

News from the Job Action Committee

Crisis and Reservations

The QUFA Job Action Committee offers an elaboration on the QUFA Executive's message of 15 August 2011

By the Communications Subcommittee, Job Action Committee (JAC), QUFA



In order to avert a crisis at Queen's University, and despite deep reservations about some aspects of this proposal,

the QUFA Executive has accepted the last employer offer received at 4.40 a.m. on Monday 15 August 2011.

The QUFA Executive will send the proposal to the QUFA Membership for a ratification vote.

This message, approved at a 15 August 2011 QUFA Executive meeting, was subsequently distributed to QUFA Members and the media. Now, Members are asking for more information. The Bargaining Team and the QUFA Executive will answer questions in detail at the Council of Representatives meeting on 18 August 2011 and the General Member Information Meeting on 24 August 2011.

In the meantime, the QUFA Job Action Committee would like to offer the Membership this elaboration on the QUFA Executive's 15 August 2011 message.

What Crisis?

The QUFA Executive considered the possibility of lockout or strike to be a crisis for all members of the Queen's community: QUFA, our students, and our fellow union members in CUPE, USW, PSAC, and ONA. We saw the possibility of job action as a crisis primarily created by the university Administration. The Executive decided it was up to QUFA to show leadership for the entire university by accepting the employer's offer.

We have a long history of collegial negotiations with our employer, Queen's University. In our sixteen-year life as a union, QUFA has never been forced into conciliation, a no-board, or the real possibility of job action until Principal Woolf's administration. His determination to "recalibrate" us as mere tools led to the potential crisis. From January through June, the employer's team did very little actual negotiation. "Packages" were put on the table with the words, "this is it."

Once QUFA demonstrated that we would not be bullied in this way, that we would stand up for the collective agreement and our Members' rights, and that our Members were strongly behind us and prepared to be locked out or go on strike, then negotiation began in earnest. We thank our Members for this great support. We could never have reached this moment without your efforts and participation.

The QUFA Executive knows that our Members care deeply about Queen's

University, and especially our students and research. We believe it is time for you to see the collective agreement we have been offered.

Deep Reservations?

The Executive's decision to accept the last offer from the employer was not unanimous, but we reached the consensus that it was better to bring this last offer to the Members for consideration than to instruct the QUFA bargaining team to go back to the table.

The deep reservations vary among the members of the Executive. Generally, the Administration's attitude towards collective bargaining and its unwillingness to see QUFA as an equal partner at the table underlie the negotiations and the Executive's decision to accept the proposal with deep reservations.

In fact, the Administration's team required a great deal of instruction about many facets of the QUFA-University Administration collective agreement. They were not willing to work with QUFA to address workplace issues in ways that cost nothing but would be beneficial to our working environment. The Administration's team focused on controlling our Members with an almost punitive stance, attempting to remove from the collective agreement policies that already apply to all Queen's employees, unionized or not.

The QUFA team fought long and hard to keep the collective agreement we had

developed over the past fifteen years of our unionized history. They expressed reservations about the entire negotiating process, the Administration's take-it-or-leave-it behaviour, and their refusals to discuss working conditions.

In the end, QUFA did not lose ground, and we maintained our collective agreement, with the exception of the term: the Administration insisted upon a four-year agreement.

In a 16 August 2011 interview with the Kingston *Whig-Standard*, QUFA President Paul Young characterizes these attitudes as the corporatization of Queen's University.¹

QUFA is disappointed that the Administration no longer sees this university's primary purpose as one of learning, teaching, and research, but

rather one of corporate production wherein students are characterized as products and professors as costs.

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¹<http://www.thewhig.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=3259359>

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