



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO EDUCATION WORKERS

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Dear Friends,

Greetings from the membership of CUPE 3902, which represents 8,000 contract academic employees at the University of Toronto, including nearly 1,000 postdoctoral research fellows. We write to you with best wishes and full support for the campaign of the PSAC, Local 610, to organize postdocs at The University of Western Ontario.

Postdocs, who were certified as CUPE members in 2013, were the most recently organized employee group in our Local as well. In fact, when CUPE undertook to organize postdocs at U of T, the University tied the process up in court for years, arguing that postdocs are not real employees but rather interns who draw on the University's beneficence for their professional development.

Of course, we all know that in fact postdocs take on an increasingly large share of universities' research labour, often in precarious conditions and at low pay relative to their significant experience and the high value their work brings in. And for that reason the Ontario Ministry of Labour ruled that postdocs *are* employees and have the right to form unions and advocate for better working conditions.

Here at U of T, unionized postdocs successfully negotiated their first Collective Agreement last year. It just one round of bargaining with U of T, they won pay increases and better job security. They made U of T start paying half of the premiums for their health benefits. They negotiated a formal grievance process to settle workplace problems outside of the sometimes difficult supervisor-researcher relationship. They guaranteed full EI top-ups for members who left on pregnancy and parental leave, and they all got guaranteed paid vacation.

Of course, postdocs still face many challenges at U of T, and every round of bargaining will be an opportunity to make further gains. But now they have a union and a formal, recurring process within which to make these gains and to push for them together. I doubt you would talk to anyone here who would prefer going back to individually haggling over their working conditions with their immediate supervisors on an ad hoc basis.

PSAC, like CUPE, has been an early leader in organizing and representing postdocs. We are pleased to learn of their efforts to organize postdocs at Western, and on behalf of our 8,000 members we encourage you to get involved with the campaign and to vote "yes" to a union for postdocs.

In Solidarity,

--Ryan Culpepper
Chair, CUPE 3902