

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

Monday, July 8, 2024

Police Actions On Campus and Academic Freedom

Dear MUNFA Members,

Over the past several weeks, students and faculty have engaged in peaceful protest via an encampment for their cause. Besides taking up some physical space, their acts also included other non-violent tactics such as signs expressing solidarity with Palestinians and holding teach-ins. None of these tactics as they were employed by students and faculty impeded any university community member's academic freedom.

As MUNFA stated earlier, academic freedom, "does not require neutrality on the part of the individual, nor does it preclude commitment. Rather it makes commitment possible". Upholding our academic freedom is, "an obligation on all members of the University community." (See Article 2.02 and <https://munfa.ca/right-to-freedom-of-expression-and-peaceful-protest-on-campus/>)

The actions of our university's administrators on the night of Friday July 5th, however, are a direct attack on our academic freedom rights. Administrator's actions show that, ultimately, if they disagree with expressions of academic freedom, including non-violent protest calling for peace, they are willing to use the police to enforce their position.

I condemn these actions by our university's administrators. They fly in the face of our rights enshrined in our Collective Agreement.

The core issue is how academic freedom is being impacted by the actions our university administrators. They have gestured to a court injunction they like, because it suits their purposes, from another jurisdiction (Ontario), while ignoring another legal ruling that is still in effect yet does not support MUN Admin's position: McGill: ["Two attempts to obtain injunctions ending the encampment at Montreal's McGill University were rebuffed."](#)

MUN's administrators have shown us that they are willing to pick and choose a legal order from an outside jurisdiction that suits their position and use it as a pretext to send in armed police to serve petty trespassing summons to students allegedly trespassing on their own university. To me, that's both cowardly and dangerous. Cowardly because MUN admin didn't have the guts to seek an injunction from their own jurisdiction (NL). Dangerous because of the chilling effect arising from knowing armed police will be deployed even against unarmed, peaceful protesters.

MUNFA continues to support our national union's [\(CAUT\) recent statements and positions](#) on the right to engage in peaceful protest on campus and "defends the right to free expression and assembly on university and college campuses and condemns those institutions that have or are threatening to have police forcibly remove and arrest peaceful protesters.

Legal scholars have already publicly pointed to both the weak grounds on which MUN administrators' actions are founded and the importance of fundamental issues at stake:

[Professor Heidi Matthews Thread 1 on Gazette Update 1](#)

[Professor Heidi Matthews Thread 2 on Gazette Update 2](#)

See also:

- Cameron, Jamie. [“Student Protest Encampments and Section s.2\(c\) of the Charter.”](#) Centre for Free Expression. Accessed July 7, 2024.
- Rollmann, Rhea. [“Memorial Calls in Police to Dismantle Palestine Solidarity Encampment,”](#) July 7, 2024.

Post-secondary institutions must serve the common good of our society through open and free discussion, research, teaching, participation, independent thinking, expression, and dissent - and academic freedom serves to ensure that these pursuits are possible without fear of recrimination or punishment. Academic freedom is a pillar of a properly functioning, robust, and healthy democracy.

In solidarity,

Josh Lepawsky
MUNFA President