

# The Agitator

A Bulletin for the Student Left

October 2007 ★ no.7

## Ontario provincial election: McGuinty's Miserable Record

by Doug Nesbitt

Ontario goes to the polls on October 10. Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty is looking for a second term while most of Ontario is looking for a real choice. The ghost of Mike Harris still (rightfully) haunts the Tories under John Tory. Meanwhile, the Ontario NDP is looking to gain more seats than the dismal seven of 2003. This is likely considering their by-election victories which brought them up to ten. It is still a far cry from the twenty years ago when the NDP was on the way to victory in 1990. But Bob Rae's miserable legacy remains.

The bitter years under Harris and Rae was an electoral gift to the Liberals in 2003. This allowed McGuinty to posture left while moving right.

In 2003, McGuinty promised a serious reinvestment in social programs, respect for workers and the shutting down of coal-fired plants. Yet social program spending has not been restored to the pre-Harris levels of 1995 and has only barely exceeded that of inflation. Meanwhile, after promising no new taxes, the health-care surtax was implemented, falling largely on the working class and poor.

Meanwhile, well-paying jobs have been disappearing at a frightening rate and wages have largely stagnated. McGuinty's promise to raise minimum wage was carried out, but it was far too

little, far too late. A growing campaign for a \$10 minimum wage this past year pressured McGuinty to act and introduce a \$10 minimum wage...but asking Ontario to wait three years for it.

Environmental protection has been dismal. Ontario's coal-fired plants have not been shut-down and nuclear energy is now being promoted as the solution while a proposed uranium mine north of Kingston threatens to poison much of the Eastern Ontario water supply, including Ottawa. There has been no investment in alternative, clean energy or an attempt to reverse the tide of job losses through promoting green manufacturing. Imagine how many jobs could be created if Ontario became a leader in wind turbine and solar panel manufacturing.

For students, post-secondary education has seen injections of new funding, but nothing remotely close to what was cut in the 1990s. As every student knows, McGuinty only froze tuition for two years, and is now allowing fees to increase 4 to 8 percent per year, on top of the 200 percent increase since 1990.

McGuinty has not improved Ontario in any meaningful way. Massive reinvestments in social programs, a drastic reduction in tuition fees and immediate implementation of the \$10 minimum wage are required. Given the provincial and federal budgetary surpluses, there is

plenty of money for all this. Instead, governments are paying down their debts, which effectively means handing billions over to the banks.

At this point, a vote for the NDP is the best option. Yes, the NDP has failed us in the past, but a solid performance would boost the confidence of thousands who desire real social change. Social movements - politics in the street - are the most effective weapons we have for winning progressive reforms under the capitalist system. But because most people still perceive elections as the highest form of politics, elections are supremely relevant and have a real effect on the population. Therefore, NDP success will strengthen the movements that can best resist McGuinty and Harper.

*Doug Nesbitt is a grad student at Trent University and a member of CUPE 3908*

## DEMOCKERY

Ontario voters are faced with a referendum to change the electoral system from first-past-the-post to a mixed model of first-past-the-post and a "top-up list" of MPs that will offset any distorted results. This is obviously worth supporting as the 2003 election resulted in a Liberal majority elected by a minority of voters, and the majority of voters - 51 percent - casted votes that resulted in no representation.

In a supremely undemocratic irony, the Liberal-appointed group to examine the referendum question decided that a 60 percent threshold in votes and ridings was necessary to implement the new voting system. The same threshold existed in the 2005 BC referendum on implementing proportional representation. It failed, even though 57.7 percent voted for it, including 77 of 79 ridings. So much for democracy!

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"During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act."

George Orwell

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# The Agitator

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## KICK THEM OFF CAMPUS

Last month, the University of Victoria Students' Society board of directors voted 7-6 to ban the Canadian Forces from participating in a career fair in the UVSS Student Union Building. The decision has provoked a nation-wide attack from the corporate media and a backlash from some students. The decision, taken September 10, was then postponed at a September 24 general meeting attended by hundreds of students. The motion to ban the recruiters is now being put forward to an October 25 general meeting.

The UVSS has been accused of curtailing free speech, dictating to students what choices they should make, and being anti-democratic. Given the democratic decision about to be carried out on October 18, the latter argument holds no truth.

As for free speech, it is a student union's democratic right to decide how its finances,

resources and space is to be used, and this is a decision being made democratically by the membership. If the motion passes, the Canadian Forces are still free to set up tables at UVic, just not in the Student Union Building. The same holds for student unions who refuse to support anti-choice groups. Student unions are not the arbiters of free speech on campus, and students are still free to make their own choices. It's not as if the military doesn't spend millions on misleading advertising.

However, the motion raises serious questions about the relationship between education and war. The fact is, there is a unequal relationship between education and the military. To fund an imperialist war in Afghanistan, the military budget is skyrocketing alongside tuition fees and student debt. American war resisters will tell you that this is called the poverty draft.

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## Quebec students mobilize for strike

by Pascal McDougall

Last spring, Quebec Premier Jean Charest announced he would increase tuition. This was a bold move coming from the premier who, during his first term, lost to the biggest student strike in the history of Quebec. Despite his minority position, Charest's confidence was bolstered by the results of the March election. The Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ) scored a respectable 30 percent campaigning along with the Liberals on tuition rises, cuts to social programs and the usual neoliberal policies. A touching unanimity now reigns over Quebec's National Assembly, with the Parti Québécois' flimsy electoral promise to keep tuition frozen now a thing of the past (the PQ has voted for the tuition rises). With the three neoliberal parties controlling the National Assembly, it will be up to the students to take to the streets and fight this policy by any means necessary. This has ramifications for all students who want to fight the neoliberal agenda, in Quebec and elsewhere.

Tuition fees in Quebec have been frozen at \$1668,30 per year for a full-time student since 1994. They will be \$50 higher every term, for

the next five years, resulting in a total increase of \$500. The government has announced improvements to the grants and loans program which are supposed to compensate for the tuition increase. In reality, these improvements won't compensate for the effects of the tuition increase. They wouldn't even be satisfying had tuition remained frozen.

Some will argue that \$500 is a very small increase, that Quebec already has the lowest tuition fees in all of Canada, and that therefore Quebec students are complaining with their bellies full. These ideas need to be challenged. First of all, if Quebec tuition is lower than in other provinces, it is not because the elites have not tried to enforce increases. They have tried on numerous occasions, and were met by mass protests and general strikes. Indeed, 1968, 1986, 1996 were all years that saw massive student strikes to resist tuition increases. Not to mention a handful of other strikes to defend the already meagre grants and loans program, the biggest of which occurred in 2005. Over 185 000 students went on unlimited strike, with considerable

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## REPORTS ★ [agitator.online@gmail.com](mailto:agitator.online@gmail.com)

### Trent University

#### Contract negotiations sour at Trent University

On September 19, OPSEU local 365 at Trent University, representing support staff, voted 90 percent in favour of a strike mandate. The main issues include pensions and wages.

Meanwhile, negotiations between the university and unit 1 of CUPE 3908, representing contract faculty, have broken down. Trent contract faculty are paid 20 percent less than the Ontario average. The last offer made by the university would have given wage increases to roughly two-thirds of the membership, while cutting wages for the other third. This was rejected by the union which is demanding wage increases for all members.

Meanwhile, Trent University president Bonnie Patterson has experienced a \$175,000 or 76 percent salary increase since 1999, including \$51,000 in 2006-07 alone. Eighteen administrators at Trent are paid a total of \$2.6 million annually, compared to the \$2 million paid annually to the 200 contract faculty.

### Capilano College

#### Capilano Students' Union under attack from anti-choice group

The Capilano Students Union at Capilano College in North Vancouver is coming under fire from the corporate press and right-wing groups for twice denying club status to an anti-choice group, Heartbeat, in March and December 2006. Heartbeat has now filed a complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal, alleging religious discrimination by the student union.

Among its many activities, Heartbeat's club constitution advocates the use of graphic and potentially offensive images. The CSU executive has stated that it was these and other activities that resulted in the denial of club status because

such activities discriminated against women and threatened a woman's right to control their own body.

A similar incident happened last year at Carleton University, when the undergrad student union council voted, after lengthy public debate, overwhelmingly in favour of reasserting its pro-choice policy, and therefore denying anti-choice groups student union resources and space.

Both student unions have insisted that denying resources to anti-choice groups is not an attack on those with pro-life views, while clarifying that being pro-choice is not the same as pro-abortion.

## Workers' force Liberals' hand

by P.R. Wright

On August 30, Colleges, Training and Universities Minister Chris Bentley announced that his government would "recognize collective bargaining rights for part-time college workers as part of a broad review of collective bargaining at colleges." This move comes four years after McGuinty's Liberals took office, and after years of campaigning by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) to win these rights.

Chronic under-funding of the college system has seen the number of part-time employees – support staff and faculty – skyrocket. Part-time employees are legally prevented from collective bargaining through the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act. As a result, part-time employees are paid much less than full-time staff and faculty and enjoy few benefits. As student enrolment in colleges doubled, full-time faculty was cut in half.

This belated announcement on the eve of

a provincial election speaks to the growing pressure from OPSEU and OPSECAAT (Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology). However, OPSEU and OPSECAAT must not withdraw the pressure now. When students were promised a tuition fee freeze for "at least two years" during the last Ontario election, McGuinty's Liberals attempted to renege, even before the vote. Student pressure forced McGuinty to recant and subsequent pressure forced his government to implement the freeze in September 2004.

The announcement is welcomed, but the Liberals' history of backsliding and record of broken promises show they can't be trusted. Only continued pressure will force the Liberals – or whoever forms government – to keep their promises after the election.

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### About the Agitator

*The Agitator* is an initiative of the International Socialists on several university and college campuses. It was created to offer a forum for the student left, and act as a collective organizer to help build a stronger student movement against neo-liberalism, war and oppression. Anyone can contribute and readers are encouraged to get involved, and help distribute the paper. If you are interested in writing, editing or distributing *The Agitator*, please get in touch with us:

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We can be found at the following campuses: Carleton, UOttawa, Trent, UVic, Camosun College, Langara, UofT, Ryerson. Help build the network!

## Behind the veil of the election controversy

by Chantal Sundaram

The debate over voting and the veil in the recent federal by-elections in Quebec shows just how important Islamophobia still is in justifying Canada's participation in the war on terror.

Stephen Harper, who risks being punished at the ballot box for his support of the Afghan mission, has gone on record saying that he "profoundly disagrees" with the decision by Elections Canada to allow Canadian Muslim women to vote with their faces covered by burkas or niqabs, invoking federal legislation passed in late June on the visual identification of voters.

The hidden agenda here is transparent: first, the existence of a mail-in ballot gives the lie to fake concerns over visual identification. Second, of the roughly 200,000 Muslims in Quebec, no more than 50 wear the full head covering. Thirdly, although it should be the right of these women to vote while covered, the whole debate about it was manufactured in the first place. As Sarah Elgazzar, a spokeswoman for the Canada Council on American-Islamic Relations, says: "If anybody had actually bothered to ask the women that are actually concerned, and we are talking about a very small minority of women, they would have told them that they always take [their covering] off to identify their faces. They do it at the bank, they do it at border crossings, they do it at the airport."

Why the sudden concern over "visibility" now? It doesn't seem to be due to any new developments in election fairness. Much less to any new-found concern for women's rights on the part of Stephen Harper.

When the French government banned the hijab, or headscarf in France's public schools, it was not actually concerned about the oppression of women but, as some politicians explicitly stated, about the rise of 'militancy' in France's Muslim community. Hijab was considered to be a symbol of that, along with the Palestinian scarf and anti-war buttons. Moreover, there is a clear pattern throughout the West of inventing Islamophobic controversies to divert public anger over the 'war on terror.'

Denmark sent troops to Iraq, and then published racist cartoons. Germany sent troops to Afghanistan and then one of their states proposed banning women who wear the hijab from school. Holland sent more troops to Afghanistan and proposed to ban the burqa. Britain remains in Iraq, and around the same time that it sent more troops to Afghanistan in fall 2006 it also stoked media hysteria against the niqab.

Now, Canada deploys the 22nd regiment - the all-francophone regiment based in Valcartier, Québec - in July 2007, and in September stokes a debate about the veil in Quebec, where opposition to the war in Afghanistan is higher than anywhere else in Canada.

Muslim women wear the veil for a number of reasons. Studies show that rather than accept post-911 marginalization, Muslim women, particularly young women in North America, are asserting their religious identities and asserting their own dynamic interpretation of Islam, which includes wearing the veil as a form of resistance.

The veil has been worn through history as custom, in accordance with state law, personal reasons, as a mark of wealth and status, fashion or beauty, to demonstrate conventional values, to hide identity as revolutionary protest, political protest, religious reasons, access to the public sphere, statement of personal identity, and so on. The meaning of the veil has changed through history, most markedly with the advent of colonialism in the Middle East, which portrayed the veil purely as a symbol of oppression and women's subjugation.

Attacking Muslim women for what they wear, whether it's a headscarf or full covering, and whether it's worn for purely religious reasons or as an expression of resistance, shamefully brings colonial racism into the modern era.

If Harper really cared about fairness in elections, he would recognize that his government only has minority support while bringing the troops home from Afghanistan has a strong majority.

## Where do you think the money should go?

### \$4.5 billion

- a) six Halifax class frigates
- b) eliminating tuition fees at all public universities and colleges

### \$2 billion

- a) four C-17 transport planes
- b) providing a \$4000 grant to every student

### \$183 million

- a) continue funding the Pentagon's Joint Strike Fighter program
- b) increasing the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council budget by 80 percent

### \$1.2 billion

- a) initial military spending increase for 2006 federal budget
  - b) forgive all student loan debts over \$10,000
- compiled from CFS-Ontario ([www.cfsontario.ca](http://www.cfsontario.ca))

The federal government plans to increase the annual "defence" budget to \$20 billion by 2010. And let's not even talk about what the Afghanistan mission is costing. The cost is too high, in money and lives, and it's time to stop now - not in 2009.

Let them know on Saturday, October 27, the pan-Canadian Day of Action to bring the troops home from Afghanistan, called by the Canadian Peace Alliance and Collectif Échec à la guerre. Our friends in the US have put out a call for events against the Iraq war on the same date; so we'll be marching together to end the violence and waste caused by both our governments.

**october 27**  
**troops out now!**  
see [www.acp-cpa.ca](http://www.acp-cpa.ca) for local listings

# Naomi Klein takes on "Disaster Capitalism"

by Erik Halliwell

Once again, Naomi Klein gives us a window into her brilliance with her masterful book "The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism". In it, she reveals the striking parallel between CIA prisoner interrogation techniques and the blackmailing techniques of the IMF and World Bank for imposing disaster capitalism across the world. Using the popular ideas of Ewen Cameron's technique of electroshock therapy in psychoanalysis to erase the minds of patients and start over, Klein parallel's this horrific practice with modern day capitalist ideology. This symbiosis of shock - psychological and economic - is linked in Klein's take of neo-liberal capitalism.

Drawing on the dark history of the Chicago school of economics, Klein begins with a glimpse of how the shock doctrine was first utilized in Chile, 1973. The figures alone are shocking: 50,000 tortured, 80,000 imprisoned. Public spending cut by 50 percent; incomes for the rich up 83 percent; 45 percent of the population in miserable poverty. This is the year Pinochet takes power and becomes the newest darling of the United States and Milton Freidman, architect of what becomes one of the most notoriously devastating economic policies of the

twentieth century. Pinochet's rule as despotic ruler of Chile makes multi-national corporations millions - a fact not lost on the continent.

Using a skilled approach to her work, Klein collects quotes from legendary and not-so-legendary historical figures that provide for insightful and ironic additions to her thesis. For example Donald Rumsfeld is quoted as saying, "Milton [Friedman] is the embodiment of the truth that "ideas have consequences"." A Chilean would not disagree.

Klein continues with her analysis of Russia in 1993. Yeltsin attacks parliament and hundreds are killed. Parliament burns and the opposition is arrested. 72 Million become impoverished while 17 new billionaires are created. They are soon named the "oligarchs" of Russia. The images of the destitute selling their belongings to pay for food are still engraved in the minds eye of many Russians and people across the world old. These types of rigid class divisions and desperation are repeated again and again through either political, or environmental disaster, as Klein makes evident throughout her book.

Using the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake as an example, and specifically the effects in Sri Lanka, Klein provides a contemporary example of

environmental shock was exploited by capitalism. While there was an international response to the 35,000 dead in Sri Lanka, few now know that the coastline, which had suffered severe destruction, was handed over to hotels and industry. There were nearly a million displaced from coastal areas, but those who relied on fishing in the ocean were forbidden to rebuild their homes by the sea. The location of their former homes has now become the property of industry, and their way of life ruined.

This book provides the reader with a holistic look at the system of capitalism and its social, political and environmental consequences. One must commend Klein for not separating these three inseparable aspects of capitalism. Her description of this as shock therapy is a fresh critique of how world capitalism operates.

Many have critically acclaimed the Shock Doctrine, and it is hard to disagree, this is a fine addition to Klein's masterful works.

"The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism" by Naomi Klein. Published by Knopf Canada, \$36.95.

*Erik Halliwell is a student and activist at Carleton University*

## Review: "A Poet's Life" by Tim Armstrong

by Doug Nesbitt

Armstrong made his name in Rancid, a 90s update of The Clash. And like the Clash, reggae has had a heavy influence on both Rancid and Tim Armstrong. "A Poet's Life" is Armstrong's first album-length foray into a completely non-punk genre. It's a mix of reggae, ska and

classic rocksteady. You won't find any distorted powerchords and fist pumping choruses. While Rancid's lyrical content is a mix of political protest, descriptions of America's urban underworld and stories of personal struggle, Armstrong's solo album is devoid of these themes, with the exception of one song, "Inner City Violence" which deliberately blurs descriptions of America's ghettos with the destruction of Mogadishu, Baghdad and Beirut. The focus of the other songs is on love and dysfunctional relationships, themes traditional to the genre. Unfortunately, some lines are blatantly sexist, which stands in stark contrast to the entire Rancid catalogue which, although rarely promoting feminist views, never degrades women. Whether this was intended or not, it certainly detracts from the music, particularly "Wake Up", musically the best song on

the album but lyrically the most sexist. This is an unfortunate step for Armstrong who has always taken progressive political positions, whether with the anti-racist "Avenues and Alleyways", the pro-union "Harry Bridges" and "Blacklung" or the anti-imperialist "Wrongful Suspicion" and "Blackhawk Down." Musically, the first half of the album is the strongest but the second half is rather unmemorable. Thankfully, the backing band, the Aggrolites, keep the bounce alive when Armstrong's scrappy vocals fail to deliver appealing melodies. The album is worth listening to, but the it has too many weak spots, including the disappointing outburst of sexism. A better purchase would be the Aggrolites' recent album "Reggae Hit LA" which includes the same spectacular instrumentals with some incredibly soulful singing. Fortunately Armstrong's album is available online at various website for free.



# RESISTING THE POVERTY DRAFT

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In February 2006, at the beginning of the new "combat" mission in Kandahar, General Rick Hillier announced the launch of "Operation Connection", a new, aggressive recruitment campaign to expand the military by at least 23,000 troops. You've probably already seen the highly misleading ads at movie theatres, on television and on the web. We're told that the military fights "fear, chaos and distress" but tell that to the villages of the Panjwai district in Afghanistan which have been repeatedly shelled for much of 2006 by Canadian artillery units. No wonder the military left out the "fight terror" part of their TV commercial after test screenings.

Recent military spending on big-ticket items, such as strategic airlift and a new fleet of tanks, are not about helicopter rescues off Newfoundland, building dikes to save Winnipeg from flooding or shovelling snow in Toronto. These weapons are for expanding the Canadian military's overseas capabilities. This should be seen in conjunction with the new recruitment campaign and the war in Afghanistan. In addition, we should not forget about the 2005 International Policy Statement that outlines the federal government's new foreign and military policy which advocates an aggressive assertion of Canadian military power overseas to

defend "national interests."

One does not have to succumb to conspiracy theories to suggest that the Canadian military is quite aware of the economic pressures on students, whether it be tuition fees, debt, rent, food, transport or low wages. The Canadian military is targeting universities, colleges and high schools knowing full well that student financial aide, guaranteed employment and trade apprenticeships are the chief reasons why students join. At recruiting tables, the military purposely downplays the many real dangers, some of which are obvious - such as serving in Afghanistan - some of which are less well-known, such as substandard housing, sexism, racism, drug and alcohol abuse and a series of other mental, physical and psychological problems which plague the military - particularly those engaged in wars overseas. Nor will the military give you remotely accurate information on its combat missions. In addition, recruiters are known to lie to seal the deal.

Anti-war students at UVic need to be supported in their battle to ban military recruiters from student union property, and their democratic rights as an organization need to be defended against right-wing jingoists. The struggle against militarism and for accessible post-secondary education are two sides of the same coin.

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support from the population, itself under attack from Charest's policies. The 2005 strike revealed the incredible power of the student movement.

The idea that a \$500 increase is reasonable, is a dangerous one. The deliberate suggestion of a modest increase is without a doubt a strategy to divide the student movement and discredit its most militant sections. It follows that we have to be clear that no increases are acceptable. In fact, the very idea of tuition fees has to be questioned. The financing of our public education system has to be 100 percent public. The neoliberal government will reply that they do not have enough money to keep the freeze and continue the grants system. Yet, the

federal government spends billions every year on an imperialist war in Afghanistan, military spending increases and corporate tax cuts. Along with the tuition increase, Quebec Liberals have implemented a tax cut of almost a billion dollars for the most wealthy. In contrast, it has been calculated that the elimination of tuition fees in Quebec would cost \$500 million. Examples of this twisted set of priorities abound all over Canada.

What conclusions can we draw from this? With the ongoing strike campaign in Quebec and the upcoming provincial election in Ontario, the timing would be ripe for both movements to organize coordinated campaigns. However, we cannot ask the impossible, and direct cooperation is unlikely from two

Thousands of members of the US military who have gone AWOL since the invasion of Iraq, and several dozen have come to Canada officially seeking asylum. Since 2004, the War Resisters Support Campaign has been putting pressure on the Canadian government to allow American war resisters to stay in Canada. While tens of thousands of Americans were allowed into Canada during America's war on Vietnam, the immigration policies that enabled that to happen were subsequently taken off the books.

This is an extremely important time for the Campaign on two levels. On the parliamentary level, support for the Campaign from the NDP has been unconditional from the beginning. Of late, more and more members of the Liberal and BQ caucuses have also affirmed their support for the Campaign.

The second development is that two of the first resisters to arrive here, Jeremy Hinzman and Brandon Hughey, have appealed the initial rejection of their refugee claims all the way to the Supreme Court. It is expected that sometime this Fall, the Court will advise whether it will hear their case regarding the evidentiary rulings made by the Immigration and Refugees Board.

Make sure your MP knows where you stand in support of these brave resisters.

**War Resisters Support Campaign**  
[www.resisters.ca](http://www.resisters.ca)

movements that have evolved in total isolation from one another. However, an educational campaign on the Quebec student movement could be coordinated in English Canada. This would help to strengthen unity between the movements and our collective power to fight for accessible education. All that being said, the best thing the Quebec student movement can do for the Canadian one, and vice-versa, is to relentlessly fight neoliberal education policies from their own province, as a student victory in one province is a victory for all.

*Pascal McDougall is a member of the Gatineau International Socialists and a veteran of the 2005 Quebec student strike*

# ON THE PICKET LINE

The recent support staff strike at Carleton University demonstrated the necessity of student support for campus workers. And it looks like it will be needed again in 2008

by **Jessica Squires**

On September 19, 700 plus support staff workers at Carleton University, member of CUPE Local 2424, went back to work after a strike that lasted just over two weeks.

The workers ratified a collective agreement that gave them three percent pay increases over three years, plus the main demand of the strike: union representation in meetings where a Human Resources person is present. Although the media spun the strike as being about money, the workers were in fact seeking protection for workers over 65, and better union representation in disciplinary matters. The deal the workers ratified on September 18 was an unmitigated success for a local with no strike experience on a campus that hasn't seen a strike in almost thirty years.

While the dispute with Carleton apparently started in the early summer, when the union began asking for bargaining meetings with management, in fact the victory was made possible by a history that goes back to the same time last year.

When TAs and Contract Instructors at Carleton University, members of CUPE 4600, were in a legal strike situation last fall, "Campus United" was formed to coordinate solidarity and support for the union and the faculty association, CUASA, who were also in a strike position at the same time.

Campus United is made up of all of the CUPE locals on campus plus CUASA, the two student unions (graduate and undergraduate), and OPIRG-Carleton. The reciprocal solidarity worked well during the student unions' campaign against tuition fee increases last year as well.

Campus United was inspired in part by the CUPE Ontario University Workers' Coordinating Committee, a grouping of all the university workers locals in Ontario. The sector has an explicit position in favour of decreasing tuition fees, and has actively campaigned for several years alongside the Canadian Federation of Students. More importantly, the OUWCC

is working on a long-term strategy of coordinated bargaining, including synching up bargaining dates as much as possible. Next year, over thirty different locals across Ontario will be in bargaining in the same year.

It is in this context of radically increased militancy, solidarity and worker-directed coordinated bargaining that CUPE 2424 got their deal. This is what it really means to be part of a movement: when one Local is being pushed into a corner, dozens of other unions and hundreds of other workers respond to bolster their confidence and capacity.

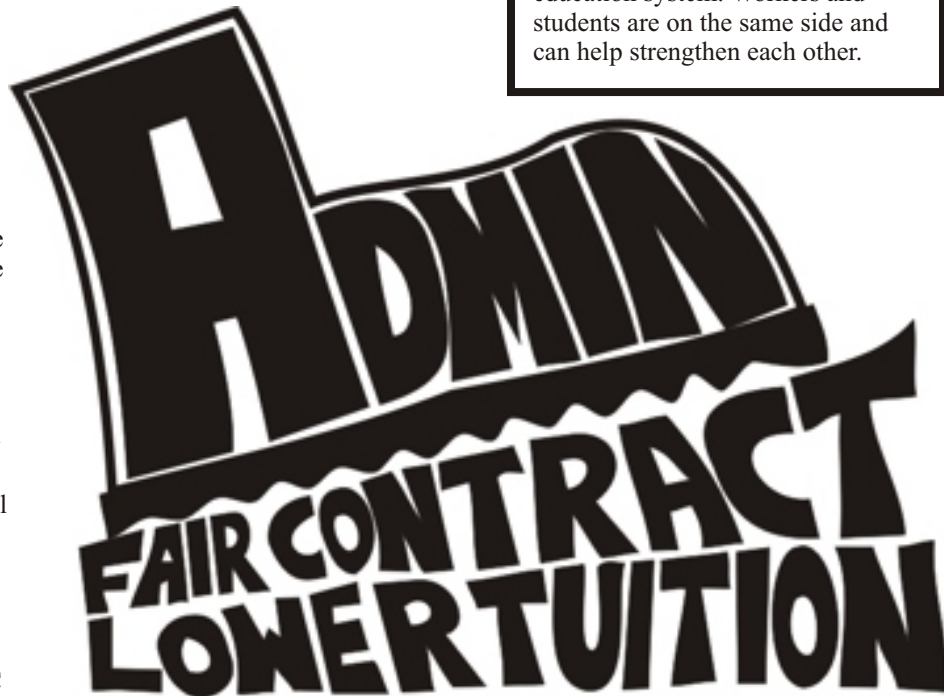
Signs are increasing that the university administrations are getting ready to push back. Next year's will be a long hot summer and fall on university campuses. Solidarity real, tangible solidarity was key for the workers at Carleton University, and it is going to be key to future victories for university workers in Ontario.

*Jessica Squires is a graduate student at Carleton University and a member of CUPE 4600*

## worker & student SOLIDARITY

Strikes on a campus can become ugly because the administration wants to pit students against workers. This happened in the spring of 2006 in Ontario when the College Students' Association made the terrible mistake of condemning the college teacher strike even though it was for smaller class sizes and the hiring of more faculty.

Students and campus workers are facing the same pressures. Federal and provincial governments are underfunding post-secondary education, resulting in higher tuition fees and attempts to roll back wages and conditions for campus workers. The boards of governors that run the universities are comprised mostly of corporate executives and therefore carry out such policies instead of fighting for a more accessible post-secondary education system. Workers and students are on the same side and can help strengthen each other.



## Theory

# Who is working class?

by **Chad Brazier**

"If they want to hang me, let them. And on the scaffold I will shout 'Freedom for the working class!'"

Socialist, trade union activist, and self-proclaimed hellraiser, Mary Harris Jones fought the system of her day for workers' rights wherever they were under attack. But if Mother Jones were here today, would she even recognize her beloved "working class"?

It may strike one as a quaint, even slightly alien term, but despite its disappearance from official rhetoric and the media, the working class still very much exists. But what does this mean anyway?

### Impressions

For many of us, the phrase will conjure up the classic proletariat of the Industrial Revolution: coal miners, metalworkers and armies of factory "hands" compelled to work long hours for shoddy wages, condemned to an existence of monotony and physical deterioration.

Others' impressions are more modern. Maybe they think of "blue-collar" workers in the automotive industry, or likelier still, those employed in the mushrooming service sector. Either way, it is understandable if one has a hard time identifying a 19th century cotton-spinner.

On the surface, we do appear to have very little in common. Successive technological advances have thoroughly transformed the outward appearance of the workplace. Most people in Canada have enough to eat, clothes to wear, and access to most healthcare, should we need it. More than this, anyone could provide a long list of consumer goods and modern conveniences that were science fiction only fifty years ago. Surely this very fact should place us in a very different category than the illiterate slum-dwellers of the Industrial Age.

### Beneath the surface

Except it hasn't. None of this has. All the underlying social relationships that make up capitalism remain unchanged. They are wallpapered over, but intact beneath the surface.

People from every corner of the globe are still compelled to work for a living. There are more wage workers in South Korea today than there were in the entire world when Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto in 1848. The working class is bigger than ever and continues to grow.

The means of production, whether it be an axle plant, a pharmacy, or a call centre, remain overwhelmingly in private (corporate) hands. Behind the so-called "democracy" of the stock market, a tiny fraction of the world's population controls the vast majority of the wealth. This minority, a small group of men and families, are linked together through what have been called "complex patterns of intercorporate ownerships, cross directorships, and social relations".

Yet, great changes have obviously occurred. The productivity of labour has undergone decades of major and frequent improvements. Successive revolutions of the means of production in every branch of industry have meant that more can be produced with less labour than ever before. But this has not benefited humanity. Instead, capital has spread production around the globe, often with brutal force, into previously non-industrial regions. Whole nations, such as Indonesia and China are undergoing a profound industrial revolution that is driving millions into the cities where conditions are not unlike those of Victorian England. On a global scale, the working class is far from dead. Only those fixated on Western nations cannot see this.

### Western Workers

Modern machinery, especially in the West, has made millions of workers redundant. The West's industrial working class is proportionally smaller than in the past. New fields of work have opened up in the developed world, bearing little immediate resemblance to the common impression of the working class. This has contributed to the popular view that rich countries like Canada are vastly "middle class", based on a relative affluence and conspicuous consumerism.

But this term "middle class" is

without real meaning. This is unlike working and ruling class, which suggest structural roles within society quite apart from individual consumption habits. As categories and realities, they offer a far greater explanatory power than class defined solely by income. Also, "middle class" people are now notorious for what was typically considered "working class" agitation. Teachers, nurses and government employees are in powerful unions and it is the white collar public sector which is now more unionized than the private sector where most blue collar jobs are found. This is because most of the so-called "middle class" is actually working class.

The all consuming nature of capitalism - to extract a profit from every aspect of society - has compelled numerous white collar "middle class" people to fight back against employers and right-wing governments. Anyone who works for a wage or salary and has no power to hire and fire and direct workplace operations in a decisive way, is most likely working class.

### Working Class Consciousness

Market-based individualism, corporate media propaganda, the divide-and-conquer tactics of racism, sexism and homophobia, all exercise a corrosive effect on our self-recognition as part of a collective class identity. This is why working class unity and the struggle to develop working class consciousness requires a constant struggle against all forms of oppression, as well as battling against the bosses.

Marx wrote that there was a difference between the working class "in itself" and a working class "for itself." In other words, there is an objective working class, defined by its role within capitalism, and a subjective working class - those who identify their role in society as a worker. So while most people may not describe themselves as "working class", there is a good chance they are. Understanding one's role in society is necessary if one is to fight against it.