

# CCA Board At-Large Director Report Form

Report: May 22, 2017

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| AREA: Northern California PT Director  | DIRECTOR: John Martin |
| ACTIVITIES (when and where):<br><b>Attended the Precarious Academic Labour in the Age of Neoliberalism, Okanagan College, Kelowna, BC, May 5th &amp; 6th, 2017; See my report below.</b> |                       |
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INFORMATION or REFERRAL ITEMS (conference attendance, relevant travel, etc.):

Keynote: Dr. Jamie Brownlee, author of Academia, Inc.: How Corporatization is Transforming Canadian Universities.

This speaker addressed the heart of what's happening in higher education, not only in Canada and but easily noted the United States. He outlined that the rise of contingent labor in all industries as a consequence of neoliberal policy priorities coincides with the fact that, for decades, the number of courses that are taught by contingent faculty at colleges and universities has increased dramatically. This ongoing shift constitutes an existential challenge to our sector and profession, and is in complicated ways related to other critical issues in our sector: dwindling government support, increasing tuition, the desire to subordinate education to market demands, the role of faculty unions in shaping the profession, and so forth.

He further highlighted that through his research that after decades of decline, higher education is now firmly embedded in a profound crisis. The source of this crisis is commonly identified as "corporatization," "managerialism," "instrumentalism," or "neoliberal economics." I will add, this model fits Naomi Klein's book, The Shock Doctrine: Disaster Capitalism and he agreed, during the Q and A session, that Klein's book is a valuable book to read. Making higher education into a "crisis" mode, caused many practice of the increasing reliance on precarious academic laborers (PAL).

Aside from obvious funding pressures, one of the major reasons for these changes is the fact that many people are unaware of the current situation in higher education and the dangers it poses. For this reason, the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge in this area is essential to resisting the increased reliance upon, and exploitation of, precarious academic labor.

Besides Brownlee's presentation, other presenters raised other issues such as how the corporatization, neoliberalism or managerialism support increasing the reliance on PAL and resist improving the working conditions for PAL.

What are some potential solutions to the increasing reliance on PAL, knowing that its increase is due to neoliberal ideology? Unions are one solution but there's strong resistance by full-time faculty as they are increasingly trying to protect their status quo (salaries, pensions and tenure). Others offered organizing third parties to resist such efforts by these unions.

Again, many presenters stressed that such PAL working conditions have adverse health effects for us such as emotional and mental due to the constant stress of wondering there will be any classes for the following semester(s)! Another topic that is part of the stress are the negative student evaluations that PAL receives...such realities cause grade inflation and loss of classes.

There seems to be an issue in Canada about the lack of data on PAL is currently available, and thus, real information how has this availability affected the increasing reliance on PAL. In California, we do have a better system through the Chancellor's Office' Datamark. Presenters, not all, stated that there myths out there regarding PAL and academia in the 21st Century, and that PAL are working semester to semester enjoy their "hobby" and they love their extra free time, and don't want to participate in shared governance, etc. and thus, affected the increasing reliance on PAL.

Another common theme that some of the presenters raised was the fact most, if not all, students and their parents think that their instructors are of the tenure-streamed!

-in what ways are PAL expected to offer free labor in the form of uncompensated service, teaching, and research in order to make up for poor work conditions?

#### **Panel #1: The Statistics and History of Precarious Academic Labour**

- o Dougal MacDonald: "Public Disclosure of Precarious Labour Work Conditions"
- o Ed Kroc: "Undergraduate Precarious Academic Labour at BC Universities"
- o Rob-Roy Douglas: "Putting the Future Behind Us: Precarious Academic Labour and the Evolution of Canada's Post-Secondary System Since 1945"
- o Elliott Rossiter: "Precarious Academic Labour and the Nature of Meaningful Work"

Film Screening: [\*Contract Faculty: Injustice in the University\*](#)

Describes the situation of university professors working on short term contracts and explains the harm this does to them and higher education in Canada and the US. The film relies heavily on interviews with both contract faculty and tenured professors.

#### **Panel #2: The Invisibility of Precarious Academic Labourers**

- Herbert Pimlott: "'Ivory Tower or Temp Agency?' Using 'Common Sense' to Challenge the 'Myths' of Post-Secondary Education and Precarious Academic Labour"
- Sarika Bose: "The Invisible Academic: The Erasure of the Academic as Professional in the Corporate Academy"
- Priscillia Lefebvre: "The Invisibility of Mental Health Concerns Among Contingent Faculty Labour"

#### **Panel # 3: International Perspectives on Precarious Academic Labour**

- o Linda Elmore: "Precarious Work in Higher Education: Micro and Macro Factors Impeding Resistance in the 'Neoliberal University'"
- o John Martin: "Betting for Change: How Contingent Faculty Activists Changed One Aspect of the Working Conditions in the California Community Colleges (CCC) System"
- o Georgann Cope-Watson: "Part Time University Teaching in Ontario: A Self Study"

#### **Panel #4: Critical Theory and Precarious Academic Labour**

- Melissa Jacques: "The Ballad of the Carrot and the Stick (or, the Uncanny Vicissitudes of Tenure"
- Sam Popowich: "Precarious Labour and Academic Librarians"
- Heidi Tiedemann Darroch: "Improving Teaching and Learning Conditions by Including Contract Faculty in Governance"

**Panel # 5: Ways Forward**

- Ray Hsu: "How to Create a \$4.3m Startup and Beat the Neoliberal University at Its Own Game"
- Frank Cosco: "The Program for Change: How to Develop Momentum and Capacity in Activists Groups and Unions"
- Jack Longmate: "Is there a viable alternative to tenure?"
- Keith Hoeller: "How to Solve the Contingent Faculty Crisis"

**What is neo-liberalism?** Presented by Steve Weber a fellow PAL:

Hello and welcome to "Precarious Academic Labour in the Age of Neoliberalism." Before we begin I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Syilx [say-elks] (or Okanagan) peoples."

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It is because of my interactions with you that I dare to be cautiously optimistic about the future of academic laborers and of academia in general. If one thing is certain, the future higher education would be very bleak were it not for the efforts of people like yourselves. You have all shown remarkable dedication to the issue of precarious academic labour. We have both permanent and contract faculty members here. We also have independent scholars here, and perhaps even support staff and administrators. If one thing is clear, at least to me, the possibility of improvement in the work conditions for contract labourers largely depends upon cooperation amongst these groups. This is why I find seeing you here today so heartening. That is, I believe the existence of conferences dedicated to precarious academic labour face unique and powerful obstacles. For contract laborers whose self-interest dictates their dedication to this subject, these people face entirely unique obstacles in terms of time and resources that prevents their participation. And in fact, their participation cannot be relied on, to no fault of their own of course. If contract laborers cannot be their own advocates, then they must rely on the care, concern, and genuine goodwill of others, whose self-interest does not overlap with that of contract labourers. This is why I believe conferences on contract labour face unique and powerful obstacles. In short, it does not matter whether the people in this room are contract or not, you are to be commended for all the work and advocacy you do on behalf of precarious academic labour. If things do improve, it is because of the work you have done.

This conference is part of a larger province-wide campaign called open the doors that has been organized and funded by the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators. If you saw open the doors materials here, it is because we are a part of this campaign, and I encourage you to check out their website at [openthedoors.ca](http://openthedoors.ca) if you have not done so already. The purpose of open the doors was to highlight British Columbia's chronic underfunding of post-secondary education and to make it an election issue on May 9th, when we have our provincial election. Some of you may be wondering how a conference on precarious academic labour in the age of neoliberalism might fit into a campaign on low funding for post-secondary education and high tuition fees and student debt. It is because I see low funding, high tuition fees, and an increasing reliance on contract labour as three problems that share the same root cause. That cause is the incredible dominance of a single ideology commonly known as neoliberalism, which is an ideology that defines freedom as free market capitalism. It is an ideology that wants to reduce the size of government, and that believes in a pay per use system, which of courses disadvantages everyone but the wealthy.

AS a side note, I should mention that the advantage to the wealthy is the reason why scholars like David Harvey talk about neoliberalism as an ideology intent on the consolidation of

class power, which had largely been undermined by the rapid expansion of the middle class in the second half of the twentieth century. Perhaps, most significantly, neoliberalism is an ideology that cares exclusively about money, at the expense of all else. In fact, because it cares about nothing but money, such an ideology is even openly hostile to concerns about poverty, the environment, oppressed groups, education, etc. The truly remarkable thing about this ideology is that there are very few people who would be able to recognize its existence. In other words, most people are completely unaware of the fact that they are neoliberals. That is, neoliberalism is so dominant, that neoliberal ideas exist on both sides of the political spectrum. Whenever most people talk about common sense, or about what is realistic and possible, or even about good and bad, what they are always talking about are neoliberal values and beliefs. If today's conference is to make an intervention, it is because its dissemination of knowledge leads to a greater awareness of the fact that the major difficulty we face lies in some of the public's most deeply held beliefs. If neoliberalism's dominance is to be weakened, it will only be with creating greater awareness of its existence.