



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Local 901

PSAC Local 901 - Unit 1 Bargaining Communique #3

Subject: Employer Refuses to Engage in Financial Remedies

The Bargaining Team returned to the table on January 13 and 15 for the first round of negotiations of 2025. Prior to meeting with us, the Employer's representatives promised to respond to all outstanding proposals, and the Bargaining Team looked forward to a fulsome package at the table. However, despite having weeks to prepare, the Employer's representatives returned to the table with only a partial response and stated, "if it's not there, it's a no." The Employer's lack of willingness to even open a discussion on topics of extreme importance to our membership, including remedy for years of suppressed wages under Doug Ford's unconstitutional Bill 124, only became more evident as the week progressed and we were met with similar refusals to elements of our initial monetary package. Nonetheless, your bargaining team made hard-won and important gains this week, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to advancing the interests of the 901 membership.

RA Right to Recognition

After significant and drawn out discussion, the Employer accepted the Bargaining Team's proposal to enshrine an RA's absolute right to recognition in our collective agreement (**Article 22.04**). Under this new language, research supervisors no longer have the ability to veto a recognition of RA contributions to research—instead, this right is granted conclusively by the collective agreement, and will be more easily grievable if not accorded to any individual RA. This language change will greatly aid 901 members as junior scholars seeking to build their research proposals, and is an indication of the overall importance of RA labour in producing the world-class research of which Queen's boasts.

Letters of Agreement

As negotiations continued on the outstanding non-monetary proposals, the Employer continually sought to keep important rights in letters of agreement, rather than enshrining within the body of the collective agreement itself. A letter of agreement is a document signed by both representatives of the Local and the Employer that provides a fixed term response to an issue that either side might have a reason to keep out of the actual body of the Collective Agreement. These documents have expiry dates and have to be renegotiated at each bargaining session; they are intended to be short-term solutions, whereas items in the body of the collective agreement stay as previously negotiated unless both sides agree to changes. The Employer's decision to keep renewing letters of agreement rather than moving important protections like Health and Safety policy into the collective agreement attacks our rights, and we will continue to strongly refuse this disrespectful tactic.

Your bargaining team seeks to enshrine in the body of the Collective Agreement **Letter of Agreement # 3**. This Letter stipulates that for TAs, TFs and RAs, "any increase from the (...)



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hourly wage rate of pay applicable during their first appointment to the hourly wage rate of pay applicable during their subsequent (...) appointment; will not result in a reduction in non-employment sources of financial funding that the University provides to a graduate student.” In other words, the team wants to ensure there is no expiry date on the promise that an increase in our hourly wage will not result in cuts to our funding. It is a matter of basic fairness and good faith: when we achieve gains at the bargaining table, we should not have to pay for them through reductions in non-employment funding.

Presentation on Caste

On Monday, January 15th, the Bargaining Team invited K. Harshita Jidugu, PSAC 901 Co-Chief Steward and PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education, to give a presentation supporting the Team’s proposed language change to include caste as a protected ground in our anti-discrimination clause (**Article 20.02**). As the 2024 bargaining term concluded with the Employer refusing to make this change under the reasoning that caste could be included under pre-existing grounds, we invited Harshita to the table to argue for the importance of explicitly naming caste in the article. Harshita explained the state of casteism at Queen’s to the employer, giving examples from her own lived experiences, as well as those collected from her pioneering research on caste in post-secondary institutions in Canada. Some of these examples include caste-privileged peers and staff refusing to form friendships or professional relationships with Dalit or caste-oppressed individuals, and Dalit or caste-oppressed students and staff being subject to casteist slurs. In addition, Dalit students with other intersecting identities, such as Dalit women and queer Dalit youth, can experience a trifecta of harm.

The Employer’s Representatives were fortunate to hear this presentation from a leading expert on Dalit studies in Turtle Island—and one specifically recruited by Queen’s University to undertake research on caste oppression in Canada. This indicates that Queen’s is well aware of the importance of this issue on this campus and the overall value of anti-caste advocacy work. Our proposal is an opportunity for the Employer to create concrete change at Queen’s; achieving this protection in our collective agreement would also be a crucial first step towards demanding that Queen’s expands their anti-discrimination policies to include caste-based discrimination—a change that is long overdue. To do anything less is a clear indication that the employer wishes only to exploit the intellectual labour of oppressed individuals, without any protections for their health and well-being. We strongly urge the employer to fulfill their obligations towards their employees. As they continue to deliberate, we also urge members to [sign our petition](#) supporting the inclusion of caste as a protected ground, increasing pressure on this vital issue.



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Refusal to Engage in Financial Remedies: Bill 124

The Employer was entirely unwilling to negotiate on several key monetary issues, describing them as “non-starters,” specifically, Bill 124, housing, and parking. The Bargaining Team refuses to engage in the Employer’s foreclosure of crucial bargaining priorities for our members. Our proposals address the financial difficulties that we experience, and we are committed to improving our members’ standard of living and working conditions at Queen’s.

While upper administration’s salaries grew by an average of 8.9 % in 2024 alone, public sector workers such as our members were restricted to a 1% annual increase due to the unconstitutional restrictions introduced by Bill 124. The Employer cited a court case as their reason for refusing to open a discussion on remedies. However, the Bargaining Team conducted our own research and found no legal restrictions that would prevent negotiations from taking place on financial remedies from Bill 124.

Unions across campus, including CUPE and USW workers, are united in their demand for fair real wages, meaning wages adjusted for inflation. So far, the Employer’s wage offers to CUPE units have failed to recognize the real impact of inflation and unconstitutional wage restrictions over several years. PSAC 901 recognizes our union siblings’ struggle, and the Bargaining Team remains steadfast in our solidarity with all workers on campus in their fight for a wage increase that addresses the affordability crisis for which Queen’s is responsible. The Bargaining Team also awaits the employer’s wage offers to 901 members, and will continue to advocate for wage numbers that will give members a dignified, fulfilled life—one that reflects the importance of our labour to the University.

In addition to refusing to address our losses under Bill 124, the Employer resists renewing the Mental Health and Hardship Funds as well as the Professional Development Funds. Our team seeks to expand these funds and secure their annual renewal, similar to Western University’s recently negotiated fund, which allows our sibling organization, PSAC 610, to assist their members with financial needs. PSAC 610 at Western University received \$180,000 in 2024 and will receive \$250,000 in 2025 for this purpose. Queen’s can do better! The team wants your Local, PSAC 901, to administer an annual fund to provide barrier-free bursaries and assistance that you have been accessing for the last two years. These supports have helped many of us alleviate food insecurity and cover the costs of medical and mental health care not included in the insurance. In the 20 weeks that PSAC 901 operated the Food Support Program, it received 1,150 applications. This represents more than half of PSAC 901 members who required support to alleviate food insecurity. Queen’s has an obligation to address food insecurity, primarily through providing a living wage and adequate funding!

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Graduate Housing and Other Preliminary Monetary Discussions

The Employer also refused to discuss housing and parking as affordability issues for graduate student workers. Queen's has a responsibility to us, their employees, not only as one of the largest employers in Kingston, but also as the largest landlords in Kingston. Their refusal to participate in these discussions show their disinterest in the wellbeing of our members at the workplace and within the wider Kingston community. Their lack of engagement in financial remedies is a reflection of their disregard for our members' safety at the workplace and in the community.

Graduate housing is one of the examples of the once glorious past at Queen's, when, as an institution, it understood its obligation to students, workers and the Kingston community and built dedicated graduate housing. It is a shame that for decades, social responsibility at Queen's has taken a back seat, despite their bragging about their leadership in sustainable development. We know that 901 members cannot sustainably work under the current housing and vacancy crises, and we refuse the Employer's false dichotomy between workers' rights and human rights. They may state that housing and parking are "not something that [they] provide their employees," but the truth remains that a significant number of 901 members live in housing that is controlled by their Employer and currently face illegal rent increases. The relationship between employment and housing cannot logically be denied under these circumstances, and we continue to fight for safe housing as an employment issue.

Conclusion

No matter how disrespectful and dismissive the Employer continues to be, the Union remains committed to the 901 membership. Our joint priority as a membership is fair, transparent, and meaningful negotiations at the bargaining table, and the stakes are no less than our livelihoods. The bargaining team is grateful for the support of 901 members, and we continue to encourage you to:

1. Regularly check the [Unit 1 Live Bargaining Tracker](#), which enables you to read the full text of both our proposals and the employer's counter-proposals
2. [RSVP for an in-person bargaining town hall on Thursday, January 23rd](#). The town hall will be held in Robert Sutherland Room 554 from 5pm to 7:30pm, and dinner will be provided.
3. Sign your [RAND card](#)!
4. [Attend a strike information session](#), and bring a friend!
5. [Join one of the committees supporting bargaining efforts](#): Communications Committee, Mobilization Committee, Member Engagement Committee, or Action Planning Committee.
6. [Answer our Strike Readiness Survey](#), which will let us know whether or not 901 members are willing to take labour action should the situation at the table require it.

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Remember: the workers, united, can never be defeated!

In solidarity,
Unit 1 Bargaining Team