



# Newsletter

## October 2008

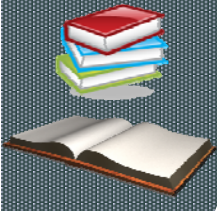
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# A Higher Grade



Newsletter of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 3909

*"Union solidarity is based on the principle that union members are equal and deserve mutual respect at all levels"*

*- Equality Statement CUPE Constitution*



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In this issue:

- ◆ Global financial meltdown according to Georgetti and Sanger
- ◆ Labour force by Statistics Canada
- ◆ Management grabs the wrong end of the stick at Parks Canada
- ◆ York University follows in U of M's labour relations footsteps
- ◆ Federal election post-mortem by cupe.ca
- ◆ Ryerson campus radio staff fired for joining a union



## Economic Catastrophe

Is it really this bad?

Ken Georgetti, President of the Canadian Labour Congress, says, "Canadian working families will bear the brunt of a deep economic crisis [caused by] corporate and political elites, [who] for years have been telling us that the economy was 'fundamentally sound,' despite stagnating wages, and tens of thousands of manufacturing and forestry jobs lost."

And Wall Street can not be blamed in this country: "[It] was Canada's

own financial insiders who were behind the Asset Backed Commercial Paper débâcle, and Canada's own Minister of Finance who refused to get involved, preferring 'a market led solution' which left huge holes in our pension plans," writes Georgetti.

During the last few weeks Canada's stock market has taken a battering that was even worse than it was for the U.S. This is a world-wide crisis and Toby Sanger, CUPE senior economist, notes: "It is now widely acknowledged that this is the worst since the Great Depression in the 1930s." Recession is inevitable in Canada, but probably not as severe as in the U.S., according to several chief economists, including Sanger. "For years, CUPE and our allies have been telling politicians, government officials and anyone else who would listen that their neo-conservative economic policies of de-regulation, privatization, tax cuts, corporate trade deals, and cuts to public programs were not only socially unjust, but also economically harmful and dangerous. Rarely were we listened to. Too often we

These economic problems did not just appear in the last few weeks or over the past year. They have been developing for a long time and have deep roots.  
— Toby Sanger

were dismissed as economically naïve and afraid to embrace the demands of global financial capitalism. Now we are seeing the results of their economic policies—and it's not pretty."



"The financial crisis brought on by an utterly irresponsible and transparently self-serving elite of bankers and outright corporate criminals now clearly threatens to drag us into a global depression. Those in Canada and around the world who proclaimed the virtues of deregulated global finance and do nothing governments stand naked and discredited."

— Ken Georgetti

Sanger foresees a renewed right-wing exploitation of the crisis and, in particular, the likelihood of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's attempt to force tax cuts, deregulation, privatization and cuts to public spending. Since these types of measures created the economic problems, they can only exacerbate the situation. Some of the stabilizing measures that Sanger suggests are:

#### Re-regulation of the financial industry

- to protect the investments and pensions of ordinary Canadians
- to deter the speculation and fraud that created an unstable economy

(Canadian pension funds have now lost more than \$100 billion so far)

#### Pro-active response to economic slowdown

- maintain and expand public services to protect families and to help the economy avoid a deeper downturn

#### Investing in our future

- increased funding to rebuild public infrastructure (focus on energy efficiency, renewable energy and green investments)
- economic strategies to rebuild industries (e.g. manufacturing and forestry)
- investments in improving public health care, research and development and education

With files from: <http://cupe.ca/economics/financial-crisis>; <http://canadianlabour.ca/en/working-families-demand-a-fundamental-change>

#### And what about jobs...?

According to the Labour Force Survey from Statistics Canada, employment dropped by 55,000 in July, a record single-month job loss figure created by massive job cuts across the private sector, largely in Ontario and Quebec. "These numbers are truly shocking. Canadians haven't experienced job losses like this since 17 years ago,

when the country was in full recession. Since this time last year, we've lost another 88,000 manufacturing jobs. Now, in the middle of the summer, we're seeing people give up on the job market altogether," said CLC President Ken Georgetti. He said "equally disturbing" were signs of discouragement among Canadians looking for work.

*American Income Life Labour Letter*  
September 2008



#### Statistics Canada/CALM

Here are some quick facts on unions from Stats Canada's annual Perspectives on Labour and Income.

The average unionized worker is paid \$23.58 an hour while the average non-union worker is paid \$18.98.

The majority of union members are now women, which has been the case since 2006. The unionization rate for women (30 per cent) exceeds men's (28.7 per cent)—2.15 million women and 2.07 million men are union members.

Unionized women are closer to achieving pay equity than non-unionized women. Women in unionized full-time jobs average 94 per cent of union full-time men's average (\$23.36 versus \$24.83). The wage gap is much bigger for non-unionized full-time women who earn only 81 per cent of non-union full-time men's average (\$18.16 versus \$22.50).

A full-time union workers' average wage is \$24.15. Full-time non-union workers average only \$20.55.

A part-time union workers' average wage is \$19.99. Part-time non-union workers earn dramatically lower pay of \$12.56

# NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE

## No laughing matter by Mikael Swayze (CALM)

In 2004, Michelle Courtemanche, a Parks Canada senior guide-interpreter at Fort Chambly in Quebec, posted on her locker a famous quote from Voltaire, “I should like to see, and this will be the last and most ardent of my desires, to see the last king strangled with the guts of the last priest.”

Her supervisors, learned of the Voltaire quote and read it as a “hateful message against authority.” They also thought the quote to be “violent” and claimed to have felt threatened.

They called Courtemanche to a meeting. Courtemanche said it was a joke and she regularly put up quotes on her locker. They suspended Courtemanche for one day, her first disciplinary suspension.

Immediately after, Courtemanche was transferred out of the fort to another Parks Canada site in Montreal.

At hearing, the supervisor said she thought the quote had just been put up and was posted in response to a recent spate of grievances.

It turned out that Courtemanche had posted the Voltaire quote 10 years earlier. Over the years, she had been sticking other quotes on top of it. Before the end of the year, Courtemanche had decided to start fresh and she removed the more recent quotes, exposing the Voltaire quote which was more firmly fixed. She had planned to remove it later.

In 2007, the adjudicator upheld the worker’s position. He found there was no reason for discipline. Clearly, an historical reference in



Thanks:  
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an historical site was not a reference to present-day management. Regarding the transfer, the adjudicator held that the “real reasons for that decision are found outside the alleged concern for the grievor’s well-being.”

He rescinded the one-day suspension and ordered Courtemanche returned to her former position at Fort Chambly with reimbursement for financial losses suffered because of the transfer.

In the end, we have unions to prevent managers or supervisors, who think they carry the mantle of authority, to simply transfer problem subjects—oops, workers.

Today, Courtemanche is on academic leave from Parks Canada, completing a doctorate in anthropology.

*(Mikael Swayze is a staff representative with CUPE 3902 and a CALM executive member.)*

# NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE

## Help York University TAs and contract faculty win a fair collective agreement

Job security, the high cost of living and workplace equity are issues that could lead to a strike at York University at the end of October.

CUPE 3903, representing 3,200 teaching assistants, graduate assistants and contract faculty, has requested a no-board report from the government-appointed conciliator, setting the stage for a possible strike or lockout at the end of the month. The union will conduct strike votes next week.

“We have been negotiating two days a week for the last two months and have made very little progress,” said Graham Potts, the union’s chief negotiator. “We want to reach a fair collective agreement so our members can focus on their teaching duties. We’re telling our employer it’s time to get serious.”

Key issues in negotiations include job security for contract faculty, employment and workplace equity, tuition fees and compensation for graduate students, who often live below the poverty level.

You can help CUPE 3903 by sending a message to York’s negotiators.

“Please take a minute to visit <http://cupe.ca/action/3903-york>. CUPE 3903, representing 3,200 teaching assistants, graduate assistants and contract faculty at York University, has requested a no-board report from the government-appointed conciliator, setting the stage for a possible strike or lockout at the end of the month.”

## York University pushing service workers toward lockout or strike

York University has raised the stakes in negotiations with the union representing custodial, maintenance and other service workers by requesting a “no-board” report from the government-appointed conciliator.

The move sets the stage for the university administration to lock out almost 400 members of CUPE 1356 in early November or force them into a strike for a fair contract.

“We are extremely disappointed that our employer is pushing us toward this deadline,” said Jack McCann, president of CUPE 1356. “Just over a week ago, after a month of bargaining, they tabled major concessions that our members simply cannot accept.”

If the university would apply the money they are spending on a lawyer to lead their negotiations to benefit improvements and withdraw the concessions, they might be able to avert a strike, he said.

“The employer is being unreasonable. They refuse to give us the same deal they signed with the York University Staff Association (YUSA). They would rather threaten us with a lockout to try to force concessions on the workers who keep the university clean, safe and operating smoothly for all the members of the York community.”

The union local will conduct a strike vote next Sunday, October 26, McCann said.



## Election brings untriumphant victories

The 2008 federal election is finally over. As the dust settles, there have emerged some wins, some losses, and some “victories” that, on closer inspection, aren’t all that triumphant.

The clearest winner to emerge from this election is the NDP. This has been the strongest campaign in the party’s history, resulting in an increased percentage of the popular vote, and inroads in Québec, Newfoundland, Alberta and Northern Ontario. NDP seat numbers are their highest in 20 years – edging closer to Ed Broadbent’s historic party record of 43 seats in 1988. The NDP finished with 8 new seats over all, climbing from 29 seats in 2006, to 30 at dissolution, to 37 by the end of election night.

The Bloc Quebecois held its ground, entering the race with 48 seats and leaving with 50. Leader Gilles Duceppe unified Quebecers against the Conservatives over their \$45 million cuts to arts and culture, and their harsh proposals for sentencing young offenders. In the end, the Bloc reinvigorated its base, and played an integral role in denying the Conservatives their coveted majority.

Last night’s unequivocal loser was the Liberal Party, finishing with their worst showing in over 20 years at a loss of almost 20 seats.

Stephen Harper’s Conservatives are proclaiming victory. After all, they did pick up 16 new seats, thereby strengthening their minority government. But the Conservatives had higher expectations for this election. To this end, they have fallen considerably short.

The Conservatives blew their chance at the majority government they so eagerly craved. Their odds went from palpable to elusive when a series of gaffes – most significantly, cuts to arts and culture - exposed their right wing agenda. This caused many Canadians to recoil, and seriously damaged Harper’s folksy image those sweater vests worked so hard to achieve.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Party - the Conservatives’ main opposition – has been at its most fractured during the last two elections. Yet even with the Liberals at their most vulnerable, the best the Conservatives could pull off was a minority both times. In fact, the Conservatives have barely penetrated Canada’s major cities, and have obtained zero seats in Toronto or Montreal.



So what do these election results mean for CUPE members? Harper has said that he plans to govern as though he has a majority. This means he’ll continue to push his partisan and ideological agenda through parliament. Harper will use economic woes to justify a smaller government and reduced public services. CUPE members must be ready to push back against cuts to public spending and jobs.

Harper will keep tight control over information – as he has already done with his secret trade deals, limited communication with the media, and vague, tardy political platforms. CUPE members must keep pressuring the government to engage in public discourse about issues that affect our jobs, families and communities.

The best news to come out of this election is that Canadians do not want the Conservatives to have a free hand to govern our country. Voters have demonstrated strong support for the NDP, who are now charged with being the true opposition in the House of Commons.

"We are committed to working with the NDP to ensure that issues affecting working families are addressed in this parliament," said CUPE National President Paul Moist.

CUPE thanks everyone who worked hard to campaign and show support for the NDP. At half a million members strong, we’re ready to keep up the fight.

Thanks:  
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## CUPE 1281 FIGHTS FIRINGS AT CKLN-FM (RYERSON)

Report from:

Derek Blackadder

National Representative

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Peterborough Area Office

The struggle to negotiate a first contract at CKLN-FM, Ryerson University's student supported campus/community radio station, has turned into a fight against the illegal firing of two staff.

The small group of paid staff at the mostly volunteer station voted to join CUPE 1281 almost a year ago. Well into the negotiation process, management argued that news director Kirstin Schwartz and music director Tien Providence should not be in the bargaining unit – a case usually made when a bargaining unit certifies and one that the employer could still try to make today at the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

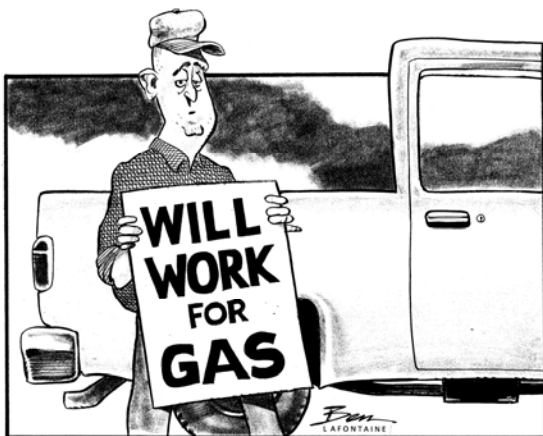
Management's solution? Forget the Board; fire the workers. Schwartz, who had just returned to work from parental leave, and Providence were terminated in a move that CUPE 1281 calls clearly illegal.

You can help Schwarz and Providence be re-instated in their jobs by sending a message to CKLN management.

Take action now! Go to <http://cupe.ca/bargaining/ckln-firings> and send a message to CKLN management.



(This report was first received on September 15, 2008)



Send your comments, suggestions, and contributions to:

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