

FACT-CHECKING THE UNIVERSITY'S MESSAGE REGARDING CUPE 2424 BARGAINING UPDATE



CUPE 2424 would like to address a number of points in the University's latest bargaining update. We have included the University's original messaging in italics, followed by our responses highlighted in blue.

The university and the union have made significant progress, including agreement on more than 20 improvements to the collective agreement. Additionally, the university has tabled increases to wages and benefits. The union advised the university that the parties have reached an impasse over pension.

CUPE 2424 and Carleton agreed on a number of non-monetary items early in the process, and some monetary items since. The major issues of pensions, job evaluation, and other monetary items remain unresolved. The employer has made their latest proposals, including wages and benefits, conditional upon our acceptance of their latest pension offer, which the Union simply could not accept.

The university explained at the bargaining table that it is not demanding a pension concession from the union, but is ensuring consistent language as it would be unfair to treat one group of plan members differently from another. The university is not proposing any change to the pension plan and remains committed to longstanding governance practices that have ensured Carleton's retirement plan is strong and will remain stable and sustainable into the future.

The University has demanded that we relinquish our existing Collective Agreement language around pensions, which of course would be a concession. We have tried to negotiate on language and have made significant movement in the employer's direction, especially with regard to contribution rates, but our proposals to maintain protection around the minimum pension guarantee have been rejected.

The University maintains that it is simply trying to ensure consistent language across Collective Agreements, which is neither sincere nor realistic. We all know that rights, benefits, and protections vary across Collective Agreements and employee groups on campus. Union groups at Carleton understand and respect the right of other groups to negotiate their own rights, benefits, and protections.

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The university advised the union at the bargaining table that the benefits all plan members receive under the retirement plan are the result of the diligent work of the pension committee over many decades. The pension committee operates within the framework established under the Carleton University Retirement Plan text.

We understand and respect the advisory role of the pension committee but also understand that decision-making power ultimately rests with the Board of Governors (BOG). We do acknowledge that in practice, historically, the committee has worked by consensus and that changes have not been made unilaterally by the BOG, but the University cannot guarantee that such practices will continue.

Our proposals that would prohibit the BOG from making unilateral changes to the plan or plan text and that would ensure the committee would continue to make recommendations in a fashion consistent with current practice were rejected.

The university's focus at bargaining is to harmonize language in the collective agreement to reflect the current practice of a collaborative approach to administering the pension plan. This approach relies upon a pension committee that is dominated by employee representatives, including a representative chosen by CUPE 2424, and ensures that no one employee group can withhold agreement on decisions that are in the best interest of all plan members.

The University cannot argue that what is in the best interest of all plan members is protected through current practice while simultaneously arguing that current practice cannot be assured.

The CUPE 2424 pension representative, while appointed by us, is not beholden to us and is required to remain independent. CUPE 2424 pension representatives have not, would not, and could not withhold agreement on decisions that are in the best interest of all plan members.

We lost our long-time pension rep last year when she took a position outside of our bargaining unit. It is worth noting in the context of the current discussion that the pension committee met during our search for a replacement. We asked that any voting items be deferred until the next meeting in the absence of a 2424 representative, but that request was denied.

The university offered a solution that would allow the union to preserve any pre-existing legal rights; however, the union is seeking to maintain a proposal that would alter the governance of the pension plan and we cannot privilege one group over another.

The Union does not believe it is in either party's interest to fight legal battles over matters that are clearly defined in Collective Agreement language, nor do we believe that we are seeking privilege over other groups. In fact, we believe that strong pension benefits and protections are a benefit to all.

In Solidarity,
Jerrett Clark
President, CUPE 2424