

Please see below the response of CUPE3902 members to the recent statements circulated by the Vice-President regarding collective negotiations:

HR #30, 2011-12
February 1, 2012
To: PDAD&C
Professional and Managerial Staff
From: Angela Hildyard
Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity

A Progressive and Fair Offer to A Highly Valued Group of Employees and Students

At the end of last week, with the assistance of one of the Ministry of Labour's most experienced conciliation/mediation officers, the University tabled an offer which the Union negotiating committee agreed to recommend for ratification. **The offer addressed every one of the Union's key issues and placed significant new financial resources on the table.**

>Rather than seriously addressing our three key issues (the broken funding package, the problems of unfunded senior students, and the sizes of tutorials and labs), the Administration has simply proposed creating two working groups. CUPE 3902 will not be allowed to co-chair these working groups. These working groups are only to discuss issues, and they will make only non-binding recommendations.

I and my colleagues are therefore extremely disappointed that the 250 or so members who attended the CUPE 3902 Unit 1 membership meeting on Monday on the St. George campus decided that the offer should not go to all employees in the CUPE 3902 Unit 1 bargaining unit for a ratification vote.

>In November, our union held a member-wide referendum on our bargaining proposals, with 91% voting in favour of a strike should the bargaining team not be able to resolve our key issues in a concrete way.

>Unlike the decision-making bodies at the University of Toronto, our meetings are open to all members and our membership makes every effort to ensure an opportunity for full and equitable participation for all. The members of CUPE 3902 do not welcome the University of Toronto administration's intrusion into our democratic process.

>On Monday January 30th, our union held a well-advertised and open meeting. Two weeks before the meeting, notice was given to all members that they would possibly be voting on a tentative agreement. Nearly 300 members attended, representing every division on campus. At this meeting, not one member spoke in favour of the Administration's last offer. The line-up to speak against the offer was so long that not all speakers could be accommodated. After a detailed discussion, fully 96% of members voted that there was no point in further considering the Administration's last offer.

>Our longstanding bylaws—which the Administration very well understands—require a two-step ratification process for any tentative agreement: 1) members at a members' meeting must decide whether the agreement merits a full ratification vote (which requires no small effort or expense for the Union to organize); and 2) a full ratification vote must be held.

Instead, those present at the meeting directed the Union to seek a No Board report from the Ministry of Labour, which will start the clock ticking towards a legal strike date. **At this time, there is no confirmation from the Ministry as to what that strike date will be.**

I think it is important that members of our community are made aware of the University's offer and I will focus on those areas which I understand to be of the greatest importance to CUPE members.

> The Administration has misunderstood our priorities. Our three key issues are: defending the funding package, supporting unfunded senior students, and improving tutorials and labs (many of which are much too big and lack sufficient TA support).

Salaries and Benefits

The University has offered an increase to the hourly rates (from the current \$39.92 per hour, to \$42.05 per hour by May 1, 2013) that is comparable to the increases we have negotiated with each of our unions at U of T – including USW and other CUPE locals.

> Since the first day of bargaining, we have only ever proposed that our wages be maintained against inflation. The Administration's offer might look like a wage increase. But moving from \$39.92 to \$42.05 per hour represents an average annual increase of 1.8%, while the current inflation rate for Toronto is at 2.8%. Thus, the Administration's offer is better thought of as a wage decrease in real dollar terms.

> Moreover, incoming cohorts will not see any increase in total income since, for them, wage increases are offset by a corresponding decrease in the fellowship portion of the funding package (i.e. they would still only get \$15,000 per year).

In addition, we have offered to add significantly to the Union's Financial Assistance Fund (it will reach \$852,000 by 2013) and the Health Care Fund, increasing it to \$2.8m.

> Our union's Financial Assistance Fund provides money for a host of different benefit funds, such as childcare, students in professional master programs, some unfunded cohorts, etc. The Administration's proposed increase to the FAF is \$100,000 per year, for a total of \$300,000. Meeting the needs of our childcare fund alone, which is just one benefit covered through the Financial Assistance Fund, would take more money than that.

> Currently, members receive \$800 per year to help cover all of their health and dental needs. Due to the growth in our membership and the rising costs associated with medical inflation, we project that the Health Care Fund needs to increase to \$3.0m just so that our members can continue to receive their \$800. The Administration is offering \$2.8m.

Tutorials

The University believes that tutorials are a key component of the undergraduate student experience and that teaching in tutorials should be based on sound pedagogy and best practice. In contrast to our CUPE colleagues, however, we do not accept that the focus of our attention should be simply on the size of the tutorial group. Within U of T, the term "tutorial" includes a vast range of activities: small group discussion and interaction, large group demonstrations, review of course materials, re-clarification of concepts and

difficult questions, and so on.

>While there are many activities that take place during tutorials and labs, what is common to all tutorials and labs is that their increasing size compromises students' quality of education and our working conditions. In 2006, 40% of tutorials had 20 students or fewer, while only 23% do today. Almost 25% of tutorials have 50 students, 42% of tutorials have more than 35 students, and 100 tutorials have over 100 students.

Each of these activities requires specialized teaching skills, different models of interacting with students, and varying preparation. We are committed to ensuring that TAs have the appropriate skills and time to deliver high quality teaching in the full range of activities in which they are engaged.

Therefore, the University's proposal is to establish a Working Group that will develop a categorization scheme that captures the range of activities that fall under the heading of "tutorial". We have further proposed that for each of those categories, the Working Group will recommend best practice based on current research, some sense of the time that a TA will need to deliver the various educational components, and recommendations on training for TAs – both required training (which will be built into TA contracts) and optional training.

The University thinks this is a more appropriate way to address a complex set of inter-relating issues than a formulaic approach based simply on numbers.

> There has already been a Provostial Working Group on tutorials (formed after the last round of bargaining). That working group failed to address many of the underlying problems associated with the sizes of tutorials and labs. Its recommendations were insufficient, and they were never implemented anyway. It's not clear why the exercise should be repeated. The new proposed working group will not consider size as even one relevant factor in improving tutorials and labs.

Graduate Student Financial Support

Financial support for graduate students comes from a variety of internal and external sources.

Approximately 50% of graduate students receive some form of support through work as a TA – and the University has agreed that effective 2013, only 205 hours of TA work will be counted towards the funding packages for students in the funded cohort. This is a reduction from the current level of 210 and represents a real gain to many TAs.

>In our view, 5 hours does not represent a significant gain to any of our members.

CUPE however, wishes to negotiate other aspects of financial support, including the minimum level of the funding provided to students in the funded cohort, and the elimination of work as a Research Assistant (which is covered under the USW collective agreement) from the funding packages. **CUPE represents approximately half of our graduate students in their Teaching Assistant employment relationship with the University. CUPE does not represent all graduate students and the broad range of interests that they have as they pursue their graduate studies.**

> Although not all graduate students are members of CUPE3902, the overwhelming majority of CUPE3902 members are graduate students. If our collective bargaining works towards the improvement of the lives of graduate students who are not CUPE3902 members, we see this as only a positive, not a negative. The GSU Council, which does represent all graduate students, has formally endorsed CUPE 3902's bargaining proposals.

The issue of funding packages is a matter that affects the graduate student population at large and the

University as a whole. Therefore the University has proposed a Committee on Graduate Student funding that will include representatives of the GSU (the Graduate Student Union) as well as CUPE, to discuss broad issues related to the financial support of graduate students. Such issues could include sources of funding, advocacy for federal and provincial graduate student support, the needs of international students and advancement (fundraising) strategies in support of graduate students.

>Our bargaining team offered a number of concrete proposals to address the problems that the Administration themselves created by eliminating the Doctoral Completion Grant and by introducing non-dissertation-related taxable RAs as part of the funding package. A working group does not address these problems in any concrete way, and could allow things to continue deteriorating over the course of our new Collective Agreement.

>In our view, the problems do not need to be investigated by a working group that meets “up to three times.” We have been discussing these problems with the Administration during the past eight months of negotiations. They are well understood.

The University has already committed significant resources to be used as matching funds for advancement strategies, including enhancing the funds for Doctoral completion awards/grants. These rare matching funds have been eagerly leveraged by our departments, with some of our humanities departments are showing the earliest results. One important goal of the Boundless Campaign is that there will be \$16 Million in new endowments to support our Ph.D. students.

>The Doctoral Completion Grant was unilaterally eliminated by the Provost. The problems with the new competitive Doctoral Completion Award have already been thoroughly stated (for more information see: http://cupe3902.org/dcg_dca_info). It is rather shocking that, as a “highly valued group of employees and students”, we will be receiving only \$16 Million (0.8%) of the stated goal of \$2 Billion for the Boundless Campaign.

Senior Students

The Current collective agreement provides up to four guaranteed TA appointments to CUPE members. The Union has expressed concern, however, about those graduate students who continue with their research work beyond these four years. The University has agreed to extend the guarantee by a half appointment in 2012 and a full appointment in 2013. This means that in September 2013, CUPE members will be eligible to receive up to five guaranteed appointments.

>The average time to completion of a PhD is about six years, with many graduate students receiving only four years of funding. Given the elimination of the Doctoral Completion Grant, and the general lack of financial support to senior students both in PhD and Master’s programs, a half additional appointment in 2012 and a full additional appointment in 2013 (for PhD students only) are welcome, but insufficient. For some members, this could mean as little as 25 hours of work in their fifth year (and nothing in their sixth year).

Next Steps

The University bargaining team worked hard to develop a comprehensive and responsive offer for settlement. I worked extensively with a number of Deans and with the Provost and the President to make sure I left no stone unturned in an effort to address each of the Union’s key issues. This is a very good offer and one that allows for meaningful future dialogue on issues that are of importance to TAs. It is certainly an offer that warranted full consideration by all employees in the bargaining unit.

Notwithstanding this, since the mediator has indicated that he will be inviting the University and the Union back to the table, we have indicated our willingness to accept that invitation.

> Our bargaining team continues to work hard to find creative solutions to the problems facing our members and the students they teach. The bargaining team has contacted the conciliator and is eager to reengage the administration in negotiations so that they can bring back a serious collective agreement to our membership for ratification.