



## WHAT IS A STRIKE?

A strike is the withholding of labour by workers in order to obtain better wages and/or working conditions.

Under normal circumstances, a picket line is the physical manifestation of a workforce on strike. It also prevents the employer from hiring “scabs” to replace striking workers, which would weaken their leverage. With a (normal) picket line, entrances to the workplace are literally blocked by workers’ bodies. The idea is to cause maximal disruption to the regular functioning of the workplace, inducing the employer to accept striking workers’ demands lest their bottom line suffers too greatly.

## ARE STRIKES EFFECTIVE?

A strike is the expression of a workforce’s collective power. In effect, a workforce on strike is saying to its employer, “You depend on our labour and you cannot make use of it until our demands are met.” This is why, in general, strikes are more impactful than protests and petitions. A workforce on strike is not just “asking” its employer for better wages and/or working conditions; it is leveraging real power against the interests of its employer in order to get what it wants.

There are those who will say that strikes are bad and that dissatisfied workers should accept what they are given or else find a new job. But the truth is that, since the interests of employers and their workers are never fully aligned (i.e., since employers will always want to keep costs down, including the cost of wages, worker benefits, and so on), in order to improve their lot, *workers have to fight for themselves*. In doing so, as history shows, the strike is our most powerful tool—even when its use is only threatened. As such, every time a unionized workforce enters a round of collective bargaining with its employer, it needs to be *prepared* to go on strike. If it is not prepared to do so, the employer will have little reason to accept any changes proposed by its workforce.

## WHAT IS A LOCKOUT?

A lockout is the opposite of a strike. It is the temporary shutdown of a workplace by an employer to strongarm workers into accepting certain conditions. Traditionally—and this still does happen—workers will show up to their jobs only to find that the doors to their workplace are literally locked. Usually, this is done to break up labour unions, to break workers’ spirits, and to force workers at the bargaining table to accept concessions or rollbacks.

## ARE WE GOING ON STRIKE?

Recently, your Bargaining Team filed a No Board Report. This started a seventeen-day countdown at the end of which (March 21st) we will be in a legal strike position and the employer will be in a legal lockout position. In this seventeen-day period, the Minister of Labour appoints a mediator to facilitate discussion at the bargaining table.

Although we could legally go on strike as of March 21st, we will not do so. In the days that follow, CUPE 3902 will call a meeting with the Unit 1 membership at which we’ll discuss whether to accept a Tentative Agreement or to go on Strike.

## **IS IT SAFE TO STRIKE DURING A PANDEMIC?**

Yes. Unions all over North America have gone on strike during the pandemic. We are planning strike action to adapt to these conditions. Instead of having a mass of people on campus, we will have small teams of people all around the city, based in the neighbourhoods where members reside. We are making this as safe and easy as possible for you, so that you don't need to use transit. We will have activities at these sites across the city, organised by Picket Captains, and will focus on ways to raise awareness of our bargaining platform and our value as workers at U. of T. If U. of T. refuses, hypocritically, to live up to its image as an excellent employer, we are prepared to tarnish its reputation in a manner unprecedented by any of our past strikes.

We have set up a Health, Safety, and Equity Committee which monitors changes in province-wide rules surrounding COVID-19. This committee will visit the different sites to ensure that individuals are following safety protocol; picket captains will also be specifically trained in maintaining physical distance and keeping groups small (as required by public health guidelines) and they will be supplied with health and safety packages (with contents such as hand sanitizer and masks).

## **I CANNOT PARTICIPATE IN A PICKET DUE TO HEALTH ISSUES. IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE I CAN DO?**

Yes. There will be multiple ways to strike: if you make a request for accommodation to us (we will set up a form for this) you will not be required to take on conventional in-person duties, and will instead take on alternate (remote) duties, or a reduced/modified load of in-person duties. That said, CUPE National does not consider *general* concern about COVID-19 (without also being at high risk) sufficient for approval of alternate duties. We are looking into whether they would consider childcare obligations reason to access alternate duties.

## **WILL I GET PAID FOR STRIKE ACTION?**

Yes, but you do need to be on the payroll currently in order to be entitled to strike pay. National regulations state: "For each calendar week, maximum strike pay is \$300 for a minimum of 20 hours of picketing or completing other assigned duties. Normal strike schedule is 5 days a week, 4 hours per day." Strike pay is there to cover members who are actively contributing to the actual strike. It comes from CUPE National, not U. of T. The Employer will NOT pay you for your bargaining unit work while you are on strike.

## **WILL MY STUDENTS BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED?**

Ultimately, adverse impacts are determined by the University, and may be wielded to discredit the strike. Take a look at our guide on how to talk to your students about a possible strike [here](#).

We expect the University to implement an Academic Continuity Policy to mitigate the adverse academic impact of a strike on students, and to minimise the power of our strike. What that policy might involve is entirely up to the University administration, but needs to be agreed to by the Faculty Association (UTFA). Such a policy may or may not address the financial impact of a labour dispute, but likely will.

For students who are also Unit 1 workers, there could be an adverse financial impact on those who elect not to participate in the strike and thus do not earn strike pay. While in the past we have been able to negotiate a return-to-work protocol that includes back-pay, there is always the possibility that the Employer will not agree to it.

## WHEN WILL OUR FIRST STRIKE-RELATED ACTIONS OCCUR?

It's important to note that the threat of a strike is the best defense against one. You can help us avert a strike by taking part in conspicuous displays of solidarity *now*. [Here are some effective, easy ways to do this right away](#). Getting students on our side is another way to apply pressure on U. of T., so please take a look at our [guide on talking to your students here](#), if you haven't already.

Although it is far from set in stone when or whether we will call a strike, we intend to visibly demonstrate to U. of T. that we are preparing for a strike through a set of neighbourhood-based actions on March 24th. You can [register for the March 24th strike preparation day here!](#)