

Update from Strike HQ: UMFA Calls Admin to Return to the Bargaining Table

November 14, 2016

Dear Colleagues:

Until late afternoon yesterday, I thought I would be sending you a very different update. As you know, our bargaining team met with the Administration's team on Saturday and Sunday. It seemed that there was finally some movement at the table. We thought we would be meeting again this morning to continue bargaining and be that much closer to a settlement.

Thus, when the Administration announced in UM Today that conciliation had failed, it was news to us. Admin unilaterally decided to stop bargaining.

First, I would like to emphasize that John Kearsy's claim that UMFA "won't accept anything that the administration" offers is categorically false and completely disingenuous.

Let's recall that one of our top priorities in bargaining was to get our salaries, the lowest in U13, off the floor. In October, with the province's interference making things more difficult, we agreed to set that priority aside to try to avert a strike. We agreed to focus on the non-monetary issues that are so crucial to our members, our students, and for the integrity of UM.

The strike could end immediately if Admin were to agree to reasonable, workable proposals on these issues we have on the table.

For example, the Administration could agree to additional job-security protections for our Instructors and Librarians, who are absolutely crucial to research and learning at UM.

Admin could agree to our proposal that individual members would be free to choose, but not be compelled, to submit performance metrics in their tenure, promotion, and evaluation files.

Admin could agree to a workable process whereby Deans collaborate with faculty to establish workload, rather than simply cranking up workloads unilaterally. Collegial governance is not an outlandish proposal. It is a fundamental value of the university. Many Canadian universities already have workload protections in their Collective Agreements, and some of them are close to our proposal. This is not unprecedented.

Job security, fair evaluation, and collegial governance are all good for us as a university. The Administration knows exactly what it would take to end this strike. So far they have refused these things, and so the strike continues.

As you will recall, the offer that the Admin made on November 6 contained:

- No salary increase;

- No protection against additional arbitrary workload increases;
- No improvements to job security; and
- A weakened proposal on the use of performance metrics.

Our Collective Agreement Committee agreed unanimously a week ago that the Nov 6 offer was unacceptable because it failed to address any of UMFA members' core concerns. As you know, our bargaining priorities were developed over months of consultations with members. That the Admin wants to push through a package that doesn't address ANY of our priorities shows the extent to which they are out of touch with the valid, urgent concerns of faculty and students. Even though the offer was unacceptable, we immediately emailed the full text to all UMFA members for review.

We then resumed bargaining with the support of a provincially appointed conciliator, and bargained through the weekend. Now, we're being told that conciliation has failed and asked to step back in time, to erase the week's progress, and to act like the previous seven days of UMFA members walking the line didn't happen. Admin wants us to vote on a stale package that was rejected a week ago. They are simply playing games.

Admin needs to stop stalling and to come back to the bargaining table where meaningful conversation can take place. They need to stop trying to play to the media, and to listen to the issues that a multitude of faculty members have thoughtfully put forward in many different ways over the past months. On your behalf I am asking Admin to meet us at the bargaining table where real discussion can occur.

I hope to be able to bring you a favourable update soon. In the meantime, it is necessary that we continue to walk the picket lines in solidarity and with resolve. Both when negotiations are actively ongoing and during a pause, the real action—and all of our strength—is with you on the lines. It is your support for this strike that gives our bargaining team the strength it needs to overturn the Admin's attempts to undermine the fundamental values of the university.

In solidarity,

Mark Hudson
UMFA President