

# QUFA VOICES

## SPECIAL AGM/BUDGET ISSUE

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### PRESIDENT'S VOICE

## QUFA Continues to Press Queen's Administration for Budget Information

By Peter Dacin  
President, QUFA



On behalf of the QUFA Executive and Council of Representatives, thank you to all QUFA Members who attended last week's

Fall General Meeting and to all who have contributed to the ongoing discussion about the issues surrounding Queen's budget situation. In this special year-end issue of *QUFA Voices*, we present a summary of what went on at this year's Fall General Meeting to provide those who could not attend a sense of the discussion that took place at the meeting.

As highlighted in the summary, a motion from the floor was passed with an overwhelming majority just before

### QUFA IMAGES

## Record Numbers



Robert G. May

**QUFA Members turned out in record numbers to the QUFA Fall General Meeting, which was held on 15 December 2008. Budgeting issues were first and foremost on Members' minds.**

*Please send your own original images to [mayr@queensu.ca](mailto:mayr@queensu.ca).*

the adjournment of the General Meeting. The motion demanded that the University Administration undertake several actions related to

the budget situation. The motion was silent with respect to QUFA's responsibilities on this matter. In our current situation, however, I believe

that we should be willing to make demands of ourselves as we do of others.

From the meeting, there was a strong, shared sense that the QUFA Membership was instructing QUFA to continue to press for meetings with the Principal, Vice-Principals, Deans, and with other unions and associations on campus, and to work collaboratively towards a collective, fully-informed solution to the current fiscal situation at Queen's.

The QUFA Membership also appeared to be open to considering possible alternatives, as long as there was appropriate information available for informed discussions and decision-making. Equally clear, the

QUFA Membership will not consider any alternatives without appropriate recovery and exit strategies.

These are not just my observations gathered from the meeting; these same observations were reinforced by many of you in your messages sent to QUFA after the meeting. Although there was no formal motion made, you have my word that QUFA is committed to pursuing the above actions and to considering possible alternatives for addressing the current fiscal situation at Queen's.

To this end, I am happy to report that a number of things happened soon after the Fall General Meeting. With respect to the need for disclosure and transparency, I met with Principal Williams the day after the General Meeting and presented him with a copy of the motion. The meeting went well. An agenda for collaboration with respect to both the current financial situation and the ongoing pension discussions was developed. During the meeting, we discussed other related issues:

- We discussed the need for the Principal to hold a meeting about the current financial situation with the QUFA Membership as soon as possible.
- The Office of the Principal is committed to launching a Web site early in the New Year dedicated to the evolving financial situation. This Web site will include a Q&A on the current budget situation.

**... a few of you asked me about whether other Universities had ever re-opened their collective agreements.... James Turk, the Executive Director of CAUT, responded by saying that there is no precedent in Canada for actually opening a collective agreement to discuss a salary freeze or roll-back, even when universities have been in serious financial trouble.**

- Principal Williams and I discussed the concerns of department heads who were facing January deadlines for meeting budget cuts and the limitations these short deadlines place on the departmental morale as well as the ability to develop creative solutions.
- Principal Williams agreed to meet again with the QUFA Executive and Council of Representatives very early in the New Year.

In addition to my meeting with Principal Williams, QUFA was busy on several other fronts after the Fall General Meeting. The Joint Committee to Administer the Collective Agreement (JCAA) met to discuss the current budget and financial situation as it relates to the implementation of the Collective Agreement. QUFA also arranged a Heads Caucus Meeting for early January to continue discussing the concerns of Heads that were raised at the General Meeting. In addition, through all of this, we also found time to meet with University Administration to discuss the ongoing pension issue.

It was clear from last week's Fall General Meeting that timely information-sharing on a variety of issues is a must. With respect to gathering more information, a few of

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QUFA Voices publishes QUFA-related news and information for QUFA Members and provides QUFA Members with a forum to express their QUFA-related ideas and opinions. We want to hear from you! Please send your QUFA-related story ideas, news items, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, photographs, and other submissions to the editor at [mayr@queensu.ca](mailto:mayr@queensu.ca).

QUFA Voices is edited by Robert G. May (English). He can be reached at [mayr@queensu.ca](mailto:mayr@queensu.ca).

you asked me about whether other Universities had ever re-opened their collective agreements, so I made an inquiry to the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) about this. James Turk, the Executive Director of CAUT, responded by saying that there is no precedent in Canada for actually opening a collective agreement to discuss a salary freeze or roll-back, even when universities have been in serious financial trouble. My conclusion from this exchange echoes what I believe is the view expressed by most QUFA Members who have written to QUFA or attended the Fall General Meeting; that is, we must consider very carefully the consequences of any decision made not only to QUFA Members, but also to others at Queen's and on our colleagues at other universities across Canada.

On the whole, in the last week, I feel that we have started on a path to progress in our quest for additional information and for a better understanding of the current situation. I am looking forward to continuing these discussions in the New Year. As we gather additional information related to the many questions you have been sending us, we will continue to share this information with QUFA Members. We encourage you to continue asking questions and sharing your questions and concerns with QUFA. And we will in turn continue to raise them in our discussions with Principal Williams and other University Administrators. As we gather additional information, it is also likely that we will schedule additional general meetings when necessary to facilitate discussion and to consider possible courses of action.

In the meantime, I wish everyone a safe and peaceful holiday break and a Happy New Year.

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FYI

## The QUFA Fall General Meeting 2008: A Summary of the Budget Discussion

By Ramneek Pooni  
Member Services Officer, QUFA



Susan Fitzgibbon (QUFA Staff) opened the budget discussion by presenting a series of slides that

highlighted details of the current Queen's University budget that was included in the agenda package for the 5 December 2008 meeting of the Board of Trustees. These slides illustrate trends over the past few years, and they have been reproduced in this issue of *QUFA Voices* over the next few pages.

A Proposed Budget was presented to the Board of Trustees for approval. The Budget for 2008-2009 was approved last year. This Approved Budget was then "updated" at the Board two weeks ago to reflect new projections of what would happen at the end of the 2008-2009 budget year, given current financial information. For example, the Board initially assumed that the University would get a grant of \$9,660,000 from the government, but this amount did not materialize.

In recent years, the University has reported year-end surpluses in its General Operating Fund. For example, at the end of the fiscal year that ended in 2007, the University reported an accumulated surplus in the General Operating Fund of \$37.68 million to the Canadian Association of University Business Officers (the surplus for 2007 is \$38.4

million on p. 55 of the 2008 Annual Report from Queen's). In the 2008-2009 Operating Budget Update to the Board of Trustees, an initial Accumulated Operating Surplus of \$20.53 million is reported, but \$20.48 million is deducted from that amount "due to revised accounting for financial instruments." We have been told that the \$20.48 million represents unrealized paper losses on investments, and currency and interest-rate hedges.

Over time, the proportion of the Operating Budget devoted to Faculties and Schools has declined from 49.1% in 1998-1999 to 42.6% in 2008-2009. Funding for several Capital Projects will be partially funded out of the Operating Budget over the next few years.

Publicly available financial reports are difficult to decipher, but it is clear that even if QUFA Members were to take a 1% cut in salary, there would be little if any impact on the overall budget.

QUFA continues to ask for specific financial information from the University Administration and to ask for meetings with Principal Williams and senior Administration to help us understand the financial situation. Our unanswered questions arise from the details illustrated in these slides.

### Open Discussion

At this point, the meeting went into an open discussion. The comments below provide a summary of the Members' lengthy discussion by topic rather than a person-by-person account.

### Discussion about Finances

Decision-making is premature at this point. There is a lot of information that we need from the University Administration.

The University cannot declare

financial exigency because it would have to be on the verge of collapse to do so. The University actually had more money this year than it did last year before incurring the expense represented by the “revised accounting for financial instruments.” The Board of Trustees has a habit of balancing the books; credit reports place Queen’s as the most financially secure university in Canada, even though the last few years of surpluses might have been wiped out in this year’s turmoil.

During last year’s bargaining, the amount of the salary mass was never at issue between the two parties. In fact, it was the Administration that argued for higher scale increases to retain and attract faculty. QUFA had argued that some of these funds should be used instead to address current anomalous salaries.

Nobody doubts that there is now a real concern about available funds and that the Administration is sincere when it says that the global financial crisis has affected Queen’s as well. The University does not know until halfway through the financial year what funding it will receive from the Province, and the revenues from the University’s large endowments are bound to have fallen this year, affecting both operating and pension funds. Because of the multiple sources of financial reporting and the confusion this creates in assessing the financial situation, QUFA is considering hiring a “forensic accountant,” and those at the meeting supported this idea.

## 2008-09 Projected Operating Budget

**Accumulated Operating Surplus carried forward**      \$ 20,531,000

### REVENUE

**Total Operating revenue**      \$324,100,000

**Balance**      \$344,631,000

### EXPENSE

**Total Operating Expense**      minus \$332,071,000  
\$ 12,560,000

**Accumulated Operating Surplus before employee  
future benefits**      \$ 12,560,000

**Slide 1: The Projected 2008-2009 Budget has been re-ordered to make the math clearer and to highlight the effect of the new accounting for financial instruments.**

The Queen’s budget increases every year. The current cuts are part of a budgeting exercise. We have no information about how the money from the cuts is used. Years ago, the Senate Budget Review Committee Reports contained detailed information on such items as salary, operating costs, etc., but now it is very challenging to find these details. Some facts that are known:

- faculty salaries were about 35% of the operating budget when we unionized twelve years ago, and faculty salaries now make up about 28% of the operating budget;
- we lost approximately 100 faculty members in 1996 with the early retirement packages, and not all of these positions have been

regained;

- we used to lose about \$1,000,000 a year on the Castle, so details on this should be sought, as it is no longer possible to decipher from the Annual Report of the Budget whether or not it is still being subsidized by the operating budget;
- Advancement used to get \$6 million per year, but this amount jumped to \$31 million at some point.

The Board’s agenda package for 5 December 2008 mentions:

- the need to cut 15% over three years;
- that these cuts will have a

## Accounting changes and the deficit

<b>Accumulated Operating Surplus before employee</b>	
<b>future benefits</b>	<b>\$ 12,560,000</b>
<b>Less: Changes due to revised accounting for financial</b>	
<b>instruments</b>	<b><u>\$ 20,479,000</u></b>
<b>Operating Deficit</b>	<b>\$ (7,919,000)</b>

These are unrealized (no cash exchanged) losses on derivatives - an interest rate swap and foreign exchange contracts for US Dollars and Pound Sterling. It seems the foreign exchange contracts have lost \$s on paper. Losses and gains on these financial instruments are shown in the Consolidated Financial Statements for the first time for the year ending April 30, 2008 because of changes in accounting rules.

vulnerable Term Adjuncts. We must present ourselves as strong, cohesive, and inclusive. We must demand information via an auditor and share this information with others on campus who are organizing. We must bring everyone in the University together on this.

It is wrong simply to accept the dichotomy—salary cuts or positions cut—presented by the University Administration. We must keep in mind the larger picture. For example, there is a lot of labour organizing going on at Queen's right now, and the Administration's actions might be connected to union busting. We should keep in mind other, more vulnerable stakeholders at Queen's, such as general staff, but we will not make them less vulnerable by cutting our pay. That will

**Slide 2: The Projected 2008-2009 Budget has been re-ordered to make the math clearer and to highlight the effect of the new accounting for financial instruments.**

significant impact on the operating budgets of most units;

- that further information will be forthcoming.

That "further information" has not been received. QUFA Members need complete and coherent financial information and explanations about what financial decisions were made by the Administration that brought us to this situation.

### Discussion about What to Consider and to Do

We unionized in the mid-1990s because the Administration refused to listen to the proposals made by our Faculty Association. We knew that in doing so we would lose some of our sense of place in the University, but

we felt that it was necessary to take a united stand. General staff were given a choice to take a 20% pay cut for a year or lose their security. The Board of Trustees recommended that Queen's faculty do the responsible thing and voluntarily take pay cuts, and we did. Then, the government imposed further measures on us anyway. So we paid twice. We learned that being responsible locally will not prevent government action. The junior faculty members who suffered at that time have never made up that loss in their financial career profile. Many staff positions were also lost and never recovered.

QUFA must make all efforts to ensure that the financial information we use is correct and complete. We need to know how this information is affecting all of our Members, especially the

not help. What would help is to allow staff to organize on campus with the same courtesy shown to faculty when we organized. Staff should be allowed to communicate through University e-mail and to meet on University property for this purpose, just as faculty was allowed to do. That would allow them to address their vulnerability on their own terms. It is important that all employee groups not simply accept the parameters constructed by our employer.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others have been recommending spending rather than cutting back as the right policy for the times. Deficit financing is another way to address the financial situation and is already happening in connection with capital

expenses, so there is nothing wrong in principle in applying this elsewhere at the University. Queen's has unusual assets, like the Castle, and maybe something creative could be done with it. Local faculty and unit budgets are not all being released to Members in a complete and transparent fashion, rendering informed discussion impossible.

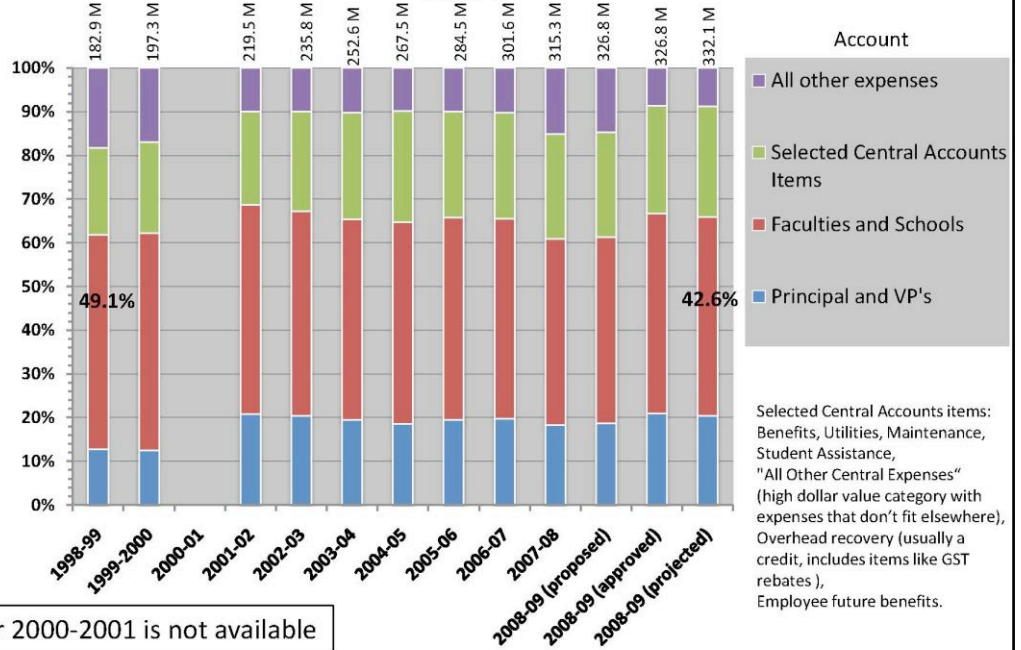
Many other types of savings can be made around the University, and there are some task-forces that have been established to seek places where savings can be made.

We must remember that we are not textile factory workers—that tenured faculty members have job security—although many in attendance do not enjoy that status. We should try to find solutions in a collaborative and cooperative way rather than being antagonistic to the Administration. “Them and us” will get us nowhere, and sarcasm is inappropriate. We must be open to achieving mutually agreed-upon targets.

Before we say that the Administration is not being completely open and giving us all the information we ask for, we must look at ourselves and remember that QUFA signed a collective agreement that neglected to grandparent the terms of employment of Continuing positions already at Queen's, and then later would not give out the actual numbers of the ratification vote.

It is a mistake to focus on salary cuts to the exclusion of all the other ways that costs could be reduced. While

Account Proportions Queen's Operating Expense Budget, 1998-99 to 2008-9



Slide 3: The proportion of the total Budget devoted to Faculties and Schools has been declining over the last decade. The academic year 2000-2001 was not posted by the University. (At the request of a Member at the meeting, a version of the slide that shows the dollar values has been included.)

some of us may have high salaries, healthy investments, and cash accounts, there might be many Members who do not have much disposable income because of high expenses, low income (one Member in the room made \$4,500 this year), being a single parent, and so on. It is presumptuous to make decisions that could put others in a precarious financial situation. It is also wrong to give up control over the uses to which any money the University would save through a salary cut or freeze might be put, as reallocation falls within management's power. If anyone really does want to give up a portion of their salary, then they should consider controlling how the money is used by giving it to a charity, as it is likely in more need than Queen's, or

by donating it directly to their unit so that the unit retains control over how the money is spent.

The letter of last Friday written by the two Board Members speaks of MPPs capping their increases at 1.5% this year, but it does not mention that those salaries had increased by 40% over the last two years.

We need to be concerned about the optics in this serious situation. We need a differentiated response for people in different situations. This University seems willing to cut staff positions and faculty budgets and other costs directly related to the academic mission, but it does not seem willing to cut senior administrative salaries or positions

Capital Projects partially funded from the Operating Budget

Capital Budget:

Queen's has embarked on a number of significant capital projects over the last few years. The table below shows the planned expenditures and the sources of funds for approved capital projects.

Approved Capital Projects in Process (\$000):

Projects in Process	Budget	Cash flow impact			Additional Funding		Operating Budget	Notes:
		Expenditures to Oct '08	Funding to date	Cash shortfall Oct. '08	External	Long-term Debt		
Richardson Hall - Renovations	12,250	8,540	7,000	(1,540)	-	-	5,250	1
New Electrical Substation	10,000	7,538	957	(6,581)	-	-	9,043	2
Tindall Field Underground Parking	34,700	26,941	1,000	(25,941)	-	33,700	-	3
Co-Generation Facility	25,000	24,064	10,028	(14,036)	-	-	14,972	2
University Ave	8,700	7,790	5,433	(2,357)	1,000	-	2,267	1
Queen's Centre Underground Parking	11,800*	-	-	-	-	11,800	-	3
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>102,450</b>	<b>74,873</b>	<b>24,418</b>	<b>(50,455)</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>45,500</b>	<b>31,532</b>	
Queen's Centre Phase 1	169,000	68,851*	6,974	(61,877)	161,026	107,000	107,000	4
QC- 2&3- balance of original budget	106,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<b>Total Queen's Centre</b>	<b>275,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>6,974</b>	<b>(61,877)</b>	<b>161,026</b>	<b>107,000</b>	<b>107,000</b>	
<b>Total Approved Projects in Process</b>	<b>377,450</b>	<b>74,873</b>	<b>31,392</b>	<b>(112,332)</b>	<b>162,026</b>	<b>152,500</b>	<b>138,532</b>	

\*Expenditures to Oct 08 for Queen's Centre Underground Parking are included in Queen's Centre Phase 1 Expenditures to Oct 08.

Notes on Funding Sources:

- 1 Deferred Maintenance Budget
- 2 Utilities Budget
- 3 Parking Revenue- Ancillary Operation
- 4 New in 2009-10- Debt Service

Note that no time line for charging these Capital Projects to the Operating Budget was given, so it is not possible to say what the impact will be by year.

Queen's is 12% lower per student than elsewhere. This is shameful. Already we cannot provide the quality of education we wish, and it will only get worse if we do not stand up against this erosion.

Many Queen's faculty are well paid. For some Members, losing the negotiated increase in salary would be preferable to losing positions, as the latter scenario would mean an increased workload for those remaining. IAR reviewers are shocked that some departments are even functioning, given the workloads of individual faculty members.

We should recommend to the University Administration that they bring these ideas and these sorts of arguments to the government when talking about the need for

Slide 4: The amount of money that will be taken from the Operating Budget for various Capital Projects over an unknown number of years.

that serve them. No Dean does his or her own photocopying, and the number of Deans and Associate Deans seems to keep increasing.

Let us also not lose sight of the fact that the University and QUFA are both parties to the collective agreement, and so far the University Administration has not approached QUFA about opening up the collective agreement. Negotiation involves at least two parties; we should not be negotiating against ourselves. We should be pragmatic, but we need open and honest engagement.

Discussion about Quality of Education

Faculty and not Administration are at the heart of a university. It is essential to work with the students and to let

them know that QUFA and its Members are taking a stand to improve education at Queen's. We need to help them understand the situation as fully as possible and to head off any attempts to pit them against us. They have parents who will also want to know, parents who may have influence at Queen's or politically, and who can present a different and more nuanced perspective to the media from that currently being presented.

It is clear that the universities are not high on the government's list of priorities right now and that we are not getting the information we need from the Province. The effects of even more cuts on our programs would be dire. Our class sizes keep increasing, faculty-to-student ratio is poor, and provincial funding to

increased spending on education.

Numbers make a difference. While QUFA can and should continue its work in trying to get the information we need, we should also ask questions of the Administration in groups and as individuals. We must request a forum where we can all speak about the issues worrying us. (QUFA asks that Members consider copying us on any missives to the Administration to keep us informed.)

Discussion about Heads' Concerns

It is necessary to prevent the Administration from forcing Heads into a "divide and conquer" situation. Heads have been told that they must make budget cuts in January and, practically speaking, this will mean either losing positions over the next

three years or, as suggested by at least one Dean, Members getting no increases in salary over the next three years. Even if these steps were to be taken, the numbers as presented in some areas clearly show that deficit financing will still be necessary at the end of three years. We need to hire an external auditor because some of the information received to date is highly questionable. The cuts will end up being made on the backs of those who are the most vulnerable, and of those who have no job security.

As they are very worried about the timelines for these cuts, Heads look to the Membership for support to tell the Administration that there must be a moratorium on cuts until a thoughtful recovery plan is put into place. From past experience, it is clear that anything cut now will not be recovered in the future. To imagine that such cuts can be responsibly made by January is ridiculous.

We are in a relatively privileged position in the world regarding job security and salary, but we should not cave just because we are. We need more information, and we need it urgently. It is incumbent upon us to learn, if we do not already know, what a union is about. The Executive should help us with direction and to be a collective, and we have to put QUFA in a strong position vis-à-vis the Administration to help with responsible negotiations.

#### **What the University Administration Says and Does**

Principal Williams said to the QUFA Council and Executive in September that things would be different this year, but in fact it seems like they are employing the same old administrative technique of “we’ll let you know what you need to know and when you need to know it.” The e-mail letter sent last Friday appeared to be from private individuals, but was from two Members of the Board of

Trustees and sent by the University Secretariat. Who authorized such a message to be sent by e-mail to the entire Queen’s community, including retirees? President Dacin has already asked for answers from the Secretariat.

QUFA must tell the Administration that the proposed pay freeze for the Principal, Deans, and Vice-Principals in the upcoming year is simply insufficient as an Administration-based contribution to this financial crisis.

#### **Wrap-Up**

There is a lot of opportunity for discussion around the financial issues. This discussion must not just be about salary cuts, as there are other possible solutions. After months of not being able to secure a meeting, President Dacin has a meeting with Principal Williams on Tuesday 16 December 2008. Whatever information QUFA ultimately gets will be shared amongst the Membership.

We must work together as one voice. A lot of pressure has been put on us, and now we must press back. Any solutions that may be implemented will have to be creative rather than crude and blunt.

It seems a little too coincidental that the salary increase negotiated in the last round of bargaining matches almost exactly the money we have been told needs to be recouped at the departmental level.

We are in the education business. We can and should ask the questions that will allow us to have a professional and informed discourse with all in the Queen’s community.

#### **Motion**

The following motion was moved and seconded from the floor:

In light of the current financial crisis, QUFA and its Membership demand the following steps of the University Administration:

- First, that there be a moratorium on cuts to all academic units and programs (including the Library) at Queen’s until such time as there is a recovery plan in place, and that the University Administration employ, if necessary, deficit financing to accomplish this;
- Second, that there be, as soon as possible, a general meeting where the University Administration has and makes available critical financial information, and that this information be made available to the entire Queen’s community (students, staff, and faculty) at least a week prior to that meeting so that we can prepare our questions in advance of the meeting;
- Third, that the University hire an external and independent auditor, who is acceptable to both QUFA and the University Administration, and that the report(s) of the auditor be sent to both QUFA and the University Administration;
- Fourth, that the students, staff, and faculty be involved in the creation of a plan for financial recovery, as they will all be affected by the results of this situation.

With approximately 170 people in the room, the vote was carried by the room with five opposed and two abstentions.

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## WORTH REPEATING

## The Baby at the Union Meeting

By Karen Dubinsky  
Department of History



*Karen Dubinsky of the History Department writes a blog for Academic Matters called "The Cost of*

*Living: The Work and Family of a Mid-Career Academic."* One of her most recent entries (dated 17 December 2008) deals with the budget discussion at QUFA's Fall General Meeting. We would like to thank Professor Dubinsky for allowing us to reprint it in this special issue of QUFA Voices.

Our faculty association AGM was unusually packed this week. As one of my colleagues who joined me perching on the stairs said, "money talks." Nothing like a global financial collapse, a twenty percent budget cut, and rumours of a request for a wage rollback to get the troops out. That our Principal sent an e-mail announcing that the senior Administration was agreeing to a wage freeze approximately 50 minutes before our Union meeting may have contributed to the crowd.

The meeting was, also surprisingly, co-operative, spirited, and community-minded. It's tempting to use the word "solidarity," though that might be in some quarters overly scary and thus premature. I think most of us agree that we are on the verge of a massive collapse of all that we hold dear about teaching (i.e., teaching = talking to students, preferably in person, occasionally one on one). But despite this, or maybe because of it, I sensed an unfamiliar spirit of connectedness and common purpose.

Another unfamiliar sight was an eight-

month-old baby. Two colleagues, both on parental leave, brought their new son with them. He stole the show, as babies do: crying, for example, when a particularly grim financial forecast was discussed. "I feel the same way," quipped the union president. It was fun to watch the mother, Margaret, rise to add her voice to the debate, baby in hand. "Juggling" work and domestic life, at that moment, moved beyond metaphor.

I'm especially fond of this particular baby and his happy parents. But as a historian who studies the iconography and politics of childhood, I was reminded that the image of the mother clutching a baby, making an imploring political speech, has a long lineage. One of my favourites of this genre is Pelizza da Volpedo's "The Fourth Estate," which famously graces the opening credits of Bertolucci's classic film *1900*. Babies move people, imploring mothers move people; put the two together and the symbolic freight is almost unmatchable.



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### "The Fourth Estate" by Pelizza da Volpedo.

So the baby at the union meeting—like the baby in de Volpedo's painting—immediately makes the abstract concrete. The suffering of Italian peasants is rendered more meaningful through the figure of the child, and so too their resolution to fight for change is heightened by the symbol of the mother, striding forward with the multitude. My union brothers

and sisters were hardly speaking about their starving children. But when my colleague Margaret rose to speak about the deplorable effects of budget cuts on the education we can provide for our students, the presence of the baby in her arms could not help but add symbolic force to those of us who cling to the notion that public education is a right.

Within all this imagery there is, however, another story. The baby at the union meeting nourished me, and I think many others, because academics don't often see each others as wholly human. Stereotypes about "pointy heads" are usually true; too many of us live in our heads or our books. There are plenty of reasons for this, and I cherish my autonomy and ability to live like a hermit when I need to. But the very conditions that brought so many people out on a cold rainy December day also helped to highlight why the baby at the union meeting (or peasant uprising, for that matter) strikes such a resonant chord. We need more time to nurture the relationships that "shelter the core," as my favourite poet, Cuba's Carlos Varela, puts it. In these chaotic times, fighting to preserve our ability to make meaningful relationships—with our students and with each other—whatever form that takes, is all we've got.



You can read Karen Dubinsky's blog at <http://www.academicmatters.ca/bloggers.costofliving.gk>.

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