

# TSSU Bargaining Bulletin

Teaching Support Staff Union

Supplement from TSSU Contract Committee  
March 2004



## TSSU Contract Committee Update

By Carl Norrgard and Victor Finberg

As you should know by now, our collective agreement with the University expires at the end of this semester, and the contract committee of the TSSU has been working hard to develop strategies for the next round of bargaining. In this article we want to highlight: the current political climate which we find ourselves bargaining in, the reasons why SFU needs to compensate us further, the new changes in teaching students here at SFU, and what the Contract Committee is doing to sort this all out.

Gordon Campbell's Liberal government has not been beneficial to working people in the province. He and his Liberal party have consistently impeded the progress of workers in achieving their demands at the bargaining table, and we should expect the same from him in our case. The Liberals have mandated school-teachers, hospital workers, ferry workers and other unionized public employees back to work in the last few years, eliminating their legal right to take job action. The Public Sector Employer's Council, or PSEC, has been instructed to allow no public

sector employee group to achieve any wage increase until at least 2006.

While SFU posted a 30 million dollar surplus last year, this year the University is facing a 15 million dollar deficit and we are expecting that the administration will make the argument that they simply cannot afford to give our members any further money or compensation. And, thanks in large part to the creativity of the TSSU over 20 years, we are some of the highest paid people in the work that we do—and this seemingly makes it hard to argue for more money.

However, when tuition increases next September, our tuition will have more than doubled in the last three years. Because 80 percent of our membership are students as well as workers, and have to be enrolled in order to receive appointments, doubling our tuition amounts to a pay cut. It is also true that we have had pay increases over this period, but they have been rather small in comparison. On May 1, 2001, the TSSU base unit pay increased by 2.25 %. One and two years later, there were further increases of 1.90 and 1.85 %. For a typical 5 base unit appointment for a master's student those increases amount to approximately \$90 per semester. We had also negotiated a tuition credit of \$70, but half of that was from money that was supposed to go toward childcare, and we will no longer receive these funds when

this contract expires. So, even though our wages have gone up, TSSU members have taken a pay cut once again.

The Dean of Graduate studies, Jon Driver, is working on a funding proposal that would guarantee funding for certain students upon entrance, but in his calculations of "funding" he counts the wage that we receive as employees of the University! Doesn't it make you feel good that the compensation for all those hours spent marking papers is considered a gift to us from the University?



Also in the package, Dean Driver proposes shorter completion times for graduate students, but fails to mention how having graduate students work longer contracts to pay for tuition is any solution. What we must also consider is that Vancouver is consistently rated as one of the most expensive Canadian cities to live in, and the cost of living keeps rising every year. Since SFU wants to attract high caliber graduate students, we think that it is in the University's best interest to offer us further compensation.

There are many new changes in the way information is going to be taught at SFU, and the way that these changes are being implemented will affect our jobs. The University is already offering Writing Intensive Courses which are being facilitated by the Centre

for Writing Intensive Learning (CWIL). By 2006 the University will dramatically increase the number of Writing Intensive Courses. The reports that we have been hearing from TA's who have taught pilot courses is that the marking workload is considerably heavier, and that the further compensation offered just isn't enough. There are also new courses being developed in the Centre for Distance Education which are focused on interaction through web-based programs. However this style of interaction with students is very time and labour intensive. You must learn to navigate new software to run these courses and we know this all takes time.

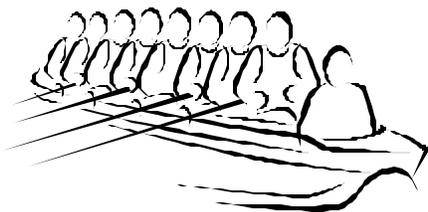


The class sizes keep going up in tutorials and labs, and this has been eroding the quality of education, and, in the sciences, the safety of our employees. The current class size limit is 24 students, and there are some classrooms that are simply too small to accommodate that number of students. We have had members also complain about the lack of office space and resources available on campus. So as the University expands with the "UniverCity" project and the new Speed Skating Oval we need to ensure that we get increased space for our members as well.

The TSSU Contract Committee is well aware of these issues, and we are trying our best to find creative solutions. The TSSU Contract Committee has made tuition one of our highest-priority items, and we are doing our best to protect you from these increases. Possible mechanisms include a tuition credit, a tuition

waiver, or an increased scholarship portion on our paychecks. A straight wage increase is also in the plan, but this is problematic because, as mentioned above, the government has decreed that all public employees must receive zero percent increases over 3 years. We are also working to improve Sessional Instructor satisfaction with the University, and developing an improved benefits package for members that includes better dental, health and even vision coverage. In addition, we are dealing with issues of respect and our satisfaction with the University as employees as we work to improve the quality of education for the student population as a whole.

The role of the Contract Committee in the current climate is to research and present arguments as to why we should be compensated for tuition hikes. Unfortunately, the administration has never demonstrated a propensity to listen to reason. How can we change this? History shows that when the membership of a union is active, politicized and militant, we can achieve real gains at the bargaining table. This is not a guarantee, but what is certain is that a passive membership will not gain any ground. When we truly need our members' commitment and support, your actions will decide your future.



## Democracy Day

*By Victor Finberg*

With a membership of 69,000 people, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) is the largest public sector union in this province. As with other public sector unions, the current neo-liberal provincial government has launched a vicious assault on CUPE. Many CUPE members are ready to fight back.

CUPE BC has announced a "Day of Democracy". While the date has not yet been announced (CUPE will give 24 hour notice), the plan is to shut down all CUPE workplaces in the province. CUPE is looking for a trigger to initiate their action.



One possibility is April 1, when the 45,000 Hospital Employees Union members are expected to go on strike. April 1 is also the day on which many people will be cut off welfare.

Why should TSSU members care about Democracy Day? Well, just consider what we have to gain. It is altogether possible that we will have to hit the bricks ourselves. If we support CUPE when they need help, they are much more likely to support us when we need help.

Also, a militant membership, willing to act when issues arise, strengthens our position in general, and especially during bargaining.

What can we do to prepare for Democracy Day? Ideas will be discussed at the General Membership meeting in March, at which time a resolution supporting CUPE will be brought forward. In the meantime please think about where you stand.

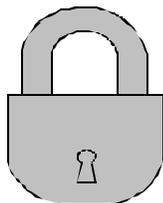


## What is PSEC and why should you care?

*By Laura Cowen*

PSEC is the Public Sector Employers' Council whose members include 8 Ministers of the BC government and 7 public sector employer representatives. One of these representatives is the Chair of the University Public Sector Employers' Association, which all BC university presidents are members of, including SFU President Michael Stevenson. PSEC must approve all newly negotiated collective agreements for all public sector employees including those in health, education, social services and other areas.

In the 2004-5 Budget, PSEC has already stated that there will be no wage increases over the next 3 years, confirming the bargaining mandate of 0% wage increases in 2004/05 and 0% in 2005/06. This means that TSSU cannot easily negotiate with the University for a raise since through PSEC wage increases have been forbidden by the BC Liberal



government. The Budget says nothing about the third year of our contract, which will also unfortunately fall under the 0-0-0 guidelines, unless there is a significant change in leadership in Victoria. Perhaps we should negotiate a four-year contract and bargain for a 60% wage increase in 2007 to reflect our tuition increases - not likely!

In addition to PSEC, Bill 28 has also been blamed for the 00-0 mandate. The idea that Bill 28 is linked to this mandate is a fallacy; it has nothing to do with wages, but Bill 28 does have a lot to do with Victoria's contempt for education. Bill 28 is a piece of BC Liberal legislation permitting the breaking of collective agreements by management. It allows administrators of schools from elementary to college level to determine class size even if it is in conflict with teachers' collective agreements.

So it would seem that PSEC is responsible for the entire hullabaloo - or are they?

An extensive web search suggests that they have written no reports or publications. The information I needed was found after talking with a PSEC employee directly. The ministry of finance publishes all guidelines and mandates within the provincial budget, because the Chair of PSEC is the Minister of Finance, Gary Collins. Because there is no mention of PSEC in the Budget or Service Plan, it makes it quite difficult to determine what budgetary aspects are a consequence of PSEC. Once again, this is hardly the "open and accountable" government Gordon Campbell's Liberals professed they would be.

So what does the 2004/05 Budget say? The BC government recognises that public sector wages are amongst the highest in the country. They chose, not surprisingly, to ignore that the cost of living in BC is also amongst the highest in the country. Because the Liberals want to have a balanced budget they will not allocate any more funding for wage increases. Paul Taylor, Deputy Minister and Secretary to the Treasury board has summed up Liberal policy: "Government has provided no additional funding for future wage settlements beyond the 0-0-0 mandate, from 2003/04 to 2005/06."

There are two exceptions to this mandate: if the current wages are below market levels or if there are efficiency savings associated with employees working in that area then wages can be increased. In other words, if you can demonstrate that your current wages are significantly lower than the average wage for comparable positions, as UBC President Martha Piper did, you could be rewarded with a raise (Piper received a 63% raise on her previous salary of \$215,000). We would probably have a difficult time applying this exception to TSSU employees. However, when TSSU members are hired instead of full time faculty there are certainly salary savings to the University, but it would be quite difficult to convince PSEC that this fell under their efficiency criteria.

But are these wage restrictions even legal? PSEC informed me that as soon as the Ministry of Finance publicly makes their mandates known,



public sector employers are obliged to comply. According to PSEC's logic, the only legal way to get wage increases for our members would be to:

1. argue that we are below market value,
2. argue that increasing our wage provides an efficiency savings (this usually refers to changes in an increment schedule from 5 levels to 3 levels such that employers would save money),
3. move money around in our collective agreement. No new money is provided but we can do things like we did with the childcare bursary---putting that

money into a tuition credit. Another creative solution could be to take over paying MSP ourselves and rolling those savings back into our wages, but solutions like this eventually end up hurting one part of the union for the benefit of another part. Bad idea.

But ... the future is not necessarily bleak. UBC TA's bargaining during the 0-0-0 mandate received wage increases on the basis of market competitiveness. CUPE 4163, UVIC's equivalent to the TSSU, received graduate fellowships resulting in a 23% increase for student members, and a wage

increase for their Language Instructors.

Clearly, the purpose of PSEC's current guidelines is to give a further advantage to administrators like President Stevenson when bargaining with their employees. However, knowing more about PSEC puts the TSSU and its members in a better position to organize for the upcoming contract negotiations.

**WEB RESOURCES**

- Bill 28: [www.leg.bc.ca/37th2nd/3rd\\_read/gov28-3.htm](http://www.leg.bc.ca/37th2nd/3rd_read/gov28-3.htm)
- BC's Budget: [www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/bfp/default.htm](http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/bfp/default.htm)
- UBC's President: [www.president.ubc.ca/president/speeches/19feb03\\_ja\\_bourforum.pdf](http://www.president.ubc.ca/president/speeches/19feb03_ja_bourforum.pdf)
- CUPE 4163: [www.cupe4163.ca](http://www.cupe4163.ca)

We will be discussing these and other issues at the next General Membership Meeting in March. To have your say, please join us. We always appreciate hearing from our members. For more information, please visit [www.tssu.ca](http://www.tssu.ca).

 Come to the GM meeting!!!

*SFU Teaching Support Staff Union*

**TSSU**

**General Membership Meeting**  
 Thursday Mar. 25<sup>th</sup>, MBC 2290, 11:30-1:30  
*Free Lunch, Childcare Subsidies Available, NEW MEMBERS WELCOME*

Are you ready?

The university works, because we do!



TA's, TM's, Sessional Instructors, Language Instructors