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**Mediator fails to comply with York's suggested plan. Suspended. The union perseveres in its unreasonable desire for bargaining**

TORONTO, December 2, 2008 –Mediator was suspended after refusing to comply with York university's recommendations. After having suspended talks on the evening of Saturday November 29, York University officials expressed deep disappointment that the union representing its teaching assistants, graduate assistants and contract faculty is unwilling to let its own members be exploited just a teeny bit more.

“The University entered the negotiations to save money, and save money, and save money. But with the union’s monetary demands still threatening a staggering 7.5% of the University's budget, the union is clearly not ready to settle at this time. It’s so disappointing and frustrating that we will have to continue paying our lawyer another 400 dollars per hour for who knows how long, when all the union has to do is to be reasonable and accept that with the worsening weather conditions only the fittest will survive,” said the spokesperson for the University.

Even as talks continued, CUPE 3903 was asking its members to attend a strike rally on Wednesday, December 3 at Queen’s Park to demand an end to the “casualization of education workers.”

“I fear our lawyer is being held hostage by a union more interested in job security and promoting a real discussion on issues of public education than in allowing our surplus budget of 139,9 million that we have accumulated since the last CUPE collective agreements in 2005 go unchecked as usual.” “The union is too blinded by idealism to understand that, by investing in box-like 500-1000 student capacity classrooms, we can increase student-instructor ratios, maximize our profit, and become a truly world-class university,” said the York spokesperson.

“When we finally came to the bargaining table on November 27<sup>th</sup> after successfully avoiding negotiation for several weeks, we understood that CUPE 3903 had a new framework to reach a settlement. But, in spite of the concessions they have already made, we found their demands still unrealistic and unaffordable, especially at a time when we have just approved for our higher administration salary increases that are several times higher than CUPE’s wage increase demands. The union simply must understand that we are in a competitive world, and it is crucial for us to keep our managers and administrators satisfied, or risk losing them to the private sector. It is highly irresponsible of the union not to keep its demands in check in these hard economic times and insist on living wages for its members who, after all, only teach, research, and facilitate student learning,” the York spokesperson said.

The University entered the latest round of talks in order to reach a settlement and get its funding from the province up and running again. On top of a 9.25 % wage increase over three years, the university proposed:

- select fund increases and indexation to future membership growth – basically we let them think they got it, but then we decide which funds we want to give them.
- long-term full-time teaching appointments, ONLY for those members who pass our most competitive

selective process. The lucky selected few will have to pass the **coarse load** and **public abdication** test, before being admitted to the university's **Special Regrettable Contracts (SRC)**. Namely, these tests will insure that only the most fit and most back-bending members will be considered to teach at our exclusive university. The **coarse load** requires that contract faculty wash the administration's dirty laundry for a full year before they be given a contract which they will then be required to put in the laundry spin for at least a couple of hours so that when it comes out it will be virtually illegible – and all in our favour. Next comes the **public abdication** test, whereby each selected member of the **Special Regrettable Contract** will be asked to read out loud to a journalist of the Toronto Star the illegible jargon on her contract while a person from the administration feeds her each line on a special invisible microphone inserted in her ear.

- benefits and post-retirement benefit improvements such as an on-the-spot spa potty porter at each gate for the poor picketers who just can't stop running in circles.

When talks were suspended, CUPE 3903 was still firm on a shopping list of over 120 outstanding demands including:

- + significant increases in levels of minimum guaranteed funding and graduate financial assistance
- + substantial increases in collective agreement funds, including childcare subsidies
- + appointment of all members of a specified pool of long-service contract faculty to full-time faculty Special Renewable Contracts (SRCs).
- + the right not to use electronic formats for student evaluations and grade submissions

“AND WHAT IS WRONG WITH THAT????” someone shouted into the York spokesperson's microphone...two bodyguards promptly took charge of the intruder and resumed their natural poise.

After that, York officials said there are now very few choices left.

“The union either brings some profitable proposals back to the table, or they agree to our own choice of binding arbitration. In fact, we will be generous and offer the union a choice of ropes they can bound themselves with. One way or the other, the primary goal must be give us some sleep please -- as soon as possible,” the spokesperson said. He then looked to the left where the union bargaining team was seated, patiently waiting for him to return to the bargaining table...then he looked to the right where a horde of reporters were suavely calling his name...and he struck a pose.



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York Is Us endeavours to redefine York University's identity for the university community and the outside world. We are seeking creative and analytical contributions for the XFile Bulletin and YorkIsUs.Org website. We also welcome technical assistance. Contact us. Give us your feedback. JOIN US.

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## Striking Can Be Good for You!

In the firm conviction that striking *can* be good for you, York Is Us pulled an artist-driven evening of strike-positive art and food. They could not have done it alone. The event was held at A Space Gallery at 401 Richmond Street West, co-sponsored by VTape and Fuse Magazine. Volunteers piled delicious, nutritious, culinary creations on tables, laughed, clapped, and helped clean up. The culinary highlight of the evening was Zach Ruiter's carrot cake, which received the Best Food of the Evening Award.

Video screenings began with three shorts by Elizabeth Fearon: *Body Dam* (2005), *Turn the Light Out* (2002), and *Snow Angels* (1998). Fearon's interest in the role of the individual as a member of society makes her work quite pertinent.



*Snow Angels*, Elizabeth Fearon, courtesy of the artists



*One Summer in New Paltz*, Nancy Nicol, Courtesy of the artist



*Undergrad. Z. Ruiter accepts solidarity cake award*



*YorkIsUs.Org*, York Is Us Collective, courtesy of the artists

Nancy Nicol screened an excerpt from her recent project *One Summer in New Platz, A Cautionary Tale* (2008). Set against a backdrop of the Bush administration's policy of endless war and assault on civil liberties, Nicol's video is a cautionary tale of a young mayor of a small village who decided to do the unthinkable and a poignant demonstration of the power of civil disobedience.

The CUPE 3903 Strike Video Committee's compilation of shorts on the current strike, led off with a clear favourite, *Where Has Our Love Gone?* The video committee is dedicated to producing work that boosts membership morale, keeps people informed, addresses media coverage and provides archival information for the future.

Three other videos provided a historical context for intersections between labour disputes and cultural production. *The Lie Machine: Media Coverage* and *Only Doing Their Job – The Police, The Law and the Miners*, documented biased media coverage and police violence against striking British miners in 1984. Susan Fairbairn's whimsical *Tell the People*, reminded viewers of the huge popular support behind the 1997 Days of Action.

Zach Ruiter's carrot cake recipe at Striking Can Be Good for You Recipe Exchange:  
<http://www.facebook.com/gr.oup.php?gid=31932192167&ref=mf>

Elizabeth Fearon's formal art education included a B.F.A. (1995) from York University and a Post Graduate Diploma in Post Production from Humber College (2002). <http://www.elizabethfearon.com/>

Nancy Nicol is a professor in Visual Arts and a long time YUFA (York University Faculty Association) activist. She acted as the equity representative on the YUFA bargaining team, working with CUPE to bring in the SRC in 1999.

Contact the CUPE 3903 Strike Video Committee: [cupestrikevideo@gmail.com](mailto:cupestrikevideo@gmail.com)  
See their videos at <http://cupestrikevideo.wordpress.com/>

The York is Us collective came together to help York University redefine itself and its possibilities.  
Become a friend of York Is Us on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1631242187>

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