

Unit 1
Welcome
Guide
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THE ALLY

A PUBLICATION OF CUPE LOCAL 3906

Volume 3 - Issue 1 - Fall 2012

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Photo by Tom Cochrane via Flickr

Letter From the President

Hello Members,

Welcome to all new Teaching Assistants (Unit 1), Sessional Faculty Members (Unit 2), and Postdoctoral Fellows (Unit 3). You all make up the membership of Local 3906. It is important that each member take time to review their Collective Agreement (CA). The CA is an agreement between our union and the administration of McMaster University that outlines our rights, obligations, benefits, and other provisions related to employment. These CAs are available from your department, on our website, or if you would like a paper copy feel free to drop by the union office. If you have questions about any part of the CA you can call, email, or drop by our office any time, located on campus in the basement of Wentworth House (B108).

For those members who are returning, we are again starting a busy semester together at McMaster University. We are starting preparations for negotiating a new collective agreement for our Unit 2 members. The contract will expire at the end of April 2013, but there are plenty of things we need to organize before we get to the bargaining table. Please watch for a bargaining survey, some in-person consultations, and a Special General Membership Meeting (SGMM) to help us understand what your priorities are for this round of negotiations. If you are interested in assisting the Local during the upcoming round of bargaining please email me at president@cupe3906.org, we have many positions open which come with a small honorarium, and volunteers are always welcome.

We have been busy preparing for the September rush, so please watch for communications from the union about your benefits. We are rolling out a new benefits plan for our Unit 1 members, so please check for emails and information on our website about this new benefit, as well as the other benefits we have for all of our members. If you every have any benefits questions please feel free to contact us either in person, via email, or give us a call and we will do our best to answer all of your inquires promptly.

Finally, allow me to congratulate all of our members who have just finished the final requirements for their degrees or completed their work terms. Many of our departing members have spent multiple years working as valuable members of the McMaster Community. Best of luck as you move on from CUPE 3906!

In Solidarity,
Diana Zawadzki



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Editor

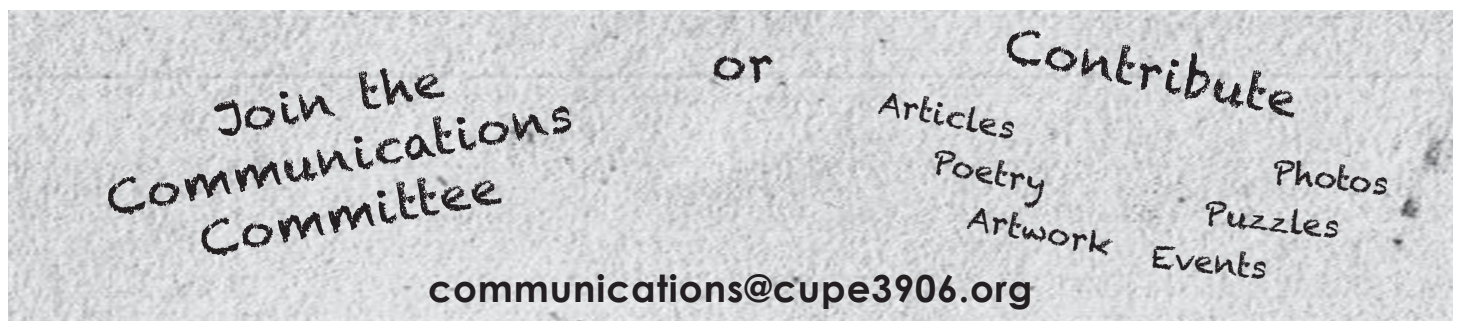
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Contact Us

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Unit 1 Benefits Improvements

By: Rebecca Strung

Photo by noir imp via Flickr

This fall, two major improvements to Unit 1 benefits are being introduced on a trial basis. Beginning September 1st, the UHIP Rebate will be raised to \$150 per year (up from \$100 per year). A Health Spending Account (HSA) will replace the Vision Care Benefit. This expanded benefit will allow members to make claims for a wide range of medical, dental and pharmaceutical products and services as well as the vision care expenses covered under the old benefit. The entitlement will remain \$250/two years.

The UHIP Rebate is open to international students who pay University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) premiums.

The Health Spending account is open to all members of CUPE 3906 Unit 1. At the time this article went to press, some of the details of the HSA were still being negotiated. Be sure to check the CUPE 3906 website for more information about the HSA including a list of eligible expenses and how you can make a claim.

Benefits Improvements the Result of Success at the Bargaining Table

These benefits improvements are a direct result of our success in collective bargaining. The Unit 1 collective agreement negotiated in 2011 includes a \$50,000 increase to the Unit 1 Benefits Fund over the five years of the contract. The first significant increase of \$30,000 occurs in September 2012. This new benefits money, which the local is contractually mandated to use for Unit 1 benefits, in turn allowed us to make some long overdue improvements to two of our benefits.

How Decisions About Benefits Improvements Were Made?

The benefits improvements introduced this September are the end result of a multi-stage process organized by the Benefits Committee (which is composed of CUPE 3906 members).

The first stage involved soliciting feedback from Unit 1 members on the benefits offered by CUPE 3906 and the improvements they would like to see with the new benefits money available September 1. The Benefits Committee sought feedback in two ways: a benefits survey and consultations. The survey gave members the opportunity to indicate their satisfaction with the benefits currently offered to by CUPE 3906 and where they would like to see improvements. The consultations created a space where members could provide more in depth feedback to Committee members in person.

After the survey closed and the consultations were concluded, the Benefits Committee reviewed the membership's feedback and drafted three sets of recommendations for the allocation of the new benefits funds. The Benefits Committee presented its recommendations to the members at the July 25th General Membership Meeting (GMM). After discussing the benefits and drawbacks of each set of recommended changes, a motion was made to adopt a package that included raising the UHIP entitlement to \$150 and converting the Vision Care Benefit to the HSA.

Question? Contact our Benefits Officer Rebecca Strung, at benefits@CUPE3906.org.

Political Action Committee Facts

By: Tony Gracey



Photo of Dublin Strike by William Murphy via Flickr

One of the greatest things I have done since moving to Hamilton is joining the Political Action Committee (PAC). The work undertaken by PAC members has been important, inspiring, and instrumental in convincing me that this little-committee-that-could, does a lot of politically productive work within and beyond the local. Indeed, the political action committee does a little bit of everything, from organizing discussion evenings, to donating to important local movements, and actively working with groups and activists involved in various labour and social justice struggles in the Hamilton and McMaster communities. The PAC carries out the social justice work which gives our local its community-wide reputation as a social justice union, and it is work which I strongly believe is equally important as the work of strengthening the internal structure of a union local because it builds connections with the broader community. This article aims to give you an idea of what some of that work looks like.

On February 2nd, 2012, PAC organized a discussion evening about the practicalities and problems of doing solidarity work with various communities in the Hamilton area. Speakers covered a wide range of issues in relation to their own practices of solidarity with indigenous peoples, precarious and unionized workers, anti-poverty organizing, and with those facing police harassment and violence. The event brought over fifty people together for an important discussion about the tensions and difficulties associated with being an ally to these groups and communities, and the ways each speaker navigated these tensions. Another discussion evening happened

on June 30th, 2012 as part of a larger speaking tour organized by members of the April 28th Coalition. The discussion that evening was also about solidarity in action as members of the community of Dundalk, Ontario and the Haudenosaunee of the Grand River nation came together to discuss their collective efforts to prevent a human waste sludge facility from being built in the rural community located within Haudenosaunee territory. The speakers discussed their cooperation to stop the facility and how they managed to organize collaborative strategies to prevent the further development of the facility in this ongoing struggle.

PAC also supports the process of social change by making important financial contributions to community-driven initiatives in Hamilton and southern Ontario. I encourage everyone to explore the PAC records detailing the financial donations the committee has made. You will see example after example of the amazing work that groups are doing within Hamilton to build a vibrant and inclusive community. PAC has historically donated money to important community initiatives including the Well, which facilitates various peer support groups and social groups for members of the LGBTQ community, as well as the Migrant Worker Family Resource Centre, which assists migrant workers and other newcomers settle in Hamilton.

PAC also works to build solidarity at McMaster and to support the struggles students and workers are facing on campuses in Ontario and across Canada. For example, PAC supported a Toronto conference entitled, *The*

University is Ours! Struggles Within and Beyond the Neoliberal University, where students, teachers and workers came together to share ideas about how to challenge the ways universities are being re-shaped within contemporary practices of neoliberal capitalism. PAC continues to stand in solidarity with striking students in Quebec and many PAC members also attended the Ontario Student Strike Training Camp this past summer hosted by Quebec students who have been on strike since March of this year. These students shared their experiences about how they democratized and mobilized their campuses in order to stand against the tuition increases they were facing. This was also an opportunity for Ontario students to meet and strategize about stopping tuition increases and making post-secondary education more accessible. Stay tuned to learn about skills sharing workshops happening this Fall.

PAC also supports the process of social change by making important financial contributions to community-driven initiatives in Hamilton and southern Ontario

The most exciting work PAC undertakes, in my opinion, occurs in the streets! Membership within PAC will help you understand what movements are active in the Hamilton community. I stood with PAC on the picket lines of the United Steelworkers of America Local 1005 when they were shamelessly locked out of their workplace by their employer, US Steel. We helped organize numerous demonstrations in support of indigenous land rights. We marched in the 2012 Pride Parade, and took to the streets for the May Day celebrations organized by the community activist group known as the 'M1 Committee'. We have marched in demonstrations demanding police accountability, immigration justice, and safer workplaces. PAC is always looking for more members! You can join our flying squad and receive



CUPE 3906 is hosting a **Welcome Social** event to be held in September at the Workers Art and Heritage Centre. Mark your calendars and plan to attending. More information to come (please check our website).

current information on demonstrations, mobilizations, and direct action in the community by activists and community groups dedicated to building an equitable society, or you can join PAC and take on some of the organization-building activities that allow PAC to hit the streets when we're needed most!

If you are a politically active, community-minded individual then please come see what the Political Action Committee is all about at our first meeting in September! If you have more questions, feel free to email our current chair, Jessica Foran, at politicalaction@cupe3906.org.

PAC's website is: <http://pac3906.wordpress.com/>

Connect with your Local online
www.cupe3906.org



www.facebook.com/cupe3906



www.twitter.com/cupe_3906



www.flickr.com/photos/cupe_3906

The Problem of Problems at Work

By: Hayley Goodchild

As far as union operations go, grievance procedures are amongst the least popular and most shrouded in mystery (eclipsed only, perhaps, by parliamentary procedure). This obscurity is not altogether surprising; the confidentiality of most grievances makes them difficult to discuss, and generally members don't learn about the process until they need to avail themselves of it.

Work-related issues can take numerous forms: having too many essays or labs to mark in the time allotted; having difficulty striking a work/academic balance; harassment; being disciplined or fired; being denied benefits or information; receiving late correspondence from the employer; being disrespected; and so on.

A grievance is a formal complaint filed via the grievance process (which is outlined in each collective agreement) for the purpose of addressing complaints between the member(s) and the employer about the "interpretation, application, administration, or alleged contravention" of the collective agreement. In other words: a grievance is a formal complaint about work vis-à-vis one's collective agreement. It is a cumbersome yet important part of CUPE's operations.

Therefore, an issue at work and a grievance are not necessarily the same thing. My concern is that the slippery, grey area between work issue and grievance has the effect of dissuading members from talking about their problems. Moreover, many of us are workers and students, junior colleagues, or post-docs, so we are understandably worried about the repercussions that discussing work issues—not to mention filing grievances—might have on our relationships with departments, colleagues, and supervisors. Indeed, ours is an unusual employment relationship.

But the particularity of the academic work relationship makes it even more important to talk about work problems and the function of grievances at McMaster. By voicing concerns at work, members may find that their issues are not exceptional, but commonplace, which does not mean they are acceptable. If you are experiencing a problem (or even if you aren't sure), speak to your supervisor, a department steward, or a CUPE staff member. Sometimes the grievance process is necessary and helpful, but often problems can be resolved informally first, whether that mean having CUPE's support in meetings with your supervisor(s), or putting pressure on the employer through the power and support of direct action with a group of your peers and colleagues.



Health & Safety

Your Rights at
Work

By: Mitch LaPointe

Call for Joint Health and Safety Committee Members

We are currently looking for members from all three Units to sit on one of several Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSC). The JHSCs are made up of groups of individuals from both management and workers, across sectors, who work at McMaster. The primary role of JHSC members is to keep an eye out for health and safety related issues in the individual buildings/departments entrusted to that particular committee. In order to do so, the committees meet approximately once per month to conduct regular health and safety inspections. It is the role of the committees to identify and document issues via incident reports. You may also provide input on the development of guidelines to make a McMaster a safer place to work.

In order to qualify to sit on one of the committees you must be a unit 1 (TA or RA in lieu), unit 2 (sessional), or unit 3 (post-doctoral fellow) member and work in one of the buildings under the purview of that committee. Unit 1 members are paid their regular T.A. hourly rate for the time given to the committee. This is an excellent way to gain important health and safety related training and to help make McMaster a safer place to work!

If you, or someone you know, is interested in one of the vacancies listed below please contact me directly for more information: healthandsafety@cupe3906.org.

Current Vacancies:

- Arts: Unit 2 & 3 Members
- DeGroote School of Business: Unit 2 Member
- Engineering: Unit 2 & 3 Members
- Health Sciences: Unit 1, 2, & 3 Members
- Ivor Wynne/David Braley Athletic Centre: Unit 2 & 3 Members
- Libraries/Museum of Art: Unit 1, 2, & 3 Members
- McIARS: Unit 1, 2, & 3 Members
- MDCL: Unit 2 & 3 Members
- Science: Unit 2 & 3 Members

Three Logicians Walk Into a Bar

By: Valentin Cassano

I would like to start by saying that this is not one of your typical "... walks into a bar" jokes. Instead, this is a logical puzzle which I run into sometime ago. I hope the "logical puzzle" part did not discourage you from reading further, on the contrary, I would like to believe that you are up for the challenge.

So here is the situation. Three logicians walk into a bar. As they sit down, the bartender asks them: *Are you all drinking beer tonight?* To the bartender's question, the first logician says: *I do not know.* In turn, the second logician says: *I do not know either.* Lastly, the third logician responds: *Yes please, we will have a beer each.*

I would expect you to be laughing by now. But if you are still puzzled and not understanding the joke, I will jump straight to the awkward part where I explain the punch line.

First, why do you think the last logician responded the way he did? Still stuck? If you go back to the bartender asking them whether they were *all* drinking beer, and notice the emphasis in "all", it would have been impossible for the first two logicians to respond to that question positively without *wild guessing*, since none of them knew in advance what the others would have liked to drink. At the same time, the first logician would have said "no" to the bartender's question, had he not wanted a beer. But he did not do that, so it is reasonable to conclude that he indeed wanted a beer, but that he was unsure if the others would want one as well.

For the same reason, the second logician answers in a similar way. That is, although he knew that the first logician and himself would like to drink a beer, he was still unsure as to what the last logician desired. Finally, when it came to the third logician, he could have also said "no" to the bartender's question, and that would have meant he did not want a beer. Since he indeed wanted a beer, just as his two friends, he responded with a "yes". So from the other two previous answers, the last logician concluded that *all* of them would be drinking beer that night. Are you laughing now?

As I mentioned before, it is a bit awkward when you have to explain a joke, but I would like to believe that you at least had your wheels turning there for a minute. Just as a last comment, I do have friends who, although not logicians themselves, have the tendency to engage in the above (or similar) type of behaviour whenever

they go into a bar. On that note, I would like to apologize on their behalf to *all* bartenders if you have experienced them as customers.

Puzzle

"The Forlorn Hope," by J. Paul Taylor, 1878.
White to mate in two moves.
(via <http://www.futilitycloset.com>)

For the answer, go to <http://goo.gl/9O0TC>
or scan this QR code:

CUPE 3906 Statement on the Oak Creek, WI Shooting

CUPE 3906 would like to respond to the Oak Creek, Wisconsin shooting at a Sikh gurdwara where on August 5, 2012 a white supremacist with known ties to the neo-Nazi movement shot and killed six people and injured several others. While the immediate target of this act was the Sikh community, it is clear that this act targeted and/or has impacted people of colour in general and especially South Asian, Muslim and Arab communities.

Violence can show itself in many different forms from gun violence in our communities to the ongoing wars around the world. What concerns us here is racism: the racism of this specific attacker and the wide-spread racism that is a fact of society on both sides of the border. With this statement we wish to show our support to the Sikh community of Oak Creek and to all communities who have been impacted by this event. We especially wish to show our support to our colleagues and fellow union members as well as other members of the McMaster and GTA/Hamilton communities who are impacted by this attack and/or by everyday racism. We wish to publically re-affirm the old union principle that an injury to one is an injury to all at a time when many of us may be feeling fear, isolation and anger.

Oak Creek, Wisconsin is not an isolated or distant case. On August 6, the day after Oak Creek, a mosque was burnt to the ground in Joplin, Illinois, the last in a series of arsons. Close to home, in July a Brampton Sikh religious elementary school was the target of racist graffiti, one of many such incidents in our region. With this statement we remind ourselves that racism is an everyday experience, that it comes in many different forms, and that we as a union have made a commitment to support each other. We call on the membership to more consciously work against racism in our union, campus and beyond.

We invite other members of the campus community, union movement, individuals, and others to sign on to this statement. If you wish to do so, please contact us at equity@cupe3906.org.

Signed,
The Equity Action Committee

Have any question about your **dental coverage**? Refer to our FAQ by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by going to the following link: <http://goo.gl/SZeoR>



NEWS

Next GMM: Wednesday, September the 26th.
GMMs are on the last Wednesday of every month

Want to get involved with CUPE 3906? We have many active committees and working groups that need your participation. Email info@cupe3906.org for more information.

CUPE 3906 Equity 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 union members from working together to strengthen the union and its initiatives.

As unionists we aim to achieve mutual respect, cooperation and understanding throughout our membership. We neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

A hostile or offensive environment includes discriminatory speech or conduct, which is racist, sexist, transphobic or homophobic and/or discrimination based on (in)ability, age, class, religion, language and ethnic origin. A hostile and intimidating environment also includes attempts to de-voice other members by ignoring GMM speaking practices or by talking over, yelling, rolling eyes at or shutting down contributions made by others.

Sometimes discrimination takes the form of harassment. Harassment means using real or perceived power to abuse, devalue or humiliate others. Harassment will not be perceived or treated as frivolous behaviour. The uneasiness and resentment that harassment creates hinder the growth of the union by hampering 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.

The above-mentioned components of a hostile environment hurt and divide the union and compromise CUPE's policies and commitments to equality. Members, staff and elected officers must be mindful that all members deserve dignity, equality and respect.