

# The Agitator

A Bulletin for the Student Left

Carleton University, September 17 2007

## WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

The CUPE strike is now entering its third week. On Sunday Sept. 16, union members voted down an admin offer by an overwhelming 78 percent. Several issues remain unresolved, including wages and union representation. In addition, the admin's bargaining tactics and misinformation on carleton.ca have only served to increase tensions.

The administration claimed that it is "business as usual" on the campus, but students and faculty are becoming increasingly upset over the problems arising from the strike. It is clear: the striking union members are essential if Carleton is to function properly.

### Who is "pro-student"?

Some students who are understandably upset are choosing to support a "pro-student" position which opposes both the union and the administration. They see Carleton students being caught in the middle. This is the alleged position being taken by students organizing a "pro-student, anti-strike" rally on September 18. However, you will find that the Facebook group promoting the rally is full of anti-union vitriol, ranging from the ignorant to the obscene. There is scarcely any criticism of the administration or little visible understanding of the labour dispute's details and history.

This position is therefore understandable but dangerously flawed because it is being manipulated by right-wing students who are clearly anti-union and often pro-admin. Some of these students are long-standing supporters of right-wing ideas and causes on campus.

Their political crusade is also driven by their deep hatred of CUSA because of CUSA's history of taking progressive and left-leaning stances on controversial issues, such as the decision last winter to not fund student groups that promote the criminalization of abortion. In this dispute, the right-wing, rather than coming out explicitly in favour of an anti-abortion position, declared themselves the defenders of "free speech", thus hiding behind an abstract value that everyone supports while advancing their agenda. They are doing the same today with the "pro-student" slogan.

### Administration Bargaining Tactics

Confusion is also aided by the student body's necessarily short memory of labour relations at Carleton. The current strike could have been avoided if admin had not deliberately dragged negotiations on from June 4 and into the school year - three whole months! In the summer of 2006 they did exactly the same thing with CUASA (faculty) and CUPE 4600 (contract instructors & TAs). This led to fears of a strike in November just before exams. Long-serving workers at Carleton, especially CUPE 2424 members, will tell you that the admin has a history of dragging their feet and forcing confrontations to occur during the school year. This is a dishonest and **anti-student** bargaining tactic designed to divide students and union members in order to weaken any popular support for a potential strike. The administration is gambling with our education to undermine the livelihood of Carleton workers.

### Who Runs Carleton?

Why does the administration act this way? The decision-making authority at Carleton resides in the Board of Governors, a body consisting of a majority of unelected "community" members and a token number of elected students and faculty. These unelected "community" members are executives and officials in local, regional and national corporations. Their political friends in ruling federal and provincial Liberal and Tory parties have carried out deep cuts in post-secondary education funding, especially since the early 1990s. University administrations, including Carleton's, have not opposed these cuts by allying with students and the majority of Canadians who want accessible post-secondary education. Rather, they have embraced the cuts. In turn, they have offset decreased government funding through shifting the financial burden onto students with ever-climbing tuition fees, and onto workers by attempts to roll back wages and working conditions.

### Being Neutral is not Neutral

Therefore, to take a supposedly neutral "pro-student" position will in fact help admin to undermine CUPE 2424 and in turn undermine the ability of students to resist tuition hikes. The only pro-student position is to support CUPE 2424 and fight to maintain a campus community united against a long-standing admin agenda of anti-unionism and tuition fee increases.

**Their Fight Is Our Fight  
See You On The Picket Line**

### 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, Langara, UofT, Ryerson. Help build the network!