



CUPE 1858 Newsletter

Loss of Meaningful Work

Several years ago, at what was then Malaspina College, a new carpenter was hired as part of the Facilities team. He was a skilled carpenter who was attracted to the stability of the job as well as the prospect of medical coverage and a pension.

As the years went on, the carpenter started to see his work change, where once he was asked to construct a new boardroom and hand carve beautiful arbutus trees as part of the logo that we used then, he now spent a lot of his time installing keyboard trays and repairing store bought bookcases. He started to notice that much of the more meaningful and creative work was being contracted out to carpenters in the area. The justification he was given for this was that it was cheaper to have an outside carpenter do the work. When his employer came to him with a job and asked him to estimate the time the job would take him (so they could decide if they were going to get a contractor instead) he would shave off as much time in the estimate as he reasonably could, in hopes that he would get to do the job himself. More often than not, the job would still get contracted out. Sometimes when the employer was considering a large job they would ask the carpenter for his advice...that advice was often ignored which resulted in the carpenter having to fix the contractors work weeks or months later.

The years started to pile up and as he watched more and more contract carpenters build on campus and tried to talk to his supervisors about how this made him feel, he became more and more disenfranchised. When we became a university, the lovely wooden Malaspina signs were ripped down and replaced by shiny new plastic Vancouver Island University signs....and the years piled up.

As the carpenter approaches retirement, he looks around the campus for things that he can point to

that prove that he was here and that he made a contribution and he sees precious little that he can lay claim to, precious little to show for 20 years of work at VIU.

By Art Kingsnorth



Art wrote the article above before he passed away in 2016. We are honored to send it out in his memory. The work that is done by CUPE members at VIU varies widely....from graphic designers to office staff to skilled trades workers. Art understood that what most of us share is how we want to feel about our work. All workers want their work to be meaningful and to have their thoughts and ideas valued by their employer.

As we move forward in trying to rebuild a positive labour climate at VIU, we must remain committed to presenting a powerful, unified voice to the employer and demanding the respect that all workers deserve.