

Local Defense & Strike Fund Special Levy

At the Special General Membership Meeting on Oct 4th, the Executive was directed by members in attendance to propose to the membership that we institute a 1.5% special levy to help rebuild the local's Defense & Strike Fund. The meeting to discuss and vote on this is on Oct 26th, 2011 at 3.30 (location TBD).

Feel you have some misinformation? General confusion? These FAQs have background info that informs you of why this matters. But don't stop there if you need more info: contact your department's Steward or talk to an Executive member (go to 3903.cupe.ca and click "Your Executive" for emails).

FAQ

★What are we bargaining for?

Your rights as workers are enshrined in a Collective Agreement (CA) negotiated between CUPE 3903 and York University. CAs have an expiration date, so they are renegotiated every few years. Among graduate student and contract faculty workers, our **Collective Agreements** (there's one per unit) are **among the strongest in Canada**. 3903 has existed, first protecting Unit 1s (full-time students with teaching duties), since 1975. This means your

What is a local? We are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (representing workers across Canada). 3903 is our designation as a unit (local) within the national organization.

protections (from unjust discipline, overwork, increased tuition, etc.) and **benefits** (access to funds for conference travel or research

costs, vision care, dental, sick leave, etc.), and your decent **wages** are result of a long history of negotiating for them! (*More information on our history as a local is online at 3903.cupe.ca/about-cupe-3903*). **Your access to these benefits must be protected.** This happens through bargaining not only to keep these benefits but also to address your other workplace needs.

This round, we have identified nine priority areas needing protection and improvement: income security, benefits, funds/leaves, tuition, job security, Unit 3 parity, employment equity, workload /class size, + facilities/space.

★What is a Local Defense & Strike Fund?

Collective Agreements are protected by members like you. Employers clawback what past improvements they've given and need pushing so they'll address your needs. In any bargaining round, **the Employer needs incentive to bargain fairly** and in a timely manner with the Bargaining Team.

This leverage is created in multiple, interlocking ways. It is contingent on **membership mobilization and involvement** as well as on being able to **convince the Employer there is a credible threat that if they attempt to force concessions** on us a labour disruption is possible. One of the key ways the local demonstrates this is by having money in the Local Defense & Strike Fund. This money is used *only* in the case of a strike (when workers walk off the job) or lockout (when the Employer withholds work and denies employees access to the workplace) in order to help ensure that members can be financially supported while not receiving pay and to support the local's ability to continue to function during such a disruption. Locals generally provide members strike pay for the first 10 working days of a lockout or strike (then CUPE National takes over payment) and must also pay for office space, meeting space, and safety equipment for the duration of any labour disruption. In order to do this, 3903 requires a minimum of \$200,000 to \$400,000 in the fund.

★ What is a special levy?

A levy refers to a specific amount of money that comes off of every member's monthly pay for a limited amount of time. **Special levies are temporary** and the money must be directed toward a specific cause. At the Oct 4th Special General Membership Meeting on bargaining, members voted to direct the Executive to recommend implementing a 1.5% levy (resulting in our having approximately \$261,000 in the Defense Fund by January and \$348,000 by February). This levy would be in place until a settlement between CUPE 3903 and York University is reached or until we are on strike / locked out, whichever comes first.

Monthly deductions from our gross pay would look like this: if your wage is \$500, the levy is \$8 ... if \$750 then \$11... if \$1000 then \$15 ... \$1,250 then \$19... if \$1,500 then \$23 ... \$1,750 then \$26... if \$2,000 then \$30

A monthly 1.5% levy is a potentially significant amount of money deducted, but **small in comparison** to the \$7000-\$8000 of health benefits, the thousands of dollars worth of funds and leaves, job security provisions, tuition protections, and minimum guaranteed funding that members have access to as a result of our Collective Agreements.

The Employer needs to know our commitment to protecting what we have. A levy to rebuild the Local Defense & Strike Fund is one of our strongest means of demonstrating this commitment to them.

★What is the process for putting a levy in place?

In order to implement a special levy, the Executive must call a meeting with proper notice (according the CUPE National Constitution, 7 days). At this meeting, the Executive will put forward a motion to implement a 1.5% levy in order to rebuild the Local Defense & Strike Fund. Members in attendance debate, discuss, and we all vote on the motion. If the motion passes, the Executive will ask for CUPE National's approval and upon

getting this approval, will inform the Employer that the levy should be deducted starting with our November pay. Meetings follow a process of who talks when, of how to ask for clarification, etc (because we've got limited time and many members with input to offer). You may want to review these rules (go to 3903.cupe.ca, click on "Useful documents", look for "3903's rules of order").

★Does approving this levy mean we that are going to go on strike?

Absolutely not. By your approving the levy and rebuilding the Local Defense & Strike Fund we are communicating to the Employer that we take bargaining seriously and are committed to negotiating a fair Collective Agreement. It demonstrates commitment to protecting your benefits, funds, seniority system, job security provisions, tuition protections, overwork provisions, and minimum funding packages. Voting yes gives 3903's Bargaining Team leverage at the table and gives the Employer the incentive to bargain with us in earnest. It communicates to the Employer that the problems members continue to face (such as your not being paid in a timely manner, your receiving notice of our work assignments late, or your facing harassment and discrimination in our workplace) need to be taken seriously. Without the credible threat of a strike and without the ability to support members in case of a lockout, there is little to discourage the Employer from trying to force us to accept concessions. Sometimes – even in a lousy economic climate that extends beyond us – we

have to remind Employers that too much labour is given for too little.

Our best chance of preventing a strike or a lockout and reaching a fair settlement is to demonstrate to the

Employer that we will be prepared if they attempt to force either upon us.

The best way to avert a lockout or a strike is to be prepared for one. The Local Defense & Strike Fund is a crucial part of this preparation.

