

UWOFA

Bargaining Bulletin

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UWOFA Remains Committed to Collective Bargaining

On August 17, 2010 the UWO Administration requested, in writing, that UWOFA agree to suspend collective bargaining. On August 19, UWOFA respectfully refused this request and informed the Administration that it remains committed to continuing negotiations as scheduled.

The UWO Administration letter cites a request from the Ministry of Finance for "a collective bargaining hiatus to allow the government consultations" with "bargaining agents, employers and government to achieve two years of no net compensation increases." The letter further asks UWOFA to agree to suspend current bargaining, including conciliation, between the Administration and UWOFA until completion of those discussions.

What happened?

As reported in our July 23 [Bargaining Bulletin](#), the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, made public statements signalling the provincial government's intention to "work with" employers and unions with the goal of preventing any increases in the total amount spent on compensation and agreements of at least two years' duration, including benefits. This process of moral suasion took place alongside legislation ([Bill 16](#)) that explicitly exempts employees who bargain collectively from any compensation freeze.

As part of the government's effort, a series of so-called "consultation" meetings were called beginning on August 9, 2010 in Toronto. They invited bargaining groups from across the public sector, including the universities and colleges.

Twenty-six faculty association representatives from across Ontario met in Toronto on July 30 to discuss the request. They agreed to send a delegation of eight people to attend the meeting with government representatives, but on the strict understanding that they were not there to negotiate on behalf of local associations. They could listen and collect information, but not negotiate at the provincial level. To do so would undermine the integrity of the collective bargaining process.

At the August 9 meeting and subsequently, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities representatives repeated their request for a two-year compensation freeze of zero and zero.

Associations' Response

Association representatives have since withdrawn from the process and have released the following statement:

The Ontario faculty associations and other groups representing academic staff have received reports from their delegation about the issues discussed the week of August 9, 2010 with COU and government officials. We are confident that these issues can better be addressed at the local level by free collective bargaining. This would acknowledge the diversity of Ontario's universities and their respective financial situations. We also do not accept the government's premise that compensation is the cause of the current financial situation, nor its determination, made even before commencing its consultation process, that a two year wage freeze singling out public sector employees is the only way to deal with the province's fiscal situation.

UWOFA supports this position. Moreover, we reject sector-wide bargaining with the provincial government, the purpose of which is to ensure association compliance with a pre-determined outcome based on faulty financial assumptions.

Fiscal Context

There is little evidence to suggest that public sector compensation is the cause of the provincial government's deficit. To the contrary, it is the consequence of the most serious recession since the Great Depression. It is not the result of over-spending on the public sector. Even if it was, the province's approach makes little sense. Rather than reducing its spending on universities, the province is actually increasing it substantially. Analysis by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) points out that "employers have available to them considerable revenues above and beyond provincial grants, most particularly tuition," which has risen with increased fees and enrolment. "Each university administration has considerable room to manoeuvre on the revenue side as well as the expenditure side," argues CAUT, "and each has already taken a number of decisions on the revenue side that go beyond the provincial grant which remains unaffected by the Government's wage policy."

The government's attempts to influence salary determination in the sector are simply aimed at getting more students through the system more cheaply. In the process, the quality of education, fairness and the retention of highly qualified faculty are left by the wayside. This has nothing to do with fighting deficits, but everything to do with using the global financial crisis and the province's resulting deficit as a smokescreen for an attack on the real wages of university employees.