

**CUPE**

# *The King's Adjunct*

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## *A Message from our Past President*

By: Neisha Cushing

I'd like to start by welcoming our new president, Mitch Rowat! Welcome aboard, Mitch!

After years of teaching in the Writing program, Mitch took over this position in December of 2020. I'd like to think that I speak for the entire previous executive team when I say this injection of new leadership is one of the only great things that 2020 brought after almost a year of dealing with the COVID19 pandemic; not seeing and hugging our loved ones nearly enough; not chatting with our colleagues in the hallways of King's; and adjusting to the massive transition to online teaching. Mitch proved to be a very wonderful and welcoming sight for a group of sore and tired eyes.

It's been well over six years since the idea of unionizing first came up in discussions with fellow

part-time faculty at King's. Many of us who'd been instructing for years were tired of the stress of not knowing if we had a job the following academic year. We were tired of feeling disposable when we were doing our very best to bring high quality instruction to our students; we were done with the exasperation of the unfairness the status quo brought and how it left us vulnerable every year to losing our positions—sometimes to a department chair's former student now in graduate school, or to a friend who needed teaching experience, or for no reason at all. The precariousness of our work needed to be addressed.

After contacting our local CUPE office, we decided to organize. We had a fantastic CUPE organizer who helped us unify as a group, at the time, of over 200 (*Continued on page 2*)

part-time faculty members. It was a boots-on-the-ground, knocking on office doors, card signing effort based on the need for job security and using our voices as a collective to say 'enough is enough', we deserve better and we're going to get it. After all, we as part-time faculty teach the lion's share of courses at King's. This was a yearlong effort that included countless volunteer hours for a handful of us who slowly but surely saw our efforts start to solidify. Maybe we could really do this!!

With some confidence, we put our efforts to a vote and much to our great delight and relief the decision to unionize by part time faculty was finalized in 2016! We were exhilarated and exhausted, but the hard work was still in front of us. Bargaining for our first collective agreement was a long, arduous, and dedicated effort with both disappointments and big wins. We sat at the table with an administration that suddenly had to start taking their part-faculty seriously. It was a huge learning experience for me and a steep transitional period for everyone.

Hammering out the first Collective Agreement was an eye-opening experience; I'd never been in a union before, let alone developed a collective agreement. Thanks to our CUPE representative and the efforts of our bargaining team, we brought to the table a list of demands that put the first stepping stone in place for what we hoped would grow into a stronger agreement. That said, our foundational document provided some rudimentary decency for us as employees of the College. No longer could a department chair just get rid of one of us with no explanation; a seniority system was developed and implemented, and we developed language around academic freedom, money in lieu of benefits to build on in further agreements, sick leave and parental leave, among other things.

What some of you may not know is that I am not the first president of our union but the second. I took over the position from a former colleague after he left the presidency before his term was up. The union was so new and there was no one else who was willing to take on the role, so I agreed to finish out his term until a new president could be voted in. That was 5 years ago and the executive team has, with few

exceptions, remained the same group of people until this past December. We were a bare bones union that did the basic work of treating our members with respect while helping them with any issues they were having; dealt with grievances; began sitting on committees in order to have part time representation at the table while the business of the College was being conducted; and kept the union afloat.

Our second collective agreement brought us further gains. We moved from being able to teach 2 courses to 2.5 (3 in exceptional circumstances); an increase in wages for almost all part-time faculty; more money in lieu of benefits; and the keeping of our seniority should anyone go into public office, among other advancements. Bargaining is not an easy process. It is frustrating and disheartening learning just how much we don't seem to matter to an institution that couldn't run without us.

Our executive team experienced many personal changes during this 5-year period; babies were born, PhDs were earned, there were deaths, surgeries, new jobs, break-ups, and celebrations. We supported each other during these major life events while trying to keep the pillars of the union standing and I am very proud and thankful for the friendships I've made with my fellow former executive members. We were a grass-roots effort, but what we really needed was to grow as a union, establish better connections, and transition to a leadership model that could carry us forward.

Mitch has only been in this position for a few short months and already we are on stronger footing. As we move into bargaining our 3<sup>rd</sup> Collective Agreement this year, we are all going to benefit from his leadership skills, dedication, organization, and networking abilities. I feel a huge sense of relief and also a renewed sense of rejuvenation for the work of the union. As the new vice president of CUPE local 5265, I'd like to thank everyone for their support and kindness during my tenure as president and I hope you will all join me in supporting Mitch in his new role as our 3<sup>rd</sup> president.



## Citizen Adjunct by Charles Burnetts

It's an interesting time to be involved in a union, and perhaps most of all in terms of the "baggage" each of us brings to the endeavour of collective bargaining and its meanings for us as working individuals. As a media scholar, I'm fascinated about how we think about our union activity from the standpoint of those conscious and unconscious associations it has for each of us. Perhaps the most vexed issue is the potential strain it puts on our understanding of ourselves in relation to the college, despite a wide variance in the reasons we have for working for King's. While some of us are content to teach the odd course while perhaps committed to a full-time job elsewhere (I call this the "old skool" adjunct), many of us are frustrated would-be academics spat out by a ludicrous job (non)market, trying to cobble together a living using our long-honed knowledge, skills and expertise.

Which brings me to "Wolfie". In the midst of the great union struggles of the UK in the 1970s, a sitcom emerged on the BBC that became very popular in its satirical depiction of union militancy. "Citizen Smith", and its Che Guevara lite protagonist, Wolfie Smith (played by Robert Lindsay), ridiculed the power-hungry militarism of 1970s union leaders. A self-styled, beret-wearing proponent of "Power to the People," Wolfie in reality had no job and no caucus, with each episode usually concerning itself with his latest crackpot scheme or campaign for furthering his attack on the capitalists, with his unemployed mates in Tooting, a very unremarkable suburb of south London. Its hero of course was that special kind of hubristic loser whose ambitions far exceeded the reality of his circumstances as a lower-middle class loafer, espousing to his directionless buddies Marxist doctrines and truisms that had become increasingly hollow and stale in the UK as the 1970s wore on. By the time the show ended in 1980, the UK had had quite enough of all the strident cockney troublemakers and their empty collectivist rhetoric, and voted in Margaret Thatcher, whose key mandate was union reform.

Brought up in Thatcher's Britain (actually she was my MP as a child), I admit to at least



having partially internalized the principles of individual advancement, wealth accumulation and class that would characterize the subsequent decade. As a Ph.D trained at various venerable institutions, my experience of academia was one of cultural capital accumulation, sharing in its remit of furthering knowledge while staying ambivalently detached about the material concerns of working conditions, remuneration or even standards of living. The scholar confined to garret or lab, focused obsessively on a research passion at the expense of mundane concerns is a stereotype, but not one without foundation, and according to the advocate Karen Kelsky ("The Professor Is In") can even be considered part of the ideology that keeps academics adherent and subservient to the "Cult of Academia". This ideology persists indeed despite the great structural changes to the academy and the financialization of everything in line with neoliberal principles

in the post-Reagan / Thatcher economies. Such acceptance of exploitative and austere working conditions is not confined to academia, of course, and indeed characterizes the more pervasive subjugation of labour in the era of late-capitalist accumulation.

So it came as no surprise upon telling my friends over a pint about joining the executive of my college's CUPE local, that the name "Wolfie" came up. Conjured by that name is a longstanding distrust and contempt for unions and their leaders, and not only that. Being called a "Wolfie" is also a not particularly unsubtle way of being deemed fundamentally ridiculous and trivial for participating in a collective action organisation.

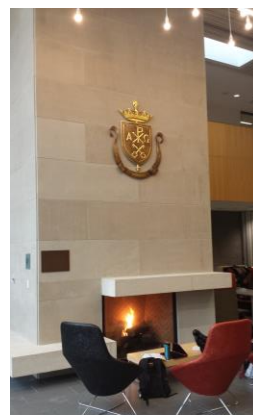
## It is clear to me at least that colleges rely on a divide-and-conquer approach to their contingent faculty . . .

While my buddy was being humorous, of course, it hit a nerve. In the era of hyper-individualized careerism and self-marketing, who was I to offer my labour to an organization founded on ethical principles rather than profit, and for free? Was this just a power-grab on my part through the deployment of an apparatus long-dismantled by anti-union legislation and corporate centralization? And, of course, as seen through the lens of a still class-obsessed UK society, did this shift my status to something altogether rather unsavoury: a working-class person?

To be honest, I merely laughed at my mate's remark and did not set upon a defence of collective principles and ethical labour practices. In any case, my friend has his own issues with the corporate bank he works for, and can only dream of ever countenancing the demands made of him through anything like a union, so maybe this was also thinly veiled envy on his part. At any rate, my participation in our union is something I have come to see increasingly in terms of a process of losing old associations and canards, in favour of gaining perspective on

myself and the often confusing, and frankly, depressing, labour economy we operate in whether we like it or not. Wolfie spoke to a time when unionizing had seemed to have run its course, producing leaders no better than those it ostensibly opposed in the capitalist class, and leaving workers with little option but the "strike" and its cognates as the only mechanism for action. This unilateralism occluded the kinds of bargaining and negotiation that really needed to happen, producing hierarchies and inefficiencies that all too often impeded progress on the shop floor.

While my inner Wolfie would certainly still consider militancy and aggression as having a time and place, the more I've participated in our union, the more I realize this process has far more to do with self-empowerment, self-esteem and the joys of communicating with others on shared concerns. It is clear to me at least that colleges rely on a divide-and-conquer approach to their contingent faculty members, preferring to use us as a depersonalized pool of labour to draw from at their behest, and on their terms, than as human beings with needs common to all other working individuals. This union, and this newsletter for that matter, seek to remedy this process of deliberate alienation through discourse, discussion and collective determination. While the academy reserves its collegial egalitarianism for an increasingly sparse full-time faculty, we bear the brunt of economic instability, sometimes questionable leadership and the ethical vacuum of corporatism. No berets are necessary anymore, but power should still be with the people.



## CUPE Equality Statement

Union solidarity is based on the principle that union members are equal and deserve mutual respect at all levels. Any behaviour that creates conflict prevents us from working together to strengthen our union.

As unionists, mutual respect, cooperation and understanding are our goals. We should neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

Discriminatory speech or conduct which is racist, sexist, transphobic or homophobic hurts and thereby divides us. So too, does discrimination on the basis of ability, age, class, religion, language and ethnic origin.

Sometimes discrimination takes the form of harassment. Harassment means using real or perceived power to abuse, devalue or humiliate. Harassment should not be treated as a joke. The uneasiness and resentment that it creates are not feelings that help us grow as a union.

Discrimination and harassment focus on characteristics that make us different; and they reduce our capacity to work together on shared concerns such as decent wages, safe working conditions, and justice in the workplace, society and in our union.

CUPE's policies and practices must reflect our commitment to equality. Members, staff and elected officers must be mindful that all persons deserve dignity, equality and respect.

# “Learning Outcomes”: or, Before the Union

by Mitch Rowat

I had my first introduction to unions when I was an eighteen-year-old university student, working summers in pulp and paper. My mom was a nurse in a private clinic, and my dad was a small-business owner, so I had no experience of unions. The induction was swift, unequivocal. One day, receiving forklift training, thinking I might help to clean up, I reached down to pick up a piece of pulp. “Put that down,” I was told. “That’s someone’s job.”

Respecting people’s work was not the only lesson I learned over five summers of shift-work. I learned early on about the importance of health and safety, much of the policy driven by the work of unions. I worked in a train shed where a worker had been crushed to death between the couplers of two train cars. I was told of a man caught up and killed in an industrial auger. A lock-out procedure had not been properly followed, and the equipment was not isolated from the electrical supply. In such instances, machines do not stop because someone becomes caught in them.

Today, I’m learning about the social potential of our union, the way it connects us and unifies, and also about its democratizing force, how its processes of consultation and egalitarian principles stand against the corporatizing manner of the contemporary university. I came to King’s in 2005 and have taught part-time ever since, and it was an enormous relief when the union was formed.

Nevertheless, at a recent labour / management meeting in April, I found myself quickly

growing impatient, disagreeable, and I left feeling that I had failed. Having taught a few cycles of the academic year, members know the feelings which often come on in April, the busiest, most stressful time of the year: dispiritedness, anxiety, resentment, anger. Is it the relentless marking? The crush of final assignments, exams? More likely the effects of creeping fears, fear that I will not have my job in September, fear that I won’t be able to pay my rent.

For about a decade, like many of our members, I worked in a system that had the power to not rehire me, a power that allowed chairs and coordinators to abuse the faculty in any number of ways, to snatch away our academic freedom, to interfere relentlessly in our pedagogy, to insist, in a field in which pedagogical dispute is rife, that every course, every instructor should conform to their personal whims, intellectual bigotry tacitly approved of and enabled by a silent department and administration, the part-time faculty turned into desperate, ingratiating sycophants, while witnessing the university parade its commitment to “social justice.” To whom could one possibly complain? And who would risk becoming one of the doomed, ushered to the revolving door? Even today, with the protection of the union, part-time members fear retaliation.

In those days, no one was ever fired, but a stream of people were “not hired back.” I’m sickened to reflect on how much hurt and damage that policy caused. How craven was this approach: to play

so thoughtlessly and cavalierly with people’s lives, to decide, on a whim, they would not be rehired, but not having the guts to fire them during the term, an action that would require grounds for dismissal, which, of course, didn’t exist. It was legal, but it wasn’t right.

When I tell people outside King’s about the situation of part-time lecturers at the university, they cannot believe it: that a pension should be so inaccessible; that the hiring process should not even afford the most basic protections, such as an internal posting process; that members could work for decades for the institution, their contributions never formally recognized; that individuals working as adjuncts for 15, 20 years should still have to reapply every year for their jobs; that a senior member of the administration should be heard to say to a part-time lecturer, that if they’re not happy, they should find a job elsewhere, and on and on and on.

However, to be fair, perhaps he was on to something. A long-term King’s lecturer I know recently took on a custodial job for the United Church of Canada. Due to COVID, the hours are minimal—14 hours a week—but the pay started at above minimum wage, and he had a drug plan, benefits, and a pension after six months.



## Results of the Spring Survey

In the last week of March, a spring survey was shared with members. The survey provided information about members' level of engagement and indicated priorities for bargaining. Overall, the following six questions provide an interesting snapshot of the membership, and the issues important to them: lack of compensation (during the pandemic year, in particular), arbitrary raising of class caps, and a lack of job security, among others.

Question 3 has 50 answers (Radio Buttons)

“Beyond the probationary period, has your teaching ever been officially evaluated by a chair or designate visiting your class?”



Question 21 has 55 answers (Radio Buttons)

“During the pandemic, did an increase in workload push you beyond the stated hours, above?”



Question 9 has 55 answers (Radio Buttons)

“Are you aware that a pension plan is available for qualifying part-time members?”



Question 32 has 52 answers (Radio Buttons)

“Have your class caps ever been exceeded without your permission?”



Question 18 has 50 answers (Radio Buttons)

“For members beyond their probationary period, do you feel you should be guaranteed a certain course load per year, irrespective of whether the current course(s) you teach are renewed the following academic year?”



Question 38 has 51 answers (Radio Buttons)

“When building a course for the first time, do you feel you are adequately compensated for your time?”



## parakletos: “the helper”

### Good of the Union

- Congratulations to our colleague Dr. Nigel Joseph, for winning the 2021 Award for Excellence in Teaching. Nigel is a superb teacher, a consummate humanist, and a *bon vivant*.
- We celebrate with Ruth Tisdale, our Chief Steward, her 29 years of marriage!
- CUPE 5265 was allotted 419 half-course equivalents for the 2021/2022 teaching year.
- Several members of our local recently received CUPE training in collective bargaining, stewardship, and duty of fair representation.
- We are grateful for the superb work and continual support of our CUPE representative, the excellent Jennifer Barnett.

### Did You Know?

- Need an OWL course site before the start of your contract? Contact ITS, who are able to get the process started early.
- Some members are being denied the application process because of small errors made in the online application form. Please take special care that all information is correct.
- The Collective Agreement allows for a Teaching Resource Fund of \$100 per half course. During the period of your contract, submit your receipts to the online portal to be reimbursed.
- A pension plan is available to qualifying part-time members, the details found in article 17.03 of the Collective Agreement. Get in touch with Kate Maars in payroll for more information: [kate.maars@kings.uwo.ca](mailto:kate.maars@kings.uwo.ca)
- Our collective agreement expired on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, and bargaining is imminent.
- Grievances can be emailed to [cupelocal5265@gmail.com](mailto:cupelocal5265@gmail.com)

### Your Union Executive

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Kristin Denniston

## Submissions

*The King's Adjunct* is a vehicle for sharing information and building solidarity among the members of CUPE 5265. Members are invited to submit images, poetry, notices for inclusion in “Good of the Union,” and pieces of writing—short articles, reviews, open letters. Submissions should be clear, concise, and reflect the values expressed in the CUPE equality statement. Our next newsletter will be in the Fall of 2021, and the deadline, Friday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

