

Strike closes part of UVic's student building

Other student workers in B.C. make wages on par with UVic

VICTORIA (CUP) – Pickets closed much of the University of Victoria's Student Union Building on Thursday, Sept. 4, as 150 unionized student employees of the building began a legal strike over wage disputes.

With their collective agreement up for negotiation, workers are asking for a \$1.50 hourly wage increase for the lowest paid employees in the Student Union Building (SUB), who currently earn \$9.95 per hour.

But when the strike began, management, represented by the University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS) board, was only offering an increase of 10 cents for tip-earning servers at the campus pub, and 30 cents for others in the lowest wage bracket.

"We want fair jobs and fair wages, but we also need to keep the SUB running in a sustainable way," said UVSS chair Caitlin Meggs. "We're trying to find that fine balance. We can't increase the wage without cutting that money out somewhere else. It's not possible."

The union's bargaining committee, headed by Acting Union President Michael Ryan, met with a mediator from the B.C. Labour Relations Board on Friday, Aug. 29. He represented the workers who had agreed to accept nothing short of their proposed \$1.50

wage increase, which they wanted applied retroactively to hours worked since May 1, when their contract expired.

The raise would cost the Student Society nearly \$300,000 over two years.

"It seems like a lot of money," Ryan said. "But we haven't had a substantial raise in such a long time that we're just catching up to where we should be now."

Workers in UVic's SUB unionized in 1989 to protect the transient worker base that often only works short term while at university. Their collective agreement comes up for negotiation every three years, and wage is always debated.

In 2005, workers received a five-cent raise and a \$100 signing bonus for agreeing to it. In 2002, the raise was 15 cents. In 1999, they took 95 cents.

Their current lowest-wage bracket of \$9.95 is in the mid-range of student workers at the other two large universities in B.C.

At the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, SUB workers are not unionized and their lowest starting wage is \$9.00 per hour.

At Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, unionized students working for businesses owned by their student union have a starting wage of \$12.66 per hour.

UVic, the third-largest university in B.C. with 19,000 students, began its fall

semester on Wednesday, Sept. 3. Classes are not affected by the strike.

Many services that would have been hosted in the SUB, such as a farmer's market and clothing vendors, were easily moved outside into the sunshine that met the first day of the strike.

Businesses housed in the SUB that aren't part of the union, such as a pharmacy and a hair salon, were kept open with an entrance free for picketers.

However, the campus pub, movie theatre, used bookstore, copy centre, and many food vendors run by the union were closed.

The only union workers still in the building were members of the UVSS board, who kept their info booth open and distributed information about their stance on the strike.

"The employer has made a fair, affordable and responsible wage offer. At almost five times the cost, the union's wage demand is simply not affordable," the UVSS wrote in their hand-out. "The UVSS is a non-profit society funded by students. Any wage increases will be paid for by students in the form of increased prices and membership fees or reduced services."

The union and the board are expected to meet with a mediator to continue negotiations in the weeks to come.

CBC Radio 2 sends classical music fans to the web

WINNIPEG (CUP) – Changes to the CBC's Radio 2 lineup came into effect this week, with a decrease in classical music and hopes to appeal to a younger crowd.

The station's classical content was reduced from an average of 12 hours during weekdays to an average of five hours.

Last January, CBC Radio 2 decided to decrease the amount after about three years of studying its radio arts programming.

The change has upset some listeners.

"I loved the old Radio 2 – note past tense. I am disappointed, sad, frustrated, angry at your ignoring of the protests of loyal listeners . . . and I will not listen to you anymore," said blog commenter Formerlistener.

In addition to the changes to Radio 2, CBC is launching three new web-based stations – one that will only play classical music.

However, the Canadian Press, the Winnipeg Free Press, a 16,000 member-strong Facebook group, and even CBC.ca itself have been reluctant to promote the new stations as a solution.

Though Radio 2 will still have classical content on air, this new online all-classical station should more than compensate for the cut airtime.

"Current listeners can take comfort in the fact that classical will remain the most

represented music genre on Radio 2," wrote Jennifer McGuire, executive director of CBC Radio, in a blog entry from early April.

"Radio 2 does not belong to one genre, one constituency, one taste.

"It's a reflection of the musical community that defines who we are as Canadians," she continued.

Critics are worried Radio 2 will deter younger listeners from classical music by reducing its airtime.

Yet while portable music technology blossoms, younger people are more likely to listen to digital music rather than content from the radio.

CBC acknowledged this trend by revamping the Radio 2 website last March to include more music on demand programming and streaming audio.

"We knew that the changes we proposed would be difficult," said Jeff Keay, head of media relations at CBC.

"People expressed concerns that the content is being dumbed down . . . [but] the Radio 2 brand is one that has always showcased creative and intelligent shows."

According to Keay, the change should still keep classical fans listening, only to more varied content.

"We did a detailed study of our listeners – classical lovers are lovers of other genres . . . as long as the presentation is done well."