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## Five reasons TAs and education workers rejected U of T's deal

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[\*\*Raluca Bejan\*\*](#) (</category/bios/raluca-bejan>) March 25, 2015

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Over the weekend the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3902 held a referendum ratification vote to allow its members to democratically vote in favour or against the second tentative agreement that was negotiated on March 18. The results came in on Sunday night and have indicated the membership's choice of not ratifying the agreement.

The Administration was quick to respond in emphasizing their disappointment with CUPE3902 members in having rejected the "generous" deal. Yet the administration did not shed light on the actual reasons that have driven down the tentative agreement:

**1. The university's administration refuses to provide *per member* benefits for the funded cohorts of graduate students.** The "improved" benefits that the Administration is talking big about are merely in the form of lump sums made to the Graduate Student Bursary Fund and the Tuition Assistance Funds. These funds do not guarantee increases in the Minimum Funding Package to \$17,500 for every graduate student. Rather it is the Union that will administer (in good faith) these funds as such, in order to lift the current funding levels to 17,000. The distinction is a fundamental one. Just think about the logic grounding these benefits. Would you want a less-than modest lump sum payment at retirement or would you rather have a pension? Would you want a universal health care plan or would you prefer a yearly static lump sum that might or might not cover what is it that you need treatment for? Why is it so difficult to understand that CUPE 3902 members are striking for *per member* benefits and not for a top-up sum that would merely form the baseline for the next bargaining round?

**2. The top-up sum is not weighted against enrollment rates, inflation or yearly tuition increases.** An approximate 600 PhD studentships are anticipated by 2019. Canada's economic forecast



**3. The proposed wage increases are lower than the levels contained in the pre-strike agreement.** The administration dropped the projected wages to 3.75 per cent from the former 4.50 per cent. The amount constitutive of the difference has been reallocated to the Graduate Bursary Fund and the Tuition Relief Fund, therefore being budgeted towards the top-up sums.

**4. The tentative agreement was not unanimously recommended by all members of the CUPE Unit 1 Bargaining Team.** Two members declined to recommend ratification.

**5. Many CUPE members are taking the NO vote as a victory.** We are seeing this fight as part of a bigger (labour) struggle and a chance to shed light on the precarity of academic life. We are welcoming the chance to participate in collective action making and to strengthen our efforts in addressing structural change. We are looking beyond our immediate individual needs, wants and desires and we are treating this as an opportunity to get a better agreement for the generations to come. We are educators and not business managers. We do have a social responsibility and we are proud to have this social responsibility. And we have chosen to not take a short term payout at the cost of long term employment insecurity.

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*Image: CUPE*

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