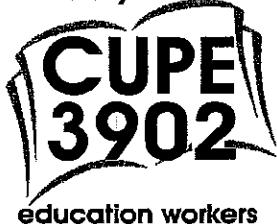


university of toronto



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May 4, 2009

Executive Committee

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Robert Ramsay

Vice-Chair:
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Secretary-Treasurer:
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Unit 3 Representative:
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External Representative:
Judy Pocock

Liaison Officer:
Vanessa Parlette

Staff Representatives

Mikael Antony Swayze

Chantal Sundaram

Dr. Ilene Busch-Vishniac
Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
1280 Main Street West
University Hall, Room 201
Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4L8

RE: Collective Bargaining with CUPE 3906 (Post-docs)

Dear Professor Busch-Vishniac,

As the trade union representing nearly 6,000 contract faculty and teaching assistants at the University of Toronto we are gravely concerned with your approach to bargaining a new contract for your post-doctoral fellows.

Postdoctoral fellows are the lifeblood of research in the modern university. In fact, without the skills, experience and sheer hard work of post-docs most university labs would be significantly less productive. Most would almost cease operations.

Yet, post-docs earn a pittance. For highly skilled professionals with the highest academic degree, they earn close to minimum wage. This should be unacceptable to the University and its administration. However, your approach to bargaining says otherwise. We all know the parlous state of finances at the current time. Nonetheless, the university sector has been settling for a minimum 3% increase throughout the Fall and Winter of 2008-9. Our 4,500 TAs at UofT recently signed a collective agreement in February increasing wages 3.5% in the first year alone.

Your post-docs have acknowledged that "times are tough" by proposing increases less than industry standard. The appropriate response would be to welcome this initiative and come to a reasonable agreement. I am sure that you can appreciate that times are even tougher when you are earning only \$25,000/year. Moreover, there are no public sector contracts that contain multi-year wage freezes such as you are proposing for your post-docs. Given the current and expected inflation over the next few years, this represents a significant rollback in post-doc real earnings over the next 3 years.

We also fail to understand your reluctance to extend regular full-time benefits to your post-docs. Although I am not intimately aware of the situation at McMaster, I would be surprised if there was any other category of full-time workers deprived of the basic benefits associated with working full-time for a large public sector employer.

The members of CUPE 3906 will have the full support of this Local and its membership if this matter becomes a labour dispute. In addition, as affiliates of the Canadian

Association of University Teachers, we will be calling on other faculty associations in CAUT to take a similar stand. Academics deserve some basic rights and remuneration from the institutions for which they work. Postdoctoral fellows are academics with the same right to dignity at work as other academics. They should not be toiling at minimum wage or denied access to employer benefits or refused protection for their intellectual property. This is wrong and McMaster will be held to account in the broader academic community if it continues such a punitive course of action.

Of course, there is still time to avoid a conflict and create a solution. We would urge you to take this opportunity to seriously engage with CUPE 3906 in bargaining a collective agreement in decency and honour.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Ramsay', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Ramsay
Chair, CUPE 3902

cc: Dr. Allison Sekular, Dean of Graduate Studies
Ms. Lisa Newton, Legal Employee and Labour Relations
Ms. Mary Ellen Campbell, President, CUPE Local 3906
Mr. Jesse Payne, Staff Representative, CUPE Local 3906
Mr. Mikael Swayze, Staff Representative, CUPE Local 3902
Dr. James Turk, Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers