secondary institutions are causing some employees to be tasked with high workloads, exacerbating stress and mental health issues within the workplace. An increase to bullying & harassment complaints will necessitate stronger collective agreement language so that issues can be pursued through the grievance process. Remote work language will also need to be negotiated to ensure that equitable access is given to employees who demonstrate their ability and preference for this benefit.

Layoffs and Non-Unionized Work

Locals saw a number of layoffs through 2021 due to budget constraints and departmental restructuring. Positions were eliminated, hours reduced, and some duties resurfaced in non-union positions. Locals are strategizing ways to bring non-union workers into their bargaining units.

Truth & Reconciliation

The Committee plans to spend a day at the Musqueam Cultural Centre and visit the UBC Residential School History and Dialogue Centre as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. The committee is committed to understanding the land that we occupy and we are finding

UNIVERSITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

meaningful ways to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *94 Calls to Action* in our workplaces. Locals are exploring bursaries to support Indigenous scholarship in post-secondary institutions. Committee members have been encouraged to enroll in the Indigenous Canada Course through the University of Alberta.

Thanks

The Committee thanks our Staff Advisors Micha Pesta, Mitch Guitard, Nick Agrignon, Andrew Ledger, and Harry Nott, as well as our Communications Representative Gregory Taylor and Researcher Anusha Balram. Committee members also extend thanks to the CUPE BC staff who assist with our Committee's work.

Respectfully submitted:

Kirk Mercer, Chair
Lois Rugg, Co-Chair
Chloe Martin-Cabanne, Recording Secretary
Fiona Brady Lenfesty
Joyce Henley
David Lance
Greg Melnechuk
Steve Nixon
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Micha Pesta, Staff Advisor
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