

CUPE COMMUNIQUE

Canadian Union of Public Employees **CUPE.ca**

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Talks stalled at SMU as academic workers prepare for possible strike

Halifax, NS – After almost a year at the table, negotiations with part-time faculty at Saint Mary's University (SMU) hit an impasse Thursday afternoon. Workers took a strike vote last week, with 87% of votes in favour of job action.

"We made every effort to identify the issues that are most pressing to our members and came to Thursday's conciliation meeting ready to get a deal," said Lauren McKenzie, President of CUPE 3912. "Unfortunately, the employer was unwilling to engage on any 'non-monetary' proposals—that is, they wouldn't discuss any issue except wages."

Key items still on the table include improved stipends, but also proposals on faculty appointments and contract timelines.

"We have absolutely zero job security," says Erica Fischer, part-time instructor and Vice-President with CUPE 3912. "We have separate contracts for every single class we teach, and we apply and re-apply for those contracts, every single term, for every single class. No one has any guarantee they'll be employed a few months down the road. We have been working like this for years."

Part-time faculty at SMU are asking for guaranteed work for instructors who have taught for at least three consecutive years. This would mean part-time instructors who have taught one class every term for three years would be guaranteed a contract for one class every term for the following three years. If an instructor taught two classes every term for three years, you would be guaranteed to teach two classes for the following three years.

"All we're asking for right now is that part-time faculty get some guarantee of income beyond the current academic term," continued Fischer. "And the employer is unwilling to even talk about this."

Part-time faculty at SMU are also among the lowest paid university instructors across the country, earning a stipend just over \$6,000 per course, per term. Even at the highest courseload, this amounts to no more than \$28,000 from September to April.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3912 represents approximately 150 part-time instructors at SMU, with 30 more workers having lost their job in course cuts this past May. CUPE estimates around 30% of SMU courses are taught by part-time faculty.

"Liveable wages, long-term contracts, and a path to permanent employment would all have a huge impact on our quality of life," said Neil Balan, part-time instructor and CUPE 3912 member. "The university benefits so much from having experienced instructors, while pushing postsecondary education towards a gig economy model. You can't have it both ways."

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