

UMFA seeks damages while government continues to interfere in University of Manitoba negotiations

Union seeks remedy for 2016 violation of charter right to freedom of association

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Winnipeg- As the provincial government continues to interfere in labour negotiations at the University of Manitoba, starting this morning the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench will hear the extent of the damages caused by the Pallister government's interference in negotiations in 2016. Last month the Court of Appeal upheld the lower court's ruling that the government violated UMFA Members Charter Right to freedom of association, writing that "[The government of] Manitoba's conduct not only significantly disrupted the balance between the U of M and UMFA, but also significantly damaged their relationship, thereby seriously undermining what had been a meaningful and productive process of good-faith collective bargaining."

"We would much rather be in the classroom than the courtroom, and the current strike shows us the long-term consequences of government interference," said Orvie Dingwall, UMFA President. "Our members are on strike today, in part, because the Pallister government's interference in negotiations in 2016 increased recruitment and retention problems at the UM by freezing wages."

The provincial government has an opportunity to learn from its past mistakes and should cease interfering in current negotiations. Dingwall noted that the new Premier, Heather Stefanson, has spoken about her desire to move away from the abrasive and dictatorial style of previous Premier Brian Pallister. Dingwall called on Stefanson to remove the wage mandate that has been imposed on the university's administration and allow the parties to negotiate an agreement so students can return to their classes.

"If the government wants to start fresh, they can learn from their mistakes and stop interfering in current negotiations, which is preventing UMFA from reaching a fair agreement with the University of Manitoba," said Dingwall. "Faculty are leaving Manitoba for other provinces where they are offered competitive salaries. From unnecessary court cases to driving faculty out of Manitoba to find higher salaries elsewhere, it's clear that the government has played a negative role in collective agreement negotiations in this province. We implore Premier Stefanson to allow us to bargain freely with the university's administration so that students can return to the classroom."

UMFA represents over 1,200 professors, instructors and librarians at the University of Manitoba.