

CUPE 3913

Teaching Assistants and Sessional Lecturers at the University of Guelph

The Executive of CUPE 3913 strongly condemns the threats made by The Office of the President on Saturday evening. Threatening legal action if student protestors do not dismantle the People's Plaza for Palestine does not encourage "peaceful and voluntary dismantling"; it is coercive, threatening, and an escalation on behalf of the university administration. The university has repeatedly disrespected the well-being of students in the People's Plaza by cutting off power, restricting access to bathrooms, and refusing to address repeated issues of intimidation and harassment by community members against campers.

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The fact that this email went out at 7:19PM on a Saturday evening, barely 24 hours before they requested the dismantling of the encampment, is deliberate. The university administration knows that many students, workers, and community members, who may otherwise show up in support, may be away for the weekend or otherwise disengaged.

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This is part of an ongoing pattern of misleading and harmful communication from the university administration regarding the People's Plaza for Palestine. The university repeatedly weaponizes language of "inclusion" against the encampment and peaceful protest on our campus, and this most recent email is no exception. The terminology and tone used in these communications implies that members of the encampment are creating an unsafe environment for students and staff, even directly saying that the encampment makes "it impossible for the University to maintain an inclusive campus". We have even heard appalling rumours that staff on campus have been warned by management that attendees at the People's Plaza for Palestine are dangerous, a narrative created by the university itself.

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Finally, in threatening legal action against the People's Plaza for Palestine, the university threatens the very nature of campus activism. The implications of such legal action may be far-reaching, as the university has stated that it would pursue legal action against employees for "participating in it". We unequivocally condemn this attack on free expression. The university administration has continued to intimidate students and employees alike into silence on the issue of Palestine. Emboldened by the actions taken by other Ontario universities, they no longer feel pressured to pretend to uphold the rights of students to protest on campus.

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We **condemn** this attack against students and our members.

We **condemn** the use of university funds to intimidate our own students and employees.

We **condemn** the escalation of violence that may coincide with the involvement of police.

We **condemn** the university using our names and our “safety” to justify repression of peaceful protest on campus.

Shame on the University of Guelph.