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Provincial Election Campaign 2018

Make It Fair

Canada's Finance Minister, the Honourable Bill Morneau, made headlines in 2016 when he asserted that Canadian workers will simply have to get used to precarious work, or the "job churn" as he called it. His comments sparked significant public debate on the state of precarious work in Canada, and whether increasing levels of precarious work are an inevitable reality.

Research on precarious work consistently highlights the complexity of defining the concept of "precarious"; therefore, depending on the breadth of the definition, estimates of the number of Canadians in precarious work situations vary. However, there is a consensus that precarious working conditions are defined by such factors as low wages; no benefits or minimal benefits; and/or involuntary part-time work, contract or seasonal work when the employee wishes to work full-time.

A 2018 report by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada entitled "Navigating Precarious Employment in Canada: Who Is Really at Risk?" suggests that while the aggregate share of part-time employment has not varied widely in Canada since the 1990s, there have been significant increases in a few key sectors: information, culture and recreation services; accommodation and food services; **and educational services.**

To say that this is ironic would be an understatement. How is it that the institutions dedicated to improving opportunities for our youth are simultaneously providing fewer and fewer fair opportunities for their own employees, our country's educators?

Precarious working conditions in our public universities are, sadly, not exempt from this trend. As a result of the chronic underfunding of our public universities since the 1980s, an increasing number of professors and librarians are trapped in contract and part-time work for the duration of their career, and a disproportionate number of these are women and members of ethno-minority groups. They are denied job security, and most must reapply for their jobs each semester. They are denied the opportunity to participate in research and service which, in addition to teaching, are the core components of academic work. Many earn less than a living wage, and all are paid less than their full-time colleagues doing the same work.

This reality has serious implications not only for our contract academic staff, but also for students, full-time academic staff, and the integrity of our universities. Contract academic staff often lack the most basic working conditions such as office space in which to meet with students. They may only receive their course contracts a few days before the beginning of the semester, leaving them little time to prepare courses. Most find it very challenging to carry out research while teaching a high number of courses, especially when they find themselves having to create and teach new courses every year as previously taught courses can be cancelled, sometimes at the very last

minute. They are not paid to do service work such as student advising or serving on student Honours committees; therefore, a greater proportion of this work falls onto the shoulders of full-time faculty. These consequences of precarious work in universities weaken the overall quality of our post-secondary institutions.

The Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations advocates the rights of our contract academic staff members to fair opportunities, security and respect in the workplace. Educational institutions must lead the way and serve as examples when it comes to fair working conditions, for the health of our employees, the strength of our communities, and the quality of the opportunities that they will be able to provide to future generations.