



Courier

Queen's University Staff Association

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SUPPLEMENT – JANUARY 2010

Should Queen's Support Staff unionize ? QUSA Members Speak Out !

**IN
THIS
SUPPLEMENT**

(Submissions alphabetical by first name; group letter at end)

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Introduction and Links

Should the Queen's support staff group unionize?

QUSA is pleased to offer a Courier Supplement as a vehicle for our members to SPEAK OUT on this controversial topic.

Around 650 staff members currently hold membership in QUSA. We know that some of our members support unionization, some are opposed, some are neutral and some are undecided. Therefore, as a representative body, QUSA has remained neutral on the question of unionization, while facilitating member education and awareness of the pros and cons through links on our website.

The **Courier** Committee's decision to publish a letter from eight QUSA members making a case against unionization in the November 2009 issue proved to be controversial. In the context of ongoing pro-union communications from the staff unionization group (QUSW) through meetings, direct approaches and a website, our intention was to facilitate a window of opportunity for the opposing voice to be heard. Nevertheless, we were criticized for violating QUSA's previously-stated standpoint of neutrality.

Arising from this came discussions within the QUSA Executive as to whether QUSA has exercised due diligence in its role of promoting education on the topic of unionization. This **Courier Supplement**, plus an upcoming **Town Hall Meeting open to all staff**, are intended as ways for QUSA to fulfill its responsibilities to staff in this regard.

Arrangements and a date for the Town Hall Meeting are currently being finalized, at which point information will be circulated. We encourage our members to attend, and to bring non-member co-workers.

In the meantime, we would like to thank all those who have provided submissions to the **Courier Supplement**. We hope you find it useful and informative. In closing, we would like to remind all our readers that opinions expressed in the submissions are those of the authors, not those of QUSA as the staff representative body. QUSA continues to remain neutral in the unionization debate.

Spring Forsberg
QUSA President

Can't decide? Check out these sites:

Queen's University Staff Union Campaign website: <http://www.qusw.ca>

Queen's HR Information: http://www.hr.queensu.ca/workandcareer/staff_union_drive.php

QUSA 2008 Pros & Cons Presentation: <http://www.queensu.ca/qusa/Pros&ConsPres.htm>

QUSA 2008 Statement: <http://www.queensu.ca/qusa/UNIONIZATIONPROCESS.htm>

QUSA 2008 How-to-Decide Information: <http://www.queensu.ca/qusa/DECIDE.pdf>

"Fear all too often creates the urge to control, and to suppress debate."

It occurs to me that the source of much misunderstanding and consequent divisive feelings about the current Queen's staff union drive is the absence of a free and open debate of the pros and cons of unions in general and a Staff Union at Queen's in particular. What is being sought is the opportunity for fully informed individual staff members to vote Yes or No. Yes, I want to be a union member. No, I do not want to be a union member.

Are unions controversial? Yes. Therefore, it seems to me that information needs to be widely available, opportunities for comment and questions need to be promoted, and debate needs to be welcomed and facilitated. The more that this is done, the more valid will be the outcome of any eventual vote, should sufficient numbers of staff sign cards indicating that they would welcome the opportunity to vote for or against the proposed Staff Union.

Fear all too often creates the urge to control, and to suppress debate. It seems to me that this is the antithesis of the ideals and philosophy of a university. Let's just have it out.

***Barb Schlafer
Ban Righ Centre***

"I think we do really well at Queen's..."

Is anyone else sick and tired of hearing about the Union? It seems that, almost daily, I am subjected to union brainwashing, but the moment anyone expresses anti-union sentiments, the pro-union crew jumps down their throats!

I for one don't really want a union representing me. I think QUSA does a fantastic job, without being adversarial (which I'm pretty sure wouldn't be the case if USW were representing us). Where else in Kingston can we do what we do and

receive the pay and benefits that we currently receive?

I think we do really well at Queen's, and I wish the USW and their followers would just shut up. Let's have a vote and get it over with!

***Holly Spencer
Department of Biochemistry***

"Queen's staff members clearly do not have freedom of speech when it comes to pro-union discussions."

I am writing to you because I recently read the November QUSA Courier and am quite upset to read a very negative letter about the Staff Union campaign.

In the President's Report on the third page of the November Courier, Spring Forsberg states that, "The QUSA Executive and I have been wrapped up for many months in trying to meet the challenges of an 'engaged' environment and in attempting to represent all parties and opinions in a fair and consistent manner ... it is the sincere goal of myself and the Executive to continue to represent all members .." and "we believe we have found a way to meet the needs of all our members of varying opinions by remaining neutral in regard to the union drive." I can imagine that this would be a fine line to walk and have had no serious issue with the way QUSA has handled the details regarding unionization - until now.

How has QUSA represented all parties and opinions by publishing a 'letter to the editor' representing only one side of the union debate? By publishing this letter, how has QUSA remained neutral?

While I respect the right of each and every one of us to have freedom of speech and the right to our own opinion, I believe that QUSA made a huge error in judgment by printing this letter. Queen's staff members clearly do not have freedom of

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speech when it comes to pro-union discussions. We are not allowed to discuss the union drive in the office, put up posters in the office, use the campus mail system, submit articles to *The Gazette*, send e-mails using our Queen's accounts, or have meetings in University buildings other than the JDUC. So, why does QUSA see fit to aggravate the situation further, by printing a negative letter about the cost of unionization? A letter that does not address the fact that union fees are tax-deductible, therefore making that 'simple math', calculated in the letter, incorrect simple math.

Since QUSA has claimed neutrality with regard to the Staff Union campaign, no such letter should have been printed in the QUSA Courier in the first place. This leads me to believe that QUSA is not neutral on the issue.

Further, as QUSA did choose to print the letter, QUSA should have ensured that all the facts (e.g., that union fees are tax-deductible) were accurate. Also, QUSA should have elicited a letter from a pro-union group, so that both sides of the debate could have been fairly represented.

Jackie Jones
Dept. of Microbiology & Immunology

"It is nice to see some dialogue regarding the union drive and whether QUSA or USW would be better for staff representation."

I read with interest the letter in the November QUSA Courier. It is nice to see some dialogue regarding the union drive and whether QUSA or USW would be better for staff representation. There are a couple of items in the letter that I felt important to comment on.

With regard to union dues, it should be noted that they are tax-deductible (as are QUSA dues) based on income, to approximately 31% for a person

making \$45,000. Therefore, the amount quoted would be ~ 31% less, after taxes.

With regard to the Drive Test people, I too was very concerned when I heard how long they had been off work. I investigated a little further, however, and found out that these members had actually turned down the second offer that was made to them and voted to continue the strike. Just recently they voted to accept an improved offer from their employer and to end their dispute. Remember, it is the members who vote on whether or not to strike. At Queen's, I currently do not know of anyone who would vote for a strike. And, to date, the 7,000 members of the United Steelworkers who work at universities across Ontario have never voted to strike.

In closing, I would like to comment that I too think QUSA has done a good job in negotiating on our behalf, especially when you consider how few resources they have (only what \$6.50 per month per member will buy). Unfortunately, they can only negotiate a Memorandum of Agreement. As such, the tuition benefit remains largely unfunded for QUSA continuing staff members for the winter payment; however, all CUPE locals and QUFA members have done better by receiving partial or complete winter-term payments as negotiated in their collective agreements. The survey that was done by MacLean's for the Top 100 Employers lists this as one of the benefits that Queen's employees have - less true for non-unionized staff.

I personally would prefer to pay slightly higher dues and have a collective agreement.

Jean Jeffrey
School of Graduate Studies

"We don't need a union - we need a Better QUSA"

I was greatly cheered to read the anti-union letter in the last issue of the Courier. I was beginning to wonder why pro-union activists had a website, an on-campus support group and the attention of

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our Staff Association, while the anti-union activists were invisible. Good for you for showing yourselves, and count me amongst your number!

QUSA is a volunteer organization: the members make a commitment to run our Association and fulfill our delegated responsibilities in the academic community. All members have the opportunity to participate in the governance of our workplace. As a former participant on three committees, I believe that we grow as individuals in service to our community.

Still, there is room for improvement. First, I propose that all QUSA Executive Committee positions should have a minimum three-year term, rather than a one-year term, so that an effective contribution to the goals of the members can be made. Second, QUSA representation on University committees should be determined through an open election at the end of the term, as determined by the committees' terms of reference, to a maximum of three years, or when an opening presents itself. As well, these QUSA representatives should submit written reports at least annually, like the QUSA Standing Committee Chairs are required to do. These reports should be published, perhaps with the Minutes of the Executive Committee, to provide insight into the role of QUSA on campus. And, finally, the number of roles a member fills should be limited, to improve their effectiveness in those roles.

By providing our members with a fair chance to learn about and to participate in the full breadth of opportunities available to them, our governance will become more transparent and ultimately will better reflect our needs.

Continuous improvement should be our goal. If you have suggestions for improvement, let your voice be heard. And let's keep our money where it belongs—in our pockets!

Karilee Reinbold
School of Computing

“Arbitration to settle differences between an employer and employees is the only way to provide security.”

I am a retired teacher and know the value of a union. I began in 1964 when teachers were only making about 60% of what industry personnel (with much less education) were making. Through the collective bargaining of our unions, I ended my career with a respectable salary, benefits and a pension. It was only through the hard work and dedication of the representatives of the teachers' union that we were able to achieve this.

How can any of us provide Queen's with our best efforts knowing that, at any time or on any day, we can be let go from our job with no chance for appeal?

Will our work time be reduced from 5 to 4 or to 3 days per week with no chance for appeal? Will we be terminated with no chance for counselling or with no attempts to resolve an issue?

Arbitration to settle differences between an employer and employees is the only way to provide security and produce a comfortable work environment. A comfortable work environment reduces stress. Thus, Queen's would become a more enjoyable place to work.

Ken Ball
Faculty of Education

“QUSA will never have the voice that a union can provide.”

I am in favour of unionization for the General Support Staff of Queen's University. The previous letter in the Courier spoke only of union dues and wage increases. Wages are not my first priority. Having a collective democratic involvement in what happens in my workplace is a far more important issue. QUSA will never have the voice that a union can provide.

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With the current academic climate at the University, job security should be on everyone's mind, especially support staff. We have absolutely no protection.

Lynda Lachance
Office of the University Registrar

"I believe that with a union we would have had the resources and the expertise to find out what the University was really prepared to give its support staff ..."

The last round of Salary and Benefits discussions between QUSA and Queen's was very confusing.

After QUSA members rejected the first proposal, we were then presented with a new one and told it was the best we could get. Shortly after the Agreement was finalized, Principal Woolf thanked staff for taking 2% less than what the University had budgeted for our increase.

I believe that with a union we would have had the resources and the expertise to find out what the University was really prepared to give its support staff, before having us vote on an agreement.

Marg Lawson
Department of Psychology

"QUSA has shown little ability to address the challenges that affect staff, and real challenges are very much on the way."

My many years of employee advocacy, my dealings with Human Resources and Queen's Administration, and my exposure to both a unionized and a non-unionized workplace model have given me a good perspective on the

challenges facing Queen's staff. The collegial, cooperative relationship that staff used to have with the University administrators and managers has been changed to a management model, without the same regard for the uniqueness upon which the Queen's workplace was built. As a result, we staff do not have the relationship with the Administration that many still think we have. When push comes to shove we have nothing to push back with. QUSA has shown little ability to address the challenges that affect staff, and real challenges are very much on the way.

I recently tried to address an employment problem using the University Staff Grievance Policy posted on the HR website at www.hr.queensu.ca/workandcareer/grievance.php. When my hearing began, the University lawyer stated that the hearing had no status in the law, and that the University would not be bound by any recommendations or directives determined by the Appeal Board. Essentially, her point was that the University would not be bound by its own policies with respect to non-unionized staff. This is a reality for Queen's staff with QUSA as the representative body instead of a legally-recognized union. The published policies do not matter; decisions affecting Queen's staff are totally at the discretion of Queen's managers.

Without the resources, expertise and strength of a bargaining unit, QUSA recommended and staff accepted 'the best we could get' salary & benefits offer, which turned out to be about 2% less than what the University had budgeted for staff compensation increases. I do not believe that this is QUSA 'showing leadership'. It is staff being disadvantaged because of QUSA's lack of resources and expertise.

With a Queen's Staff Union, we would have a place at the table beside the other employee groups, where decisions affecting our employment are made. Investing in a Queen's Staff Union is investing in our future. With active staff involvement and with tax-deductible dues that cost less than parking or a ARC membership for most, we can have a voice in maintaining our

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jobs, our salaries and our benefits, and a mechanism to face up to the University's changing interpretations of its own policies.

We should not wait until the big changes are announced. Together, as a Queen's Staff Union run by Queen's staff, we can ensure that we have the equity, fairness and respect that we deserve in our workplace.

Mark Publicover
Department of Geography

"The issues facing staff are huge - we can deal with them much more effectively by achieving the same legal status in our relationship with the University as that held by the other employee groups on campus."

I am writing this letter in support of staff coming together and forming our own union. The issues facing staff are huge and we can deal with them much more effectively by achieving the same legal status in our relationship with the University as that held by the other employee groups on campus.

Principal Woolf's welcome letter, sent out earlier this month, mentioned the issue of salary & benefits costs a number of times, and also that reducing administrative costs will be looked at. To me, this means staff will be cut. I am not saying that if we have a union there will be no staff cuts. However, with a union we can achieve a fair and transparent process for layoffs that would have to be followed, and we will be informed about cuts before they happen.

I would like to thank QUSA for giving us the opportunity to express our concerns. I support a Staff Union.

Monica Desjardins
Faculty of Arts & Science

***"Do you fear for your job?
You are probably right to do so."***

The time has come for staff unionization at Queen's.

Having found itself in an economic quandary largely of its own making, the University administration has foregone some much-needed soul-searching and is taking the quick-and-easy way out: putting the onus for cost-cutting on the faculties and their departments; sucking the life out of the units that provide front-line service to the students. (Was spending really so out of control in our various departments that they are now somehow able to face years of severe cuts without the students noticing?)

And let us not fool ourselves into thinking that cutting back on teaching assistants, contract instructors (where possible - keep reading), photocopying, equipment purchases, and memo pads will be sufficient to save the staff from layoffs. Layoffs have already begun, and can only accelerate as the cuts grow deeper.

Do you fear for your job? You are probably right to do so. The argument some Queen's staff members and administrators have used for years against unionization is that it will result in job losses overall. Well, we haven't got a union, and it seems we have arrived at that state anyway.

Meanwhile, are full-time faculty also in danger of losing their jobs, even those without tenure? No. How about those part-time contract instructors, the people once called "Sessional Adjuncts" and now known as "Term Adjuncts", who have earned a Right of Reappointment under the QUFA Collective Agreement? Maybe, although if Queen's still offers their courses and can't find a full-time professor to replace them, they have to be kept on. So why have these people, even those working only a few hours a week at Queen's, got employment protection where the staff have none? Well, they are in a union, and staff members are not - at least, not yet.

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The Queen's University Faculty Association has expressed its support for the current staff unionization drive. QUFA did so without qualification at its Fall general meeting. Support for the motion at the well-attended meeting was overwhelming: no naysayers, and only two abstentions. The faculty is currently enjoying the benefits of unionization: job protection, reasonable salary increases (well above the below-inflation increases offered to the staff), and a legally-binding Collective Agreement. They want the same for us. Isn't it time we wanted it, too?

Richard Linley
School of Computing

"Instead of blaming 'the University' for not allowing their message to be heard, perhaps the Staff Union organizers should take a hard look at their message."

This is an open letter to USW organizers:

For over a year now I've heard complaints that 'the University' is not allowing enough time/space for the Steelworkers' Union (USW) to conduct its campaign to unionize Queen's support staff. I do not work for Human Resources and my knowledge of labour laws is only superficial, but I understand that 'the University' is constrained by labour laws as to what it can and cannot do when there is an ongoing unionization drive. The laws are very restrictive, so rather than take a chance of running afoul of these laws, 'the University' is sticking to exactly what it is required to do - nothing more and nothing less.

USW knows this but instead is trying to make 'the University' out to be anti-union. This is a convenient distraction from what might be really going on.

My experience is that I have had PLENTY of opportunity to get information. Unfortunately for

USW, all the information I see sends up red flags. I'm sure most staff are getting the same signals. It's not that staff don't see the USW message, it's that they don't like what they are seeing.

The Staff Union organizers should face up to the fact that their offerings are not appealing. Instead of blaming 'the University' for not allowing their message to be heard, perhaps the Staff Union organizers should take a hard look at their message.

Since the summer of 2008 this campaign has been limping along. How long is this going to go on?

Roger Healey
Institutional Research & Planning

"I am a supporter of QUSA as the representative of the non-unionized staff members of Queen's"

This is in response to the letter written by Audrey Hunt, Bev Howes, Bonnie McCalpin, Caroline Burke, Deborah Emerton, Gail Knutson, Nancy Koen and Valerie Bartlett in the November issue of the QUSA Courier. I just want to 'speak up' and let it be known that I do NOT support the union drive. I am a supporter of QUSA as the representative of the non-unionized staff members of Queen's University.

I have worked for Queen's since 1981 as a research, grant & contract staff member. I've seen, and have been a part of, many workplace changes, including 'equal pay for equal work' and job description evaluations. QUSA has played an integral part in many of these changes. I feel that QUSA has done an exceptional job negotiating for increased salary & benefits on behalf of the non-unionized support staff members. The QUSA Executive members should all be very proud of the jobs that they have done.

I feel, however, that in recent months there has been a serious erosion of the confidence in QUSA by some staff members who believe that they will

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be better off with union representation. Having seen a family member devastated by the loss of his pension and savings when the unionized (USW) company he worked for suddenly foreclosed, and having seen several friends lose all their savings when their union went on a lengthy strike, I may be jaded - but I personally believe that many groups at Queens, including research, grant & contract staff, **would not** benefit from a union. In fact, a union may do more harm than good. I believe that unions once had their place in the workforce long ago - but not today, and certainly not at Queen's when we already have an efficient, competent organization like QUSA representing us.

In regard to the erosion of confidence in QUSA, I would like to add one more thing. Some of the recent ListServ emails from QUSA seem to me to have a decidedly "union-supportive" undertone. I am thinking, in particular, about the E-poll regarding open-floor discussions about unionization, and the email regarding a further course of action in response to the letter from the Administration denying the Staff Union Campaign access to rooms other than in JDUC. I would remind QUSA Executive members that QUSA was created to represent the non-union staff members, and as such **MUST** remain neutral. Dissemination of accurate, unbiased information is one thing, but support for the union drive goes against the very definition of QUSA.

Does QUSA support the union drive? Or does QUSA represent its non-unionized members? To attempt to do both would seem to me to be a conflict of interest.

Sandra Vincent
Department of Physiology

The Case for Unionization

**'Union' or 'Association'
- what's the difference?**

With a union, we would have resources and professional expertise working for us: professional negotiators, researchers and lawyers with experience in the university sector. We would have the right to bargain about all terms and conditions of our employment including pensions, salaries, job evaluation to ensure fair pay for the work we do, and improved job security. We would have an enforceable Collective Agreement to create fair and consistent treatment and binding timelines. We would have legal rights to democracy and transparency both within our union and in our relations with the Administration. With an Association, the purview of what we are allowed to discuss with the Administration is limited. We lack the resources and expertise we need. We have no effective way to ensure consistent application of policies or to resolve staff complaints.

Why do Queen's staff continue to fall behind other Ontario university staff?

The Queen's-QUSA Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) covers only our salaries and a few benefits. And even in those areas, we are falling behind. There have been questions surrounding the fairness of our present job evaluation system, and whether staff are fairly compensated for work we do. As well, many staff have been held at the top of the grid for several years, and even the recent \$300.00 one-time payment staff received does not add to our base salary or benefit our pension.

How can a Staff Union improve job security?

The QUSA Memorandum of Agreement does not cover job security or layoffs. A staff member has no input before a layoff or reorganization is contemplated, and no recourse after it takes place. A staff member has no representation to ensure the layoff terms are fair, or that all other options have been explored. The HR department is of limited assistance to staff whose positions are eliminated. We deserve better. With a Staff Union we could bargain for job security protections that fit our specific needs at Queen's. Staff at other Ontario universities have negotiated everything from increased notice before positions

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are eliminated to enhanced severance pay and strong redeployment, recall and retraining rights. We need real representation so that staff are not left to fend for themselves. As the Administration plans ways to cut costs and to 'do less with less,' staff need a process to cope with increased workloads and changing work systems.

A Staff Union could improve our retirement security.

Currently, staff barely have a voice in pension decisions. This is not the case for other employee groups at Queen's. The QUFA Collective Agreement guarantees that the pension plan can't be changed without QUFA's approval. For technicians and custodians (members of CUPE Locals), pension contribution levels are guaranteed in their Collective Agreements. Staff have no such assurances. Only a Staff Union can provide staff with an equal voice at the pension table. We could advance our own pension priorities in bargaining and gain a real voice in pension governance.

Queen's staff play a vital role in Queen's success.

On top of advancing our interests, a Staff Union could also help ensure that our ideas and hard-won experience are truly heard when the University asks for input. We deserve a real voice in the decisions that affect us - just like staff at almost every other Ontario university, and just like our colleagues in the other employee groups here at Queen's. Let's step up and take our place at the table, and make the University a better place for everyone in the Queen's community.

- Carol Kavanaugh, Arts & Science**
- Cheryl Power, Rehabilitation Therapy**
- Debbie Stirton-Massey, History**
- Karen MacIntyre, Environmental Studies**
- Kelly J. Smith, Arts & Science**
- Phyllis Reid, Law**

About QUSA

The Queen's University Staff Association (QUSA) has been representing the interests of Queen's University non-unionized staff for 38 years. Membership is voluntary and new members are always welcome. Visit the website for an enrolment form.

2009-10 Executive Committee

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About the Courier

The Courier is the on-line Newsletter of the Queen's University Staff Association. It is published three times a year: March, June and November..

Submissions for publication are welcome. Submissions must be original and signed. Opinions expressed are those of the writer(s). Please include your name, affiliation and phone number, and submit by email to qusa@queensu.ca by the middle of the month prior to the publication month.

We reserve the right to edit submissions to address style, length and legal considerations. We also reserve the right to edit or reject any submission that does not comply with policy.