



Representing Contract Faculty, Teaching Assistants, Graduate Assistants,
and Part-Time Librarians and Archivists @York University, Toronto

Canadian Union of Public Employees/Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique local/section locale 3903

May 24, 2019

Gizem Çakmak
Recording Secretary/Research Officer
CUPE Local 3903

Dear members of the National Executive Board,

We appreciate that you are acknowledging the inconvenience that this scheduling would cause Jewish members of CUPE. That being said, we would like to assert that this is more than a mere inconvenience, as scheduling the convention during a major holiday leads to the exclusion of many Jewish members.

You had indicated that upon receiving our letter, you have reviewed all signed contracts for conventions and conferences to ensure they do not conflict with any religious holidays. In many institutions across Canada, these procedures are standard practice in order to respect the equity rights of their members by ensuring religious accommodation. Why has this not been the standard practice for CUPE, as a union that takes pride in its history of fighting for equality and justice?

We are happy to see that the CUPE leadership is bringing a motion to the National Executive Board to require that we move convention to a different city if the venue in the scheduled city cannot accommodate our national convention in a week without any religious holidays. However, while this is a step forward, it does not undo the harm that will be done to the many Jewish members of CUPE who will not be able to participate in the business of their union. Again, we wonder why this flexibility in policy in order to accommodate members had not already been put in place.

Lastly, we are disappointed to hear that CUPE leadership has known that the 2019 Convention conflicts with Yom Kippur for more than 5 years; yet, no apology, explanation or acknowledgement of this has been given to the membership. Mistakes happen, but the National Executive Board needs to take responsibility. We as the CUPE 3903 Executive Committee demand that CUPE National Executive Board immediately issue an explanation and apology for this grave violation of the religious needs of so many members. We request that this apology and explanation is sent to all locals using regular mail and online communication channels.

In solidarity,

Gizem Çakmak