



Report of the President

Brenda Austin-Smith

Since the closing of our campuses (and of the CAUT office) in mid-March, CAUT has continued its vital work from a variety of remote locations. As the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold, its full effects on our teaching, research, and service work are already significant, and require constant monitoring. Information and assistance for academic staff, students, and their families in managing these on-going changes is crucial. Even more now than in the past, academic staff associations provide essential information to members, and are a critical source of support for them as we navigate our way collectively through these changes.

CAUT COVID-19 Activities

What has remained constant since the start of the pandemic is CAUT's commitment to the protection and advancement of workplace rights for members. CAUT staff continue to respond to association queries for information and analysis. The CAUT website, which features a FAQ page devoted to COVID-related questions from members and associations, is updated constantly. David Robinson, members of CAUT staff, and I meet by phone each week to review developments across the country and identify trends (e.g. the use of emergency motions to by-pass collegial decision-making bodies) that call for critique and action. The CAUT Executive has met on-line, as have our committees. Two members of staff and I attended an on-line meeting with members of the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers to talk more specifically about their concerns, and shared strategies for on-line activism. David Robinson and I have also had a chance to communicate with association Presidents, and to hold a shortened version of the New Presidents Forum earlier this month. CAUT's views on matters related to the pandemic and post-secondary education have informed a number of media pieces.

CAUT continues to offer workshops to associations through on-line delivery, and CAUT members and staff have undertaken campaigns to resist program closures in Ontario, and cuts to public sector funding in Manitoba. Lockdown has not dampened our commitment to academic freedom, and our opposition to austerity measures in this time of crisis.



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université



CAUT staff also developed a series of on-line Town Halls on the topic of "COVID-19 and the Academic Job." These webinars presented member panelists from across the country on the effects of COVID on equity, on contract academic staff, on research, on teaching, intellectual property, governance, and privacy. Hundreds of members registered and attended these events, which were held in English and in French. The presentations are now archived on the CAUT website for you to access.

Sincere thanks to CAUT members and CAUT staff of the federation for their excellent work in the service of high quality, public education.

Apart from COVID-related actions, CAUT has maintained its vigilance more generally. Here are some other highlights of our year together in CAUT.

Academic Freedom

The dangers posed to academic freedom not only by so-called "free-speech" directives, but also by on-line harassment, and attacks on extramural and intramural speech, remain a concern to CAUT's Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee. In its meetings over the past year, the committee discussed plans for a workshop on academic freedom to be rolled out for interested associations. The Committee recognizes that the complexities of defending academic freedom in different spheres of activity require more member discussion and interaction. The Committee also monitored developments in the cases of Dr. Derek Pyne and Andrew Potter, among others. One moment of justice arrived in late October with the achievement of settlement in the case of the late Dr. Michael Persinger, of Laurentian University. The settlement found that Dr. Persinger's academic freedom was indeed violated by the university; the university has created a scholarship in his name. Another positive outcome was a consent decision in an arbitration that upheld the right of a colleague to use institutional letterhead in criticizing the actions of local government in BC.

Collective Bargaining

Several associations prepared for, or took job action this past year in support of member demands. Algoma and Cape Breton were poised to walk out, while UNBCFA colleagues were on strike for twenty-three days. Mount Allison Faculty Association members walked off the job for six days in early February for improvement to the working conditions of faculty and librarians with disabilities. Interference by provincial governments in the collective bargaining process is on the rise across the country. Several governments have passed (but not proclaimed) legislation mandating salary increases, or have threatened rollbacks. The UCP in Alberta has gone much further, passing legislation that fundamentally challenges the right of our members, as with others in the public sector, to free and fair collective bargaining. Deep cuts to the University of Alberta in the neighbourhood of 18% will do shocking damage to the working lives of our colleagues, and to the quality of post-secondary education in that province. Mobilizing and organizing associations and members, and providing them with tools and information to take effective political action, connects CAUT's research, education, and bargaining efforts to larger campaigns and other communities with shared values, which will increase our collective power.

Political Action

CAUT made use of a new on-line election toolkit this fall. "For Our Future" allowed members to fill out a survey on issues critical to them, including increased basic funding, reducing precarity, and affordability for students and their families. We made good use of these digital tools to reach members and assist them in joining local efforts to contact candidates in Halifax, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Ottawa. CAUT has moved to make contact with the new minority government on many of these matters, including a meeting between Minister of Labour Tassi to discuss our concerns about precarity and equal pay for equal work in early February. David Newhouse

(Executive Member-at-Large, Aboriginal) and I wrote an article "Indigenization as one path to reconciliation" that was published in the *Hill Times* in January. CAUT's action on the climate emergency continues. In addition to steps and recommendations reported to the November 2019 Council, CAUT is involved in a research project with Larry Savage of Brock University on "Bargaining for Climate Action."

Equity

Last July saw the conclusion of a sixteen-year effort to address systemic discrimination in the Canada Research Chair program. CAUT has supported the eight women who took the issue to the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 2003. The settlement means targets will be based on the diversity of the population, rather than on an already discriminatory pipeline of applicants. And for the first time, LGBTQ+ members will be included. Members of CAUT's Equity Committee put together and presented at the recent conference "Organizing for Equity: Tools and Skills for Activists" in mid-February. The conference brought members together for sessions on how to use grievances, bargaining, and political campaigns to achieve equity goals. The Equity Committee also continued its work developing an Equity tool kit for association activists.

Solidarity Actions

CAUT continued its solidarity work both locally and internationally. We contributed to the successful legal challenge undertaken by the Canadian Federation of Students against the Ford government's Student Choice Initiative, and expressed solidarity with striking teachers in Ontario last month. We maintained our solidarity partnerships with colleagues around the world, including Palestine, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, and Malaysia. We have taken positions in support of striking University and College Union in the UK, and have contributed to the International Labour Organization's global dialogue on the terms and conditions of work in tertiary education.

In Memoriam

In closing this report, I want to acknowledge the terrible loss in January of passengers on UIA PS752 in a crash over Iran on January 8, many of whom were our colleagues and students. We express condolences to their families, friends and co-workers. I also want to repeat CAUT's statement of June 3 that our federation stands in solidarity with communities around the world protesting racism, injustice, and inequality.