



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

February 13, 2013

Six Unions: One Voice

This Wednesday, February 13, the six unions operating on the University of Manitoba campus will unite with one voice. The University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA), Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) Local 3007, The Canadian Union of Public Employees 1482 (CUPE), CUPE 3909, The University Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU) and the Association of Employees Supporting Education Services (AESSES) will hold an information picket. Their goal is to let the university administration know how a long list of actions has negatively affected the university community.

Given that these unions include such a wide array of workers, all with different kinds of jobs and separate collective agreements, it is unusual that all six would unite with the same message. This demonstration is about much more than protecting workers' rights, important as that is; it is about preserving the integrity of campus life and ensuring that quality education is available to future generations.

The ability of all the workers on campus to carry out their duties is being compromised by the administration's push to privatization and corporatization. More and more private-sector companies are doing what university employees used to do, whether it be the teaching of international students by Navitas, a foreign corporation, to having the private corporation Aramark manage the caretaking staff and food services. Caretaking staff has been reduced and too few workers are now expected to do all the work. Employees are berated and bullied and when employees

complain, administration replies with a variety of excuses: private sector supervisors do not fall under the purview of university administration and, therefore, are not required to follow university protocols of personnel management; it claims that employees' issues do not qualify as grievances or that grievances were filed past the required time limits, when in fact extensions had been granted. Morale is at an all-time low; stress, anxiety and sickness are mounting.

Corporatization is evident with the hiring of private consulting firms which seek "efficiencies" by implementing new systems that increase workloads and operate much less efficiently than the tried and true methods used before. A new expense-reimbursement system and a classroom scheduling tool have proven confusing, unusable, time-intensive and to deliver unsatisfactory results.

A new contract with Xerox resulted in large clusters of support staff and faculty having to use one centralized, controlled printer. Xerox imposes financial penalties on departments that make too few or too many copies. These systems have only managed to frustrate support staff and faculty alike while increasing their work loads. It is not clear who is benefitting from these new systems, but it is not the students, staff or faculty.

These privatization and corporatization measures are having a negative effect on students. The near-monopoly on food

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services has curtailed student events and students note a marked deterioration in the cleanliness of classrooms and washrooms since Aramark took over management of the custodial services. International students are surprised to learn that they are not actually taking their first year courses at the University of Manitoba, but at the privately-owned International College of Manitoba. As a private business, it is unregulated by the province and students are not covered by the University of Manitoba Students' Union, leaving them without help when they need it. ICM students are not University of Manitoba students and are therefore excluded from the possibility of working while in Manitoba; this at the same time as they are paying exorbitantly high tuition fees. Teaching staff are also not unionized. Scarce public education resources are bleeding into this private business, while public classroom space is squeezed and long-overdue infrastructure repair is put off.

Further evidence of corporatization at the University of Manitoba is the expensive promotional campaign designed by advertising consultants. With so much money being dedicated to image, there is a lack of revenue (faculties are told to cut 3 – 5 per cent from their budgets) to invest back into traditional tenure-track positions.

The six campus unions recognize that the collective impact of these changes is immediate and long-term. They also understand that these changes are part and parcel of the broader attack on the public sector that is unfolding across North America. Labour and the public sector are facing an unprecedented wave of challenges from anti-union governments, right-wing think tanks and mainstream media. The US has seen tremendous erosion of union rights and that trend is mounting in Canada under the spectre of right-to-work legislation, privatization of government services, implementation of back-to-work legislation and forcing

unions to provide public financial reports. The more insidious effect of these measures is now becoming palpable: unionized workers feel their rights slipping away as employers find ways to circumvent collective agreements and build two-tier institutions that pit unionized workers against non-unionized workers; public-sector students against private-sector students; tenure-track faculty against sessional instructors.

The six unions have realized that it is time for a collective response. Although they represent different constituents, the unions are all part of a campus community and it is for this reason they feel compelled to come together and speak out with one voice.

These unions are setting an excellent example for unions across Canada: it's time to speak out with one voice for the good of our larger community - for the sake of democracy.

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