

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About a Potential TA/RA (in lieu) Strike or Lockout at McMaster

STRIKE VOTE QUESTIONS:

- **What is a strike vote and why is the Union calling for one?**

It is normal for a Union to ask for a strong “strike vote” during the process of any legal contract negotiations in Canada. In fact, CUPE 3906’s TA and RA (in lieu)’s bargaining teams have asked for a strong strike vote from its membership in virtually every single TA and RA (in lieu) contract negotiations in the past 35+ years, and there have only ever been 2 TA and RA strikes (and 1 “wildcat” strike) since our unionization in the late 1970s.

A strike vote is called by the Union’s bargaining team when the Union requires more leverage at the bargaining table. Generally speaking, the bargaining team feels that it has negotiated as much as it can with the Employer, and needs to demonstrate the membership’s support for the union and the membership’s bargaining priorities before any more progress can be made.

The exact wording of the strike vote question may vary, but it always asks the same basic question: do you authorize your bargaining team to call a strike if negotiations fail at the bargaining table? A strong “yes” to this question with as many members voting as possible is the best scenario: it says to the Employer that they have a “last chance” to return to the bargaining table and negotiate in good faith to get a deal or else the members are prepared to proceed to the “next steps” in the legal bargaining process: conciliation, mediation, and, finally, a strike.

- **Why should we vote yes if there’s a strike vote?**

It is important to vote yes during a strike vote for a number of reasons. First of all, more people voting yes means that we’ll end up with a strong vote. In this situation, a strong vote means that we have 80 - 90 percent of the membership voting “yes”. Based on past experiences, what we’ve seen time and time again is that when we have a strong strike vote, we end up with a strong collective agreement. It sounds counter-intuitive but the stronger the strike vote, the less likely we are to go on strike. This is because a strong strike vote sends a clear message to the employer that we mean business and are not interested in dragging things out at the negotiating table.

Secondly, voting yes in a strike vote is a great way to be involved in the collective bargaining process so as to ensure that your union works for you. Being a TA automatically makes you a part of the union but that is simply not enough. This is a way for your voice to be heard and

for you to be a part of the decision-making process of your union. As with so many things in life, if you do not make a decision, someone else will end up making the decision for you and more often than not, the decision made for you is not going to be one that you like.

Finally, a strong strike vote often leads to a strong collective agreement. Paying union dues is part of being a member of the union. Put it this way: you're already paying dues so why not be involved? Also, you will keep paying dues in the future regardless of what kind of collective agreement we end up with. If that is the case, don't you want to ensure that you will be paying dues towards an agreement that you're happy with? It makes more sense to pay dues towards a collective agreement that works for you as opposed to one that negatively affects you.

- **How many strike votes are there? What is the difference between a “strike vote” and a “strike mandate vote”?**

Under the Ontario Labour Relations Act, there is only one “strike vote” (which is commonly called a “strike mandate vote”). The strike vote/strike mandate vote asks you to give your elected bargaining team permission to call a strike in the event that the Parties reach an impasse at the bargaining table. There is no “second” vote or additional vote required (or recognized by law) to call a strike.

- **Who can vote in a Unit 1 (TAs and RAs in lieu) strike vote?**

Only members of Unit 1 (TAs and RAs in lieu) may vote in a Unit 1 strike vote. Both Classification A members (i.e., members holding an undergraduate degree) and Classification B members (i.e., members not holding an undergraduate degree) may vote. Also, the following members of Unit 1 may vote in a strike vote:

- i. Members who are working as TAs or RAs (in lieu) this term;
- ii. Members who hold a TA/RA (in lieu) funding guarantee or a contract to work as a TA/RA (in lieu) in the 2016-2017 academic year (i.e., “contract in hand”);
- iii. “Political” members of the union (i.e., members who have held a contract work as a TA or RA in lieu in the last two academic terms—i.e., winter 2016 or spring/summer 2016).

Please note that **all** members require personal identification to vote. **Some members** (especially those members in categories ii and iii) **may require proof of membership** to vote (see: next question).

- **What do I need to vote in a strike vote?**

- i. **All members must bring photo ID to vote in the strike vote.** Photo ID includes your student card, and/or a government-issued ID such as a driver's license. (Please note that we cannot accept health cards for privacy reasons.)
- ii. Members who are not working as TAs or RAs (in lieu) in the current term should bring proof of membership to the vote. Proof of membership may be: a letter of offer indicating your guaranteed funding period (with reference to a TAship/RAship in lieu); a letter of offer for a TAship or RAship (in lieu) for the current academic year; and/or a signed hours of work form from the Fall 2016, Spring/Summer 2016, and/or Winter 2016 term(s).

- **Why is the Union sequestering ballots?**

If the polling station staff cannot find your name on our membership list (or if you fall into categories ii or iii in the "who can vote" question above), they will ask you to "sequester" your ballot. This means that you will be asked to insert your completed ballot into a blank envelope, which you will then place into another envelope on which the polling station staff will write your name, student number, department and term in which you are, were, or will be employed as a TA or RA (in lieu). Sequestering ballots allows the union to include as many votes as possible because it gives the union the opportunity to verify your membership in other ways if you aren't on this term's membership list (e.g., by looking you up in our hours of work form records or by verifying your appointment with HR). Once the union has verified your membership, the blank envelope containing your ballot is removed from the outside, identifying envelope, and added to a pile of other anonymous envelopes. Once all of the sequestered ballots have been added, the scrutineers open all of the blank envelopes and count the ballots as marked. This way, the union can be certain that you are actually eligible to vote while preserving the anonymity of your ballot.

- **Can I vote in the strike vote online? Is there proxy voting?**

We are not able to set up the strike vote online for a number of reasons. First, our bylaws do not permit online voting. Second, the online infrastructure to ensure the privacy and eligibility of voters is cost-prohibitive and incompatible with the requirements of our sequestered balloting process.

Proxy voting in strike votes is not prohibited.