



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Local 901

PSAC Local 901 - Unit 1 Bargaining Communique #4

Subject: Pivotal Week at the Bargaining Table

The Bargaining Team returned to the table from January 27 to 31 with the hope of seeing the Employer's representatives make movements on a number of our proposals on language changes and monetary compensation. We have already completed 13 days of negotiations, and it has been over 19 days since the Team first presented our initial package— but we have yet to receive a response from the employer on numerous proposals, except for their refusal to remedy wages lost due to the unconstitutional Bill 124.

Significant proposals concerning members' physical and mental well-being were discussed this week, and the Bargaining Team is seeing Employer movement on certain matters. We continue to remain vigilant at the table as we enter conciliation with the Employer alongside a Ministry of Labour-appointed conciliator on February 10.

Changes to Grievance Procedures

After several rounds of extensive negotiations, the Employer has finally taken steps that bring grievance procedures closer to the Bargaining Team's initial proposal on Article 11. We proposed increasing the number of employees present during a grievance meeting because we understand how difficult and intimidating it can be to challenge the employer. As a member of a labour union, you are entitled to union protection through grievance meetings, where union officers work together with you to ensure that our Collective Agreement—and therefore your rights at the workplace—are respected. The Bargaining Team continues to enshrine further protections for you and your colleagues in the collective agreement, ensuring that the Employer is held accountable.

Despite this move forward, the Employer continues to maintain anti-union language in their proposal. In addition to imposing a fine on those complaints deemed to be "frivolous and vexatious," thereby demeaning valid concerns from our employees and discouraging further grievances, the Employer remains insistent that the Faculty Relations Office (FRO) must be notified if a representative of the Union is present during an informal grievance process. Both the presence of FRO at the informal stage and the fines on "frivolous and vexatious grievances" appear to aim to intimidate members; such language poses a considerable threat to you in exercising our right to enforce the collective agreement, and your Bargaining Team will not entertain any language changes that infringe upon our grievance processes.



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Pregnancy and Parental Absence

We strongly believe that birthing people and parents should have access to further support and assistance from the Employer. To that end, we proposed changes to Article 23.04 which expands the qualification for unpaid pregnancy and parental leave to include those employees whose contracts are shorter than 13 weeks. The Employer continued to question the necessity of such changes, but the Bargaining Team remains steadfast in our commitment to our members with parenting responsibilities.

Proctoring and Marking Positions

From your input through grievance filings, we understand that there are instances where graduate student workers are working additional hours as proctors and markers, unprotected by the Collective Agreement. The Bargaining Team condemns such practices from the exam office, as it undermines the basic principle of equal labour for equal pay. We put forward a proposal to ensure that the work of TAs, such as proctoring and marking, is fairly compensated in accordance with the Collective Agreement. The Bargaining Team is committed to ensuring that graduate student-workers are protected from labour exploitation, and we will continue to respond to the needs of our membership.

Expanding TA Appointments and Labour-to-Funding Ratio

The Employer sought to expand the language of TA appointments to include both departmentalized and non-departmentalized faculties, such as the Faculty of Education. In combination with other suggested changes, such as a proposal to “soften” work hour limits, it appears to the Bargaining Team that the employer is merely seeking another avenue to increase our members’ workload. While we appreciate the flexibility such a change will bring to our members in non-departmentalized faculties and the value of cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching, the Team insists that expanding the reach of TA appointments to other departments should not change the core funding promised to our members upon acceptance to Queen’s. We firmly believe that graduate student-workers should not be put in a position to seek additional employment as a means of survival. When presented with facts about Kingston’s food insecurity and affordability issues, the Employer merely stated that they “appreciated” the Team’s concerns. Such blatant disregard for the existence of graduate student workers is not only disrespectful and shameful, it is an indicator of how removed the Queen’s upper administration is from the economic crises which our members experience daily. These



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are the same economic crises for which the University is responsible, as they are the largest employer in Kingston.

We believe that funding packages should be sufficient to cover the cost of living in Kingston. As the bargaining process continues, we continue the fight for livable wages and condemn working conditions which force our membership to work long hours in order to make ends meet. To this end, the Team proposed a formula which would maintain the same total sum of funding per year for each member, but decrease the mandatory employment component of that funding. The proposal seeks to increase opportunities for additional income from employment that cannot be counted towards the guaranteed funding package—this would enable our members to seek extra work when they choose and under the circumstances that they choose, rather than being compelled to overwork due to circumstances outside of their control. Instead of merely “appreciating” our member’s valuable labour, the Employer should bolster their appreciation with concrete actions.

Streamlining E-Contracts and TA Forms

In an effort to streamline e-contracts and TA Forms, we proposed an alternative timeline for the issuing of these important documents which would allow members to better plan and prepare for their duties. The current formula obliges the Employer to let us know about our work assignments (by sending Teaching Assistant Form part A) on “the Tuesday prior before the start of the academic term,” a date which shifts depending on the calendar layout of any given year. This constant change has created challenges for creating and signing these documents for both our members and the Employer. We seek a firm date/time commitment that would allow us sufficient time to prepare for the job demands ahead of each academic term.

Health and Safety Concerns

The employer maintained the status quo on Article 21, which addresses Health and Safety. Their reluctance to update Health and Safety provisions, many of which they insist on relegating to temporary Letters of Agreement, reflects the Employer’s dismissive attitude towards your well-being at the workplace.

Our proposal for Article 21, passed on December 2nd, seeks to incorporate the National Standard for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace from the Mental Health Commission of Canada into our collective agreement. In particular, our proposal aims to expand the definition of “workplace hazards” to reflect the diverse nature of our membership’s workplaces. It is disappointing, yet not surprising, for the Employer to

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reject such expansion. The Bargaining Team continues to push for the Employer to concretely acknowledge the various forms of Health and Safety risks our members experience in their day-to-day work.

Employment Equity

We proposed changes to Article 25, which focuses on employment equity, as part of our effort to hold the Employer accountable for their role as Kingston's largest employer. Our goal is to enshrine language from the Employment Equity Act in our Collective Agreement, thereby holding the employer more directly responsible to the provisions in the Act. This language change ensures that the University aligns their hiring practices with current legislation instead of University policies, which can be unilaterally modified without input from our campus community. Furthermore, our proposal also requires that the Employer takes concrete steps to address employment inequities and share their actions with the Union.

Providing Union with Member List

The Bargaining Team proposed that the Employer send the local a complete member list with members' preferred and legal names. We understand that many members use preferred names which differ from their legal names, but continue to use their legal names for administrative purposes such as banking, immigration paperwork, and government-issued identification. To this end, we proposed that the complete list sent at the beginning of the academic year include both the preferred name and the legal name. This ensures that members continue to access services without interference in their lives.

Food Insecurity

While we continue to wait for a response to our initial monetary package from our Employer, we remind them that while we wait, we only fall deeper into poverty. PSAC 901 has been sounding the alarm of food insecurity for years, and this issue transcends our membership—one in three households in Kingston experiences food insecurity, leading the [City Council to recently declare a food insecurity emergency](#). We remind Queen's that as one of the largest employers in the city, they bear partial responsibility for this crisis. The dismissive and belittling attitude that the Employer's representatives displayed at the table illustrates the bubble of privilege in which they live, and which we as workers refuse to maintain. The Team, along with all graduate student-workers and the city at large, are impatiently waiting for their response.

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Conclusion

The Team offers our sincere gratitude to all members for keeping up with bargaining, speaking about bargaining in your workspaces, and showing us their support and solidarity online. As bargaining continues to intensify, be sure to take the following actions to stay informed:

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. A major update to our Tracker will be coming soon!
2. [RSVP](#) for an in-person bargaining town hall on Wednesday, February 5th. The town hall will be held in Robert Sutherland Room 554 from 5 pm to 7:30 pm, 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.

The workers, united, will never be defeated!

Solidarity forever,
Unit 1 Bargaining Team