

# CUASA COMMUNIQUÉ

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## **Actions Speaking Louder than Words**

Last fall we ventured to comment that respect was a crucial element of the strike with which the academic year began. Some feathers were ruffled, but John Osborne, the Dean of Arts and Social Sciences, picked up the theme with eloquent words in one of his weekly blogs. They are quite a moving statement:

How do we show respect? First and foremost, I believe, in the macrocosm we show respect by treating every human being as an equal, which is to say with care, with consideration, and above all with humanity, regardless of their station. Showing respect means trying to understand and assist our fellow travelers on this planet, to the best of our abilities given the means available to us. In the microcosm of Carleton University it means valuing the contribution of everyone who toils in the cause of advancing knowledge, from the most brilliant of scholars to the staff who clean our floors and deliver our mail. All deserve our respect, our consideration, and our care. All deserve to be treated fairly, and as generously as our resources permit.

And the conclusion to the paragraph was particularly strong:

And when our professional relationships are covered by collective agreements, it does mean going the extra mile beyond the strictly enforceable letter of the law – especially when we are not actually required to do so – and doing so voluntarily without having to be asked.

Who could imagine that the author of these words had already set in motion a series of events which led at the beginning of April to the dismissal of 12 of our most vulnerable CUASA members?

The events go back to the founding days of CUASA and to the first Collective Agreement. It included provisions for “soft money” employees who would not have tenure but would nevertheless be included as members of the bargaining unit. Section 17.11 provided that:

Any instructional program which is self-funding (i.e. exclusively funded from student fees, or which is funded to the extent of 50% from sources outside the University's normal operating funds), and such programs may be terminated in whole or in part at the discretion of the employer.

One area where the administration made use of this provision was in hiring people to teach non-credit courses in English as a second language. For years people have taught on and off under this program, providing a range of courses that brought cash to the University. Indeed there is still demand for their work, but as of August 29 they are to be laid off. The program is no longer “affordable.”

What has made the program unaffordable began when Dean Osborne decided he didn't want it in FASS any more. The program and the people working as hard as ever were suddenly in limbo -- until they were shuffled off (hard to believe) and put under the supervision of the person who runs the Campus Card! Certainly an unusual way of showing respect for dedicated, educated teachers at a university. But that was only the first step. Now the non-credit language teachers have been told that they are simply **too expensive**: they don't bring in enough money to cover the overhead, etc., etc.

At least a dozen members, all women, will lose their jobs effective August 29 when the employer closes the Centre for Intensive Language Education (CILE). Some of these women have worked here for 23 years on successive term contracts. The employer acknowledges the quality of the program and maintains that its decision to close CILE was taken on the basis of financial loss in the operation of CILE. Income is derived from student fees and since the teachers only work if there are enough students to teach, the teachers are not the cause of the financial difficulty identified by the employer. Amazingly, the financial deficit almost exactly equals the "administrative services fee – \$130,280" and the "space charge – \$105,584" imposed by the employer.

We've been here before. When the Carleton administration wanted to get rid of foreign literatures, they jiggered the numbers this way and that in order to make the case that programs had to be closed. This finagling included turning down the multi-million dollar Austrian Studies Centre because it would have undercut their argument; the Centre and the money went to the University of Alberta. The numbers can always be slanted. A few low-paid language teachers are too expensive, yet severance pay for a president who served less than two years is no strain on the budget at all.

CUASA has been working hard to get our members the best possible severance terms. Unfortunately, the Collective Agreement does not provide much room for action. The employer has the right to close the program, period. Alas, not everyone in the administration shares Dean Osborne's sentiment that "when our professional relationships are covered by collective agreements, it does mean going the extra mile beyond the strictly enforceable letter of the law." The program can be closed, so it will be closed. Sweet words about respect turn out to harbor bitter kernels of unilateral action.

Frankly, this isn't the turn of events CUASA expected after being told that the employer wanted better relations on campus.

Subsequent to the support staff strike in September 07, the employer made statements about and held meetings on "improving the employer-employee relationship" at Carleton. We looked forward to a more collegial, transparent and cooperative climate.

When members of CUASA's Steering Committee met with President Designate Runte, we stressed the need to repair relations with employees and the need to have more consultation, transparency and collegiality in management-union undertakings. For the moment, we remain mired in a continuing pattern of actions that undermine harmonious (or as harmonious as possible) relations with the employer.