

**President's report to Fall General Membership Meeting**  
**Dec. 5, 2013**

It's been quite a week.

But before I say anything about that, I would like to acknowledge some of the other milestones and accomplishments of the past six months.

We must congratulate the CAE bargaining team on the successful completion of their negotiations: David Bell, the chief negotiator, and team members Wendy Bourque, Arthur James, and John Neilson. Further congratulations to the CAE CB committee: Robert Derrah, Stephen Dutcher, Marianne Eiselt, Carla Gunn, Alison Luke, Elizabeth McGahan, and Trevor Sawler. This group did a spectacular job and achieved solid gains. The contract that Jula Hughes and her team crafted with so much labour has now grown a little, improved a little. It is well on its way to one day becoming a solid and mature collective agreement. The CAE team has much to be proud of and deserves our recognition and thanks for all their work. CAEs at UNB do not yet enjoy even the modest benefits of their counterparts at many other institutions, but the groundwork has been well laid and their working conditions are considerably improved over just two contracts.

As you all know, these past few months saw tremendous activity on the pension front, culminating in the vote to ratify the tentative agreement to convert the existing FT pension plan into a SRP. What you may not know is that the pension committee, initially under the able leadership of Jon Thompson, began working to address our underfunded plan more than two years ago. The Pension Committee put in untold hours and it is no exaggeration to say that they stood between the membership and a disastrous plan wind-up. All FT members owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Jon Thompson, current co-chairs Rick McGaw and Gopalan Srinivasan, Jula Hughes, Barb Trenholm, David Bell, Dorothy DuPlessis, Alyssa Sankey, and Vaughan Dickson. Not everyone is happy with the new plan, granted. But we still have a pension, and that was by no means a certainty two years ago. Please join me in thanking the committee for all their work, work that is still ongoing as the final details are being sorted out.

The third milestone I would like to mention is the hiring of AUNBT's professional officer, Matt Hiltz. Matt joined us in August and many of you have already had occasion to meet him and benefit from his experience and his sense of calm in the eye of whatever storm is blowing around him. This last quality is particularly important for as you will know, the executive decided to seek a professional officer, in part, to deal with an increasingly legalistic, even aggressive, approach from management. AUNBT had not had a professional officer before but now we cannot imagine how we ever managed without one. Matt has fit in as if he had always been there, and in just over three months has already helped many members with issues great and small. He has become a valued member of the group and, along with Executive Assistant Brenda Morais, make the AUNBT office a pleasure to work in and an invaluable resource for our members.

So. If that were not more than enough for one term, there is FT bargaining. Lloyd Waugh and his team – Matt Hiltz, Francesca Holyoke, Jeff Houlahan, Charlene Mayes, Melanie Wiber – have been working inhuman hours to achieve a new collective agreement. Lloyd is going to address this meeting shortly so I will say not more here. Except for one thing.

As you know, yesterday concluded two days of polling for a strike vote. I'm sure you all already know the details but I just like saying the numbers:

90% in favour of authorizing a strike mandate  
97% voter turn-out

Those numbers just roll around in your mouth, don't they? Very meditative. Those numbers cause me to meditate on several things:

—how far we have come as a union: we have broadened, we are more representative, we are growing from a solid long-established base into an organization that is prepared to engage with the cold realities of the neo-liberal university

—how far the membership has come: the first time I was on the CB council I remember very clearly how the membership shied away from even the idea of talking about forming a strike preparedness committee. A decade later and we have all come to realise, I think, that there are much worse threats to our work – our profession – than striking or being locked out. We have come to realize that being willing to take that step is a way to protect and strengthen our work.

—how far the managers of this university have pushed us. No matter how long I live I doubt I will forget the member who stood up at our meeting last week and told us that he had never been to a union meeting in all his years at UNB but he was there that day and he was going to vote for a strike.

Those numbers – 90, 97 – also cause me to meditate on

—the optimism of our membership: exemplified by the way people came together over the past days to build a strong mandate for the team despite the increasingly debilitating environment in which we all work

—the righteous anger of our membership, at the way our leaders are cheapening our work and selling out our students' futures.

—the unity of our membership, scattered across the province and often divided in the past but prepared to band together – there is that optimism again – and make a stand. I don't think it is an accident, by the way, that there was an inverse correlation between the size of the campus and the strength of the vote. Don't get me wrong: the vote was strong, across the board. The membership is unified. But it was a tad stronger in SJ than in F'ton. And our colleagues in Bathurst and Moncton

blew the bigger campuses off the map. We would all do well to reflect upon that, and to recommit ourselves to working together despite the inconveniences of distance.

Yes, the FT membership has a lot to be proud of today.

But the FT members are not alone.

FT members are only one of two bargaining units in AUNBT, and just as in the coming weeks the FT members must strengthen the connections between campuses, we must also broaden our vision of our union as a true partnership of all academics at UNB. This is not a time for divisions.

And AUNBT is not alone. More than ever before we are part of a wider network of academic unions in New Brunswick, and across the country. Our provincial organization, FNBFA, is stronger and more active than ever, and AUNBT has been working closely with them and our colleagues at the other N.B. universities, and has been benefiting greatly from that collaboration.

We are not the only ones who are recognizing the necessity of coalition building. The necessity, and the pleasure. We have wonderful colleagues across the country, to teach and to learn from. CAUT has long been a valuable source of support and inspiration, and it will soon be closer to home: Robin Vose, our FAUST colleague, is the incoming CAUT president. Wayne Peters, the current president, is from UPEI. Faculty unions from eastern Canada are contributing considerable energy to the larger academic labour movement; AUNBT has long been in the forefront in making those contributions through the work of Jon Thompson on academic freedom, Francesca Holyoke on the Librarian's committee, Katy Haralampides' work on the Status of Women's committee, and many others. Now more than ever we need to commit ourselves to maintaining and strengthening those connections to our sister academic unions across Canada.

AUNBT has a long history with both CAUT and FNBFA. Of more recent vintage is our growing involvement with the broader labour movement.

As you know, AUNBT is a fairly new member of the NBFL. We attended our first NBFL convention this year. Our delegation consisted of Jeff McNally, CAE rep from SJ, Bill Parenteau, former FT executive member and longtime provincial labour activist, member and labour historian David Frank, and me. We look forward as an organization to developing the ties to the provincial labour movement that some of our members have long been developing individually. Later in the meeting, NBFL president Patrick Colford will present greetings.

And finally, we are connecting as never before to ALL the unions at UNB: UNBEA, UGSW, CUPE 3339, and the newly formed PTSU. I am delighted to announce to you today that the STU Labour Council, of which AUNBT is a member, has decided to expand into a labour council for all the unions at UNB and STU, called the United Campus Labour Council.

So I suppose the message I would like to leave you with today is that while the FT members of AUNBT took a major step over the past few days by voting so overwhelmingly for a strike mandate – a step that may seem alternately exciting and terrifying – we are not alone. Not alone in our union; not alone at our university; not alone on our campuses; not alone provincially; and not alone nationally. This is a time for building. Building our relationships, building our community, and *re*-building our university. It's time. I know that, because you told me so, yesterday.

Miriam Jones