

An FAQ for Members
of CUPE 3903
April 2, 2012

WHAT'S ALL THIS TALK OF A STRIKE?

CUPE 3903 has been bargaining with the 'Faculty Relations' department of YorkU since November. We're asking that the Employer address our concerns around **the job security of contract faculty, income disparity** between PhD and Masters students, **inequitable hiring practices** for both contract faculty and graduate students, and **tuition costs for graduate students** who have finished all their course work and examinations. The Employer had little of substance to say about these issues – if they addressed them at all – for the first four months of negotiations.

Only after the Local received a strike mandate on March 16 did the Employer begin to address some of these concerns. What they have come to the table with, however, still doesn't substantially address the concerns we've brought to them.

In response, 3903 has indicated (in accordance with all the legal frameworks that surround negotiations) that the deadline for reaching a deal is **April 12, 2012**. At this point 3903 will have a **General Membership Meeting** (see time/location below), which is open to every 3903 Member, **to discuss whatever offer the Employer has put on the table**. It's at this meeting that the Union will discuss whether this offer should be put forward to the entire membership for ratification. It's also possible that the Employer could decide to (again, legally) 'lock out' the Union and prevent us from working, which they effectively did in 2008 by cancelling classes and closing the University.

What does 'being on strike' actually mean in the context of a university? We're not an industrial union! Being on strike means withdrawing all the work you do for the University for pay that is not directly related to your own research as a graduate student. This includes Teaching Assistantships, Graduate Assistantships, and some Research Assistantships. For Contract Faculty, being on strike means withdrawing any work you do at York that is done under contract through 3903. It also means walking a picket line at the University to talk to community members and students in order to explain what we're doing and to show the administration that you're serious about improving your working conditions and students' learning conditions.

Strikes hurt students – undergraduate and graduate alike. So, why go on strike? Many of the things that graduate students benefit from at York – like six years of funding for PhD students, tuition indexation for all grad students, summer minimum funding – were the product of work done by 3903 in past bargaining rounds. Things that benefit undergrads – like caps on tutorial sizes (which UofT currently doesn't have) – were also the product of the work of 3903. *Going on strike is a last resort*, turned to only if the administration of YorkU won't adequately respond to our concerns. Whenever we can, we push to get improvements to the working and learning conditions at the University without actually going out on strike.

If a strike happens (and it is an 'if') Senate policy 008 protects students who refuse to cross picket lines, stating that they *'are entitled to immunity from penalty, to reasonable alternative access*



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to materials covered in their absence, to reasonable extensions of deadlines and to such other remedy as Senate deems necessary and consistent with the principle of academic integrity.' If York decides to cancel classes, they will be responsible for making sure that lectures are made up when classes resume to ensure the semester isn't lost. If they do not cancel classes, and the University stays open, they have a responsibility to accommodate students who choose to respect our picket lines.

For students who depend on OSAP, YorkU also makes allowances for labour disruptions. After the 2000-2001 strike, York expanded its undergraduate bursary and pushed back the deadline to cover the costs of a school year that was ten months long rather than eight.

If you or your students are applying to grad schools or other programs, schools tend to take into account labour disruptions and will likely grant extensions to those who might be affected. The 3903 Executive will be more than willing to provide written confirmation of any labour disruption to all those who may require written documentation to this effect.

If there's a strike...

...should I pay my summer tuition? The Local is encouraging Members to withhold their tuition money until after our new Collective Agreement has been signed. This is because graduate tuition is a significant source of income for the University in the summer – it is, in fact, a larger proportion of their income in the summer than at any other time of the year. If we want to disrupt the Employer's capacity to operate in the summer we need to withhold this capital. The Local recommends registering for classes to avoid the \$200 late registration fee, but holding on to your tuition dollars. That said, members should be aware that there is a 1% interest rate on late tuition.

...what happens to my external scholarships? According to FGS, if you are registered in the summer semester, your external scholarship will not be affected.

...can I come on campus to do my lab research? Yes. If you have ongoing lab work that needs to be taken care of daily you should most certainly attend to this work. Keep in mind, however, that some of your lab work might be CUPE work and should be withdrawn in the context of a strike. If, for instance, you do work for your supervisor that doesn't contribute to the completion of your own thesis work, it's covered by the Collective Agreement and you should make arrangements with your supervisor to hold off on this work until any labour action is resolved. If not doing this work will jeopardize the project as a whole, then the Local recommends doing the minimum required to maintain the project's integrity.

...should I use the library? In the event of a strike, the Local would encourage members to use University facilities as little as possible. If members absolutely must access the library, however, they should feel free to do so, as refusing to use the library has no impact on York's finances.

...will exams be cancelled? As mentioned above, under provision 008 the York Senate has an obligation to accommodate students in the event of a strike or lockout. If the University remains open, then it will be up to York whether or not the exam period continues. If the exam period does not continue, and exams are cancelled, York has an obligation to ensure that accommodations are made for our students.



...will there be a hardship fund? At our Annual General Membership meeting (March 29) a hardship fund of \$37,500 (based on estimated solidarity donations from other organizations) was proposed as part of a strike budget. This fund would be available to members in the event that the strike lasts more than one month. Eligibility requirements and application and adjudication processes are to be determined and will be announced as soon as possible if strike action is taken.

...who is eligible to receive strike pay? Only members who are on York's payroll as of the start of the strike are eligible to receive strike pay. In other words, members who have contracts that started in September and end in April would be eligible for strike pay as would members who have contracts that started in January and end in April.

...how much is strike pay? How many hours must I perform strike duties in order to receive strike pay? Strike pay for all members is \$200 per week (\$800 per month). There are typically two shifts per day of four hours each. Members must engage in strike duties for 20 hours per week in order to receive strike pay. In the event that members cannot do 20 hours in a given week (for example, because of teaching commitments at another university), you must make arrangements with the Strike Coordinator in charge of strike pay forms and your strike pay will be pro-rated.

...what strike duties can I perform to receive strike pay? Generally, members must picket in order to receive strike pay. If this is impossible due to mobility or other documented health issues, alternative duty will be arranged. According to CUPE National policy, members cannot receive strike pay for attending meetings.

...what about my health benefits? The Local is attempting to negotiate a premium amount with the Employer that CUPE National will pay using the National Strike Fund to ensure that our Sun Life Coverage continues. If the Employer does not agree to this, CUPE National will use the National Strike Fund to provide interim benefits coverage for us. Since in either case the National Strike Fund will be used to pay for health benefits, members must perform strike duty in order for your benefits to continue.

...what about my Employment Insurance? Those members who are eligible generally will not be able to receive EI if they are directly participating in a strike/lockout. There may be exceptions to this, however; when the Local contacted Service Canada on this issue we were told that "all claims for EI must be assessed on a case-by-case basis." The Local therefore encourages eligible members to apply for EI. If you are rejected, you can appeal the decision with Service Canada.

For **more information on bargaining** including all bargaining updates since December, meeting times/locations, and information for undergraduates, please **visit our bargaining webpage**: <http://3903.cupe.ca/bargaininghome>

And don't forget the membership meeting on Thursday, April 12

- 11 am-2pm (although it may be extended should the membership choose to do so)
- In Curtis Lecture Hall I or L... (a note will be on the door to let you know which one; we've booked both should we need the additional meeting space)

