President’s Report- Dennis Fitzpatrick

Dr. Larry Savage, Professor of Labor Studies at Brock University spoke on the way forward for academic unions at January’s CAUT forum. He outlined the pressures academic staff face as a result of increasing corporatization and managerial mentality in Canadian Universities. He suggested that traditional ways of promoting and defending the profession are failing. That the current situation, a house divided within the academy a significant numbers of faculty association members tacitly supporting a corporate agenda, leaving the academy vulnerable. He suggested universities are at a crossroad. Playing defense is not a winning strategy.

Savage talked of enhanced communication strategies, moving associations beyond their comfort zone to enhance collegial governance practices, organize town hall meetings and engage your membership in the grievance process. Members must understand the nature of grievances, the ‘normal’ administrative responses and the costs of intransience, delays and incompetence. Savage focused on investments in people, engagement, building new coalitions and supporting other local unions. Dr. Savage suggested the forces of business and political ideology were significant. The current guild model is under assault and being overwhelmed. URFA’s communication plan addresses many of these issues.

Previously I reported Dr. David Robinson, CAUT’s Executive Director, spoke to the conflict between fiduciary duty and collegial governance at CAUT’s Western meeting. Robinson used Harelkin v. University of Regina (1979) as the foundation for this report. In their decision the Supreme Court of Canada stated ‚‘The Act incorporates a university and does not alter the traditional nature of such an institution as a community of scholars and students enjoying substantial internal autonomy...[I]t’s immediate and direct responsibility extends primarily to its present members ‚’ The current community of scholars had management rights and responsibilities. The Board of Governors should be open and Faculty should be represented in a meaningful manner. CAUT’s Legal Advisory has been posted on our website.

CAUT has been busy. They published a Respectful Workplace Policy discussion paper and a Disciplinary Investigations bargaining advisory in February. The discussion paper frames the issue while the bargaining advisory speaks to discipline investigations that support respectful workplace policies. CAUT observes Employment harassment policies often include their own investigation procedures, with reduced procedural fairness and natural justice rights for complainants and respondents, and no Employer obligations to even notify an academic association that a member is being investigate.
Why should you be interested? UofR’s policy and investigation process are inadequate. The discussion paper and advisory are posted on our website.

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