

Ontario school board workers defend public education through central bargaining



Canada's system of collective bargaining is, for the most part, based on the premise that workers in individual workplaces will bargain directly with single employers at that workplace. It is a highly fragmented system of collective bargaining that poses challenges for unions in the era of government austerity and privatization. Some workplaces, and thus bargaining units (notably in the public sector and service sector), have become smaller, lessening the collective strength that workers wield.

One of the exceptions to this system of fragmented bargaining is the Ontario school board sector, which is strengthened by a combination of central bargaining and local bargaining. Governed by the School Boards *Collective Bargaining Act* (SBCBA), unions negotiate a central agreement that covers all

issues that have a cost (wages, benefits, etc.) and local agreements with school boards that cover issues directly related to individual workplaces (seniority, hiring, layoff and recall, etc.).

CUPE has responded to the creation of the SBCBA by creating the Ontario School Boards Council of Unions (OSBCU) that is responsible for negotiating the central collective agreement. Covering 55,000 members, this is the largest bargaining table in all of CUPE.

A CUPE bargaining table that represents a membership this size poses both opportunities and challenges. On the plus side, the collective power of this many CUPE members has great potential to fight for a good collective agreement, even in the face of a newly elected Progressive Conservative government that is simultaneously cutting taxes and promising to cut spending on vital public services.

The first challenge is to actively engage with all 55,000 members and involve them in the kinds of actions that build union strength. The second challenge is to coordinate local bargaining for 111 bargaining units on key issues.

To meet this challenge, OSBCU has been working with locals to develop strategic plans that include

member-to-member conversations, building support for bargaining in our communities, and working with allies to develop relationships with school board trustees to keep them accountable for delivering high quality public education. In these ways, OSBCU is moving bargaining forward by embracing centralized and coordinated bargaining across the sector – and by making bargaining more explicitly political by talking about public policy, like the expansion of public education. Plus, school board locals are mobilizing their members and their communities to act politically and challenge austerity.

CUPE has used sector-based coordinated bargaining strategies for years and they have resulted in significant gains for members. CUPE has also used centralized bargaining models that have worked well. The OSBCU shows how CUPE rises to the challenges posed by hostile governments by utilizing strategic planning as a vital tool to build union power.

Doing these two things will strengthen the union's position at the bargaining table, help you make your case with the public, and lead to a better collective agreement.

■ Dan Crow

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Ask & Analyze: The important role of disclosure

Success at the bargaining table is an outcome of many actions, from research to mobilizing. One critical activity is disclosure – accessing and leveraging relevant information from the employer.

It may not be obvious, but disclosure can be vitally significant to the bargaining process. Getting information in a timely way allows our bargaining committees to make better decisions and to prepare for challenges at the table.

A typical disclosure request to the employer could include the following information:

- Details on benefits use and costing
- Overtime usage
- Sick time
- Use of contractors and costs

The above examples are common requests of the employer that address bedrock bargaining issues like leave time, benefits and hours of work.

Understanding the usage and cost of these items helps us make key decisions at the table and guide the bargaining process. It also helps the bargaining committee make very tough decisions.

There are creative ways to use disclosure. This is especially useful in obtaining information related to operational issues like staffing levels, hours of work and baselines of service delivery. In the municipal sector, for example, disclosure can be compared to things like staff reports that help the employer make decisions.

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to things like staff reports that help the employer make decisions.

For example, an annual municipal budget may approve 10 staff for a department. Through monitoring reports like budget variance reports and talking to members in that department, we may discover only eight staff were being assigned. That means the municipality is saving money twice – staff are not being hired and services are not being provided. Understanding these practices and their consequences can give bargaining teams leverage at the table.

The same principle applies to other services. If a municipality operates a land ambulance service, deployment data could be requested and measured against the employer's service delivery plan. This type of information can help provide concrete arguments for the

bargaining table and can be used as a tool to fight concerns around precarious work in our locals.

Disclosure can also be used with other types of information-gathering to amplify bargaining strength. A bargaining committee could file freedom of information requests (also known as access to information) or ask questions in a bargaining survey.

To recap, here are two key tips to remember:

- Ask for the right information, and
- Analyze that information before you start negotiations

Doing these two things will strengthen the union's position at the bargaining table, help you make your case with the public, and lead to a better collective agreement.

■ **Simon Collins**

Tabletalk is published four times a year to provide CUPE bargaining committees and servicing representatives with useful information for preparing and negotiating bargaining demands.

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CUPE / Canadian Union
of Public Employees

Contract U: Shedding Light on Contract Faculty Appointments Across Canada

For many years now, universities have been relying on contract appointments for faculty, rather than full-time, permanent positions. The negative effects on faculty, students, and the university community are well-documented.

But until now, we have had very little information about the extent of precarious employment among faculty and its implications for bargaining. Universities are understandably reluctant to release information that might make them look bad, and Statistics Canada does not report on contract faculty.

In order to learn more, CUPE submitted Freedom of Information requests to all 78 publicly-funded universities in Canada asking for ten years of data on faculty appointments. To-date, we have received usable information from 70 universities.

Thanks to this research, we now know that for the past decade, more than half of university faculty appointments in Canada have been contract positions. We also know that the majority of these contract appointments are

part-time – in 2016-17, part-time work accounted for nearly 80 per cent of all faculty contract appointments.

Our findings also reveal that Quebec relies on contract faculty appointments far more than any other province. Ontario is also above the national average. Alberta and Prince Edward Island, by contrast, have the lowest rates of contract appointments (See table below).

When looking at rates of contract appointments by subject area, there are significant differences. Humanities, for instance, depend far more on contract appointments than social science or science. However, in all subject areas (besides agriculture and veterinary medicine), contract jobs represent more than one-third of appointments (See table on page 4).

While reliance on contract faculty has become a systemic part of higher education across Canada, some universities are worse than others. At twelve universities, contract appointments make up more than two-thirds of all faculty appointments.

This suggests that despite the many excuses given by universities, use of contract faculty is really about the choices that institutions make, not about funding cuts or the personal choices of individual faculty members.

You can access all the research collected by CUPE in our online database at contractu.ca

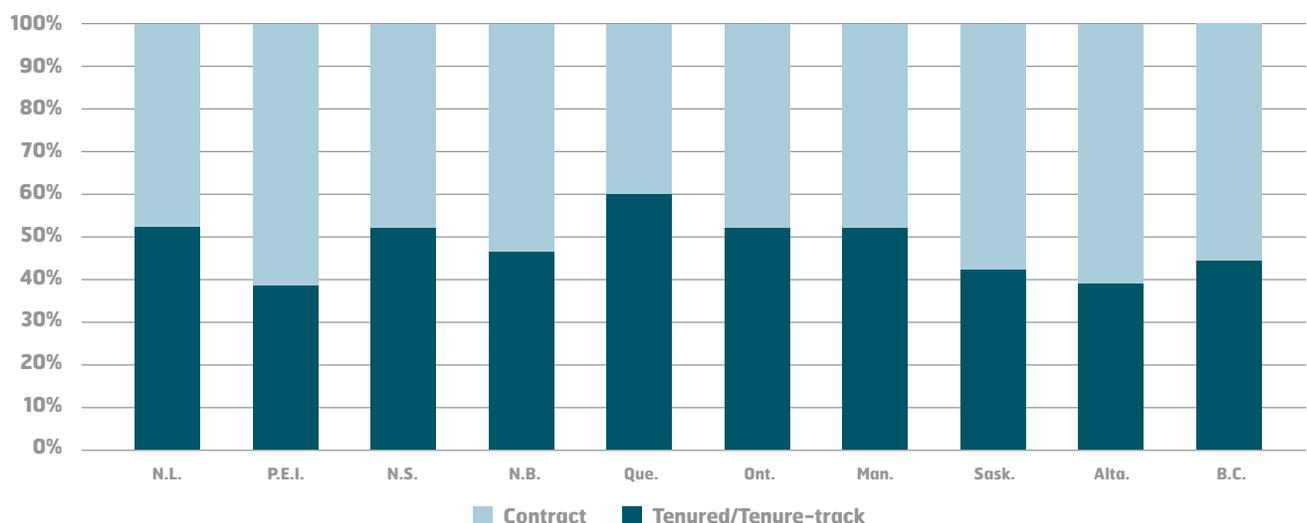
The information at contractu.ca – available to researchers, union organizers, and bargaining committees alike – can help your local identify how rates of contract faculty appointments at your institution compare to other universities across the country. This can help your local refine its bargaining strategy.

More information on bargaining to reduce precarity in the sector and to protect precarious workers can also be found in CUPE’s new guide *Quality Jobs: Tackling Precarious Work in Post-Secondary Education at the Bargaining Table*.

Find it on cupe.ca or through your staff representative.

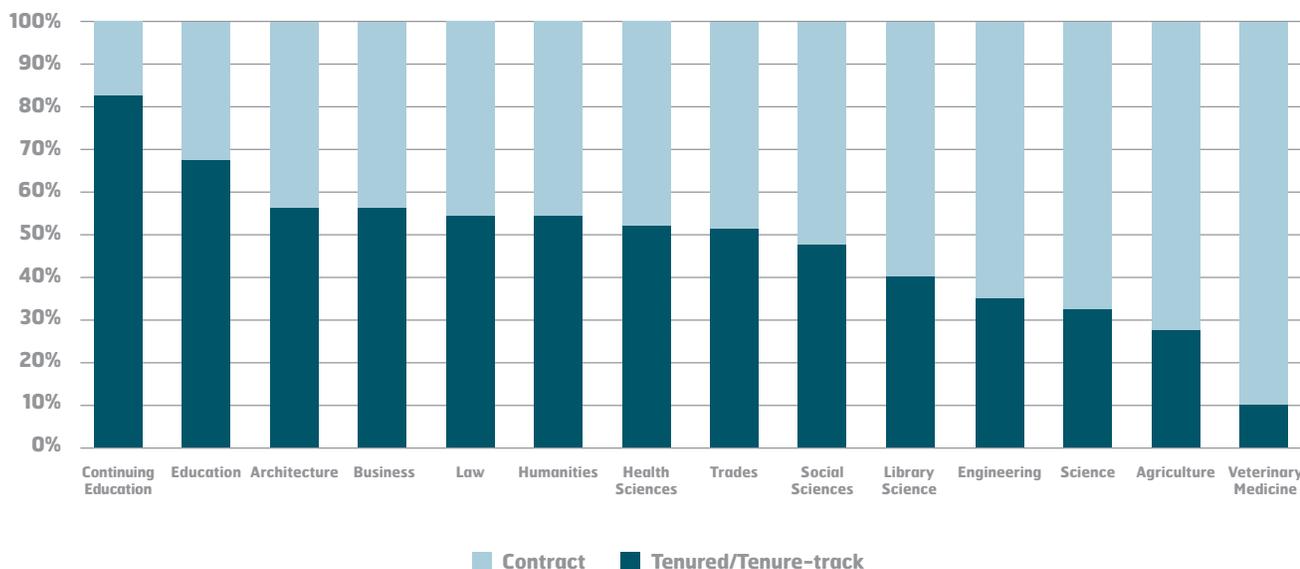
■ Chandra Pasma

Proportion of Contract and Tenured Faculty by Province



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Proportion of Faculty Appointments by Employment Status and Subject Area, 2016-17



BC municipal & library locals mobilize for bargaining – together

Municipal and library workers in BC have found common cause – and have collaborated on a breakthrough campaign to mobilize their collective power at the bargaining table.

After several rounds of bargaining with limited coordination, the union heard from members that they were looking for more in-depth planning. This prompted CUPE staff and leadership to roll once-distinct projects into one massive campaign to get ready as municipal and library contracts start expiring in December of this year.

The South Coast Municipal and Library Campaign brings together 24 municipal and library locals, representing 22,000 members and covering a huge part of southwest BC, from Hope to Pemberton. The campaign builds upon the significant investments in member and community outreach by

locals, and provides an opportunity to pool resources, share experiences and support one another. The campaign brings together community outreach, coordinated bargaining, internal organizing and local leadership training into one big effort.

The idea to band locals together to host a cost-shared campaign to raise CUPE’s profile or to deal with a difficult situation wasn’t new. But members and staff realized that they needed to work together collaboratively to build trust between locals that have had differences in the past.

Working together can be a challenge – but it always produces rewards.

The campaign launched in August 2018 with the CUPE BC Trailer visiting local communities and supporting family-friendly events like BBQs. The union organized leadership meetings

and educational opportunities and begun to build a plan to coordinate bargaining through 2019. The campaign also includes a digital component, including a pro-public services video as well as advertising materials.

As the campaign progresses, we are providing opportunities for further local leadership training and creating research resources that will be used across the region to align locals on shared issues and bargaining goals.

As municipal and library contracts start to expire across BC later this year, we’re busy building solidarity – and combining our strength. Bringing people together to make decisions about the campaign has fostered trust and communication between locals – and that has made our bargaining power even stronger.

■ **Jordana Feist**