

Be Ready

Last week we sent out an e-Letter about tenure not being a term appearing in Saskatchewan legislation. While tenure and the ideals it holds have been a part of academia and the task of imparting knowledge to others for a very long time, it is not something that exists in the laws of our province. At the University of Saskatchewan tenure is enshrined in our Collective Agreement. As faculty we enjoy the rights associated with tenure because we have bargained them into existence.

The award of tenure means you have successfully passed a period of probationary employment. But unlike other occupations, tenure not only means job security, it means that you have the right to do your job in a way that allows you to question and openly oppose widely held beliefs, happenings in the world around us, and even your employer. As an academic it is crucial that you impart knowledge and nurture critical thinking in an environment that allows and respects the freedom that requires. Your academic freedom is a negotiated right that needs to be protected.

Questions or concerns about Academic Freedom?

Please contact the USFA office:
usfa@usaskfaculty.ca
Or 966.5609

The Collective Agreement is available at:

www.usaskfaculty.ca
www.usask.ca/hrd/employees/agreements.php

What's happening out there?

The day after this month's provincial election, our re-elected Premier began his new term by letting it be known that his government is contemplating changing labour legislation yet again. While this time the changes have to do with union finances, it begins to illustrate a pattern of changing labour laws so they are anti-union.

The move towards anti-union legislation is not unique to Saskatchewan. In the US, the state of Wisconsin passed laws removing the ability of workers to bargain because, according to the politicians who introduced the bill, unionized public employees are the cause of the state's economic problems. Other states have attempted to follow suit.

It's important; however, to note that efforts are not only underway in these states to stand up to anti-worker sentiments, they are proving successful. Ohio voters overwhelmingly voted (61% - 39%, with voter off-year participation at a 20 year high) to repeal Senate Bill 5, which is described as an attack on middle-class jobs that was designed to destroy collective bargaining rights in that state.

Other US states where anti-worker agendas are evident had recent election-day shake-ups as well. In Michigan, for the first time since 1983, a state representative was recalled. In Arizona, the

senator who was the architect of a repressive immigration law lost his seat. Maine saw changes to voter legislation stopped, preventing a ban on same-day registration, and Kentucky and Iowa saw representatives elected who openly support the rights of workers.

What's happening at universities?

On October 25th, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) adopted a new Statement on Academic Freedom (<http://www.aucc.ca/media-room/news-and-commentary/canadas-universities-adopt-new-statement-on-academic-freedom>). This new statement was unanimously accepted by representatives of university administrations and replaces the statement AUCC members had agreed to more than two decades ago in 1988. It is expected that affirmation of this Statement will become part of AUCC's criteria for membership.

What's troubling about this new Statement is that it says academic freedom should be constrained by professional standards of relevant disciplines and institutional requirements. It also says that universities must "defend academic freedom against interpretations that are excessive or too loose, and the claims that may spring from such definitions."

Our Collective Agreement includes precise language about academic freedom.

USFA members, whether tenured or not, “are entitled to the exercise of their rights as citizens and to freedom in carrying out research and in publishing its results, freedom of discussion, freedom to teach the subject assigned in classes, freedom to criticize the University and the Association without suffering censorship or discipline.” (Article 6.1)

Not all of the AUCC Statement is objectionable of course, but its reconsideration of our fundamental right does cast a shadow over the ability of faculty to exercise their academic freedom, and universities to defend that freedom, at a time when it is perhaps more important than ever. The ever-increasing dependency on funding from private sources, which very often comes with parameters that go against academic freedom, means that the protections bargained by academic unions may be the only written protections out there.

Important, too, is the ability of faculty to freely express opinions about the institutions in which they work. As the appropriate people responsible for the academic endeavours of universities, the way in which institutions operate is crucial to these responsibilities being effectively carried out. The ability to question, challenge or oppose institutional requirements is necessary to ensure those requirements are appropriate. Faculty, not administrators are the core of universities.

Brandon

We’ve told you a bit about the strike at Brandon University and that the USFA Executive Committee voted to make a considerable contribution to BUFA strike fund. USFA Executive Committee mem-



Michael MacGregor (centre) speaking at a rally on the BUFA picket line November 4, 2011

ber Michael MacGregor travelled to Brandon to deliver the cheque and show our support at a rally and by walking the picket line.

Michael discovered what USFA support meant when he walked the picket line with striking members. Not only did he hear how their Board of Governors contravened their own by-laws by creating an *ad hoc* bargaining team headed by a lawyer who is an advisor to the Canadian Labour Watch Association (a Vancouver-based anti-union organization), he felt how much the USFA support meant when he was hugged over and over by striking faculty.

BUFA is on strike for all faculty and all universities. Universities are being transformed into business corporations and the integrity of the academy is being eroded. Collegial processes are being undermined, and transparency and accountability are being threatened. Moreover, claims by the President of Brandon University, Deborah Poff, were directly contradicted by Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger who said that no provincial mandate limiting Brandon University salaries has ever existed.

What does this mean for us?

Changes are happening, in legislation, in policies and in practice. What’s happening in Saskatchewan, at AUCC and next door in Manitoba are examples of what makes unions important.

It would be naïve to think that there will be no impact for the U of S and USFA members. The ability to maintain rights and protections or temper the impact of change exists because we have a union.

Your support and involvement in the USFA are what it will take to meet issues head on. Be ready!

What issues are important to you for the next round of bargaining?

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