

TO: All MUNFA Members

FROM: The MUNFA Executive Committee

DATE: September 12, 2024

SUBJECT: Power in the Union: An Update on Labour Relations and Grievance Handling

Labour relations is at the heart of what your union does - bargaining good collective agreements, handling grievances, mediations, arbitrations, defending academic freedom, ensuring that the Employer is following the collective agreement, and working to advance the standards of the University as an institution of higher learning, teaching, and research.

There is little use in bargaining strong collective agreement language if it is not being enforced on our campuses. Much of this effort occurs behind closed doors and out of the spotlight - in grievance meetings, in arbitrations, in meetings with the Employer, and via countless emails and phone calls. The bulk of this work is carried out by two Academic Freedom and Grievance (AF&G) Committees - one in St. John's and one at Grenfell Campus. The day to day labour relations are handled by two MUNFA staff - Amy Wadden, Labour Relations Officer and Dale Humphries, Labour Relations Coordinator. They also sit on and support the work of the AF&G Committees.

The MUNFA Executive also plays an active role in the grievance process (including making determinations on filing association grievances), collective bargaining, and the direction and coordination of the overall labour relations effort.

The full terms of references of the AF&G Committees can be found here - [St. Johns](#) and [Grenfell Campus](#)

Aside from the two staff, the members of these Committees are rank and file members of the union just like you. The current composition of the Committees can be found on the MUNFA website - [HERE](#).

Essentially, the AF&G Committees serve four crucial functions:

(1) To assist and advise members of the MUNFA bargaining unit in the protection of their rights under the Collective Agreement and to advise non-bargaining unit MUNFA members of their rights under the Terms and Conditions of Employment.

(2) To prepare individual grievance cases and to represent grievors before administrative and arbitral committees.

(3) To prepare association grievance cases for representation before administrative and arbitral committees.

(4) To monitor the state of academic freedom within the University, to promote awareness of academic freedom issues and to make policy recommendations to the Executive.

For those who may be unfamiliar, an overview of the Grievance Process can be found - [HERE](#)

Triennial Review Process

Section G (i) of MUNFA's Academic Freedom and Grievance Committee's (AF&G) terms of reference calls for an Evaluation Committee to review its activities every three years. The most recent evaluation covered the period of 2018 to 2022.

The Evaluation Committee for the SJ Campus AF&G Committee was comprised of Aspi Balsara (Chair; Library), John Hoben (Education), Sandra MacDonald (Nursing; retired), and Sarah Martin (Political Science). The Evaluation Committee for the GC Campus AF&G Committee was comprised of Robert Hengeveld (Chair, School of Science and the Environment), Karen Doody (School of Science and the Environment) and Peter Stewart (School of Arts and Social Science).

The MUNFA Executive would like to take this opportunity to extend a heartfelt thank you to the members of both committees for their time, effort, and energy on this.

The full reports can be found [HERE \(St. John's\)](#) and [HERE \(Grenfell Campus\)](#). They will be brought to the Fall Annual General Meeting of our union but we wanted to share them with you in advance.

Overall Assessment

The overall assessment of the Evaluation Committee (St. John's) was as follows:

“It is clear from the information collected, that during the period of January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2022, the AF&G fulfilled a demanding role proficiently and with dedication, maintaining a high standard of competence in advising and representing its members. The AF&G has maintained consistent and sustained contact with members, as evident by emails, letters and records of meetings. All cases were handled in a confidential manner as evidenced by secure storage and maintenance of case files.”

The assessment of the Evaluation Committee (Grenfell Campus) was as follows:

“It is important to acknowledge the excellent work that has been done by the Grenfell AF&G Committee. Their hard work continued throughout pandemic shutdowns and demonstrated their dedication to MUNFA members.”

Our union handles a considerable workload as it relates to grievance/arbitration/mediation handling with over 100 individual grievances and over 100 association grievances filed during the reporting period. This only includes the grievances that were filed, it does not include the hundreds of query files that were also generated during that time frame, or the effort involved in informing and being actively engaged in the collective bargaining process (which is a major task in and of itself).

Grievance/Arbitration Delays and Frustration - Faculty Relations

The reports also highlight a significant issue with the slowing pace of communications and handling from Faculty Relations. From the SJ Committee report (p. 3)

“...a significant challenge with Faculty Relations because of the slowing pace at which the grievance steps proceed. One of the co-chairs stated that the pace of grievances has “plummeted”. They reported the administration contributes to the delays by being unavailable for timely step one meetings, and MUNFA staff had to frequently follow up with administration to set grievance resolution meetings. Consequently, individual and association grievances remain on the AF&G meeting agenda for long periods of time, often years at a time.”

These issues and delays with Faculty Relations are, unfortunately and frustratingly, ongoing. We have been working to address these concerns with the [Senior University Administration](#) and with Faculty Relations directly, but we have yet to see any evidence of a change in approach or urgency from Faculty Relations to date.

Despite the obstacles, your AF&G Committees, Executive, and MUNFA staff continue the important work of defending you and enforcing your Collective Agreement; this work takes place

each and every day. We thought it was important to shine a spotlight on that work. Thank you again to the members of the Triennial Evaluation Committees, to the volunteer members of our AF&G Committees, and to our staff for all that they do to defend our members and advance the cause of our union.

You are the Union

A union is only as strong as the knowledge, resolve, and solidarity of its members, so please take the time to get familiar with your collective agreement and the rights afforded to you as a member of MUNFA - learn more at www.munfa.ca . There are also many ways to get involved and active in our union and we encourage members to reach out at any time if they are interested or have any questions - [HERE](#)

Thank you for all that you do. Never forget - this University works because you do.

In solidarity,

Your MUNFA Executive