



Statement from the CUPE 4207 Executive Committee

As everyone is aware, the COVID-19 crisis is continually evolving. Health authorities at all levels of government have recommended that as a way to halt the spread of this virus, people avoid large gatherings and practice social distancing. The Executive Committee has discussed these recommendations in how our union functions, especially given that we are seeking to bargain for a fair collective agreement for Unit 1, and Unit 3 will be entering bargaining soon.

Given the current context, the safety of our members is paramount. This is especially so for members and their families who identify as being part of those most at risk from COVID-19. To slow the rate of infection and in spreading the virus further, we have made decisions to work towards protecting members in union spaces.

On Monday, March 16th, in a joint Executive Committee/ Bargaining Committee/ Strike Committee meeting, we have unanimously agreed that we will not be taking strike action at this time. Given the context of this crisis, it would be irresponsible to call members to a picket line.

We have also agreed to suspend all in-person meetings of the local, including all committee meetings including the Executive, training and education, and General Membership Meetings until the pandemic has passed, or health authorities recommend meetings of this kind could resume. This decision is effective Tuesday, March 17th.

This will impact our previously scheduled Annual General Members' (AGM) meeting, originally scheduled for April 6th. The Executive will commit to holding the AGM as soon as possible, and no later than October 2020.

The union office in MCC 402 will also be closed until further notice. We are presently working on alternative office hours for members to be able to chat with Executive Committee members. However, for the meantime, emailing the union at info@cupe4207.org or by contacting individual Executive Committee members to answer questions is the easiest way to have your questions answered at this time.

With this said, there are a number of issues that members may find themselves in moving forward.

Bargaining

While we have suspended calling for strike action on account of the present crisis, we are still committed to bargaining for a strong collective agreement. We will continue to provide

updates on where we are at in relation to bargaining, and will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation.

Overwork

With the suspension of in-person instruction at the university, and the transfer of all courses to online environments, this may lead to additional problems for contract academic workers. Especially for Instructors in Unit 1, the transfer of all courses to an online format might lead to you working more hours. Please keep track of your hours, especially if you are finding that your workload has increased, and contact your chair or director. You may also contact the union at any time if you feel that you are working beyond your hours.

Sick Time

Whether your courses are in-person or online, you still have the same rights to access sick time in our Collective Agreements. The same procedure would follow, in that you need to contact your supervisor and/or the chair of the department.

Health & Safety Concerns

While the COVID-19 pandemic is a severe health crisis, we also need to recognize that the university is our workplace, too. The university is governed by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, and must be proactive in ensuring that we work in a safe environment. The suspension of all in-person classes may be an inconvenience in the last few weeks of courses, but it is one way to protect members from contracting a communicable disease. With that said, the university is not closed. If there are members who are being compelled to report to the university to do work covered under any of our Collective Agreements, you can request to know how your safety would be ensured. Further, if you identify as someone who is part of the at-risk population, then you can also seek an accommodation. Please contact the union for more information if this applies to you.

Research for Graduate Students

This was a regular point of discussion in the last few weeks, as Grad Student members were concerned about whether they would be able to continue research in the event of a strike. While the university has been disrupted, it has not been the result of labor action. In the Emergency Senate meeting held on Tuesday, March 17th, it was expressed that the University will remain open and research facilities will remain open. However, they did not rule out the possibility of a future closure.

Fall/Winter Contracts and our Allocation of Hours Forms

Given the uncertainty in the transition from in-class to online learning, members have been concerned about the status of our contracts. In an email from Human Resources, we were informed that the full value of our contracts would be paid out to members. Some members may have their supervisor seek to re-allocate their hours in the AOH forms. They do have the right to do so. However, if they attempt to cut the hours in your contract or demand that you repay the

university or the department for work not completed as a result of this suspension of classes, then this is a problem. Please contact the union immediately if this occurs.

Finally, the Executive would like to note that we are acting to prevent the spread of this virus, and to protect members and their families. Closing union spaces was not an easy decision and was done as a last resort. We also need to stand in solidarity with other frontline workers who are still reporting to work. These include people working in health care, long-term care, and child care; transportation workers; workers in retail and hospitality; and many others. Some of them are on the job because they are working to protect the health and safety of others, and some are there because they lack union protection and access to paid sick time. Working to slow the spread of infection *is* an act of solidarity with those at-risk and with front-line workers. Thank you for your understanding.

In solidarity,
The Executive of CUPE 4207