

March 3, 2020

Last week, one of our Unit 1 members, a Teaching Assistant, participated in one of the ongoing rail blockades in support of the Wet'suwet'en. Our member was interviewed by a public news source and was reported to have made claims about requiring students to participate in the blockades. The comment she was alleged to have made was not an accurate representation of what she actually said regarding students and the potential for a teachable moment. By virtue of this reported comment, our member has been subjected to targeted harassment and bigotry by members of the Hamilton community and beyond. Let us be clear at the outset: The claims our member was said to have made were not accurately reported, and even if they were, they would constitute no violation of the Collective Agreement which sets the terms of her employment.

CUPE 3906 has issued a [statement](#) standing in full solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en and has offered financial support to the Unist'ot'en Camp's growing legal defence fund.

Meanwhile, in what appears to be an indirect yet targeted response to our member, McMaster University (our member's employer) published a message via their Twitter account addressing the situation, claiming that grades cannot be associated with attendance at any particular protest. This message does not refer to any portion of the Collective Agreement between Unit 1 of CUPE 3906 and McMaster University, nor does it refer to any internal university policy.

The Collective Agreement *does*, however, outline McMaster's duty to provide its Teaching Assistants with a safe working environment. By posting this message to the university's public Twitter account, McMaster created an unsafe environment for one of its employees (who is also a student), essentially inviting - indirectly or not - targeted harassment and bigoted vitriol. Since the tweet was posted, our member has received direct messages rooted in racism and misogyny, as well as calls for the termination of their employment. As a union member, a Haudenosaunee womxn, and a human being, it is completely unacceptable that she has received such messages. McMaster's tweet has drawn dozens of online comments, many of which are in clear violation of the university's *Discrimination and Harassment: Prevention and Response Policy*. While we recognize that McMaster itself has not posted these racist and bigoted comments, deleting the tweet would be a step in the right direction to securing a safe working environment, enforcing their own discrimination and harassment policy, and taking away the space for these comments to be made and seen publicly.

Further, since our member has not violated any aspect of the Collective Agreement, any and all statements calling for our member's termination are not only completely unfounded, but demonstrate a striking lack of understanding of what it means to be an employee, let alone a Unionized employee.

We find this event particularly egregious and ironic given McMaster University's [repeated public support of reconciliation](#). In particular, McMaster has stated it is "fully committed to supporting our Indigenous students, faculty, staff and local communities now and in the weeks and months to come." Within the past weeks, McMaster has had the opportunity to put these words into action by standing up for its members (be they students or employees) as they support Indigenous rights across Turtle Island. Instead, McMaster chose to remain silent and, even worse, to tacitly (if not explicitly) endorse the harassment our Indigenous members are facing. The irony of allowing such anti-Indigenous hatred

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to go unchecked in a time when the university continues to tout its commitment to so-called “reconciliation” should not be lost on any of us.

CUPE 3906 stands in solidarity with our member (and indeed any other land defenders) in the face of such abuse. We also support their participation in the solidarity blockades.

Because McMaster has facilitated and exacerbated the issues outlined above, we publicly call on the university to immediately take the following actions:

1. Remove the tweet.
2. In keeping with McMaster’s stated commitment to reconciliation, as well as its duty to ensure a safe working environment of its employees, issue a statement condemning the attacks being made against our member.
3. In continuation of the above, issue a statement condemning anti-Indigenous violence in all forms, including both resource extraction and the harassment of so many land defenders, including our member discussed herein.

Sincerely



Nathan Todd
President, CUPE 3906