

Message to MUNFA Members about Conciliation

MUNFA Negotiating and Executive Committee members have been fielding questions about the significance of our request to move the current round of Collective Bargaining to conciliation. We hope this communiqué will answer them.

What is conciliation?

During collective bargaining, either the union or the employer may ask for the help of a conciliator if they feel that progress has become impossible through the normal negotiating process. Government-appointed conciliators try to “unstuck” the process by providing mediation between the parties. They do not impose a settlement.

Why is MUNFA asking for conciliation now?

Any members who have followed the [Negotiating Committee’s regular updates](#) will know that Collective Bargaining has reached an impasse. It is now almost a year since MUNFA notified our employer of our intention to open the 2014-17 Collective Agreement. It took the University another five months to come to the table.

Since then, MUNFA negotiators have worked earnestly to improve our Collective Agreement in ways that would strengthen academic freedom and make Memorial a more equitable and inclusive workplace for all Academic Staff.

In return, they have been met with carelessness. MUN’s negotiators sometimes arrive at meetings clearly unprepared for the day’s business. Worse, when prepared, they bring proposals that threaten the most fundamental conditions for academic freedom: tenure, collegiality and the intellectual property rights of scholars.

Hence the [Negotiating Committee’s disbelief](#) at the University’s claim that it “worked hard to reach a negotiated settlement with MUNFA.”

Is the impasse about money?

MUNFA recognizes that all public institutions in this province are facing an austerity regime and that the University has been a particular target. As our members know, our analysis is also that our senior administration has often compounded the problem with ill-advised spending choices.

Nevertheless, MUNFA members should not be misled into thinking that this impasse stems from Memorial’s budgetary problems. The University has not yet responded to MUNFA’s proposals on salary. The most important issues under dispute are not primarily financial in nature.

So what is at stake?

MUNFA’s priorities for these negotiations would make Memorial fairer and more vibrant. We want:

- Updated Promotion and Tenure language, to meet the needs of the 21st century University. Our proposals, which recognize that there are many ways to contribute to scholarship, would provide critical support to the University’s stated goals of inclusiveness and diversity, including through Indigenizing the Academy;
- Language that recognizes the actual work of Counselling Faculty;
- The Intellectual Property language that was revised and agreed through extended dialogue between MUN and MUNFA to be incorporated into the Collective Agreement; and
- Language that will help remedy the precarity of limited term academic appointments.

In return, [the employer wants to get rid of banked time](#). Rather than renewing our P&T language, the University wants post-tenure review for full Professors, potentially adding a divisive task to the existing P&T committee workload.

Particularly shamefully, they want to move control over IP out of the Collective Agreement and into the hands of the Board of Regents, whose remit is finance and administration, not scholarship. As for the other issues, the University simply refuses to engage with MUNFA's proposals.

Does conciliation mean we will be going on strike?

We hope not. The point of conciliation is to try to avert a strike or lockout. We know that our members would prefer to avoid job action and so would we.

Having said that, given the University's apparent contempt for the negotiating process we need to be prepared for all eventualities. To that end:

- Most academic units now have MUNFA liaisons to help enhance communications between the membership and MUNFA's central committees;
- MUNFA is compiling non-Memorial contact information, so we can stay in touch with our members if we are shut out of the University's system;
- We have initiated a Job Action Committee (JAC) whose first task will be to secure space off campus to serve as strike headquarters;
- MUNFA is preparing a list of Frequently Asked Questions in relation to job action. These include such issues as how we handle our responsibilities to graduate students and what to do about our research grants.

A final word...

Many MUNFA members may be unaware of just how hard the MUNFA Negotiating Committee has been working on all of our behalf. Our bargaining team is made up of ASMs from across the university, all of whom continue to do their day jobs of teaching, research and academic service.

They have the wholehearted support and confidence of the MUNFA Executive Committee. They deserve yours too.