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“Top Employer” University of Guelph attempts to silence employees on campus

GUELPH, ON — Employees at the University of Guelph are in disbelief after representatives from the University entered the office of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3913 unannounced to remove posters with messages related to bargaining issues. The office was empty when the University’s representative entered, but members of the CUPE 3913 – which represents Teaching assistants and Contract Instructors – returned to find a note affixed to the door indicating that the University representatives had removed the posters. Ashley Wilson, president of CUPE 3913 said “I can’t believe that the university would do this, the posters simply state what we are asking for in bargaining: tuition relief, job security, benefits.”

CUPE 3913 has been in bargaining since September and the posters – initially created for a rally in November – had been in the office windows for over a month. “We put them in the window so that students could see them from outside. No one had a problem with them for a month, but the sentiment appears to have changed now that we are nearing conciliation,” said Wilson. She also added, “it is frightening and reprehensible that the University of Guelph would attempt to silence workers and restrict their rights to communicate about the issues that are being discussed in bargaining.”

The union and the university administration are set to meet with a provincially appointed conciliator on January 17, 18, 19. The major issues remain tuition relief, job security and benefits, but there are still many more outstanding items. Wilson said that the University’s approach to bargaining has been more aggressive than previous years with many proposed concessions for both Teaching Assistants and Sessional Lecturers despite the University of Guelph’s healthy financial position and a surplus of \$66 million at the end of the last fiscal year. Currently teaching assistants and sessional lecturers see most of their wages erased by rising tuition costs, they must re-apply for their jobs up to three times every year and have few benefits to speak of.

In February of 2016 the University of Guelph was named the 6th best employer in Canada by Forbes magazine. “It is important to inform students about our working conditions,” Wilson added, “because our working conditions are students’ learning conditions, and at the University of Guelph the reality is that our working conditions include low wages, no job security, few benefits and now we can add threats and intimidation to that list.”

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