



THE UNION AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS/EMPLOYEES QUICK FACTS

EMPLOYEE UNIONS IN A CANADIAN CONTEXT

- An employee union is an independent organization, which forms a collective unit with the purpose of representing the rights and needs of the workers in front of the employer.
- Although it is recognized and legally protected by the Canadian government, it is a separate organization, whose loyalties lie with the employees that they represent.
- When forming a union, the collective agreement that is negotiated between the union and the employer, is a legally binding contract.
- **Every worker in Canada (regardless of Country of Origin) has the right to organize.** The employer cannot interfere with that right, which is protected under the Ontario Labour Relations Act (can be found at "http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_95101_e.htm". Sections 5, 6, and 7).

IMPORTANT FACT:

The employer (Queen's University in our case) cannot punish you for exercising your right to join a union. Remember that Queen's cannot ask you if you have signed a union card, or ask if you are involved in the drive. This means that they do not have access to this information (unless you provide it), as such are in no position to inform any other parties of your involvement with the union drive. These are legally binding requirements! Your own government will not know about your involvement!

KEY ISSUES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

(1) Financial

- International students are in a more challenging financial situation than domestic students because of issues such as the difference in tuition, the extra costs of UHIP, and the discontinuation of the international tuition award beyond the eligible funding years. Other issues international students are facing are the fact that percentage tuition increases result in higher real increases, and the ineligibility for major external funding scholarships makes them more dependent on TA and TF funding.
- Queen's University recently changed the funding policy for all International PhD Students entering their 5th year of study. Those students who held a tuition bursary for the first 4 years of the

program are no longer eligible for the international tuition bursary beyond their 4th year of study, meaning International Phd's are responsible for making up the difference.

(2)UHIP

- The university health insurance plan was created in 1994 when the Ontario government choose to exclude international students from OHIP the Ontario health insurance plan, Ontario's 35 000 international students contribute \$900 000 000 to the provincial economy each year but are required to purchase insurance from a private company rather than receiving public health care like other Ontario residents. Since its implementation the cost of this insurance program has increased dramatically.
- International students contribute to Ontario Health insurance programs through their taxes but are not eligible for any of the benefits and services that domestic residents receive.
- While some international students receive financial assistance through their supervisors and the Queen's general bursary, many, especially those with families, are still left with a costly burden.
- International students paid in 2007/2008, \$756 for single coverage and \$3348 for family coverage compared with \$528 and \$1584 in 2006.
- Through collective agreements, bargaining units throughout Ontario campuses have secured university-funded pools of money specifically for the purpose of partial UHIP reimbursement, and the campaign to abolish UHIP has been largely carried by TA unions. TAFAs considers this a chief bargaining priority.

(3)Human Rights

- The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that all collective agreements automatically incorporate the *Human Rights Code*, the *Employment Standards Act*, and other human rights and employment-related statutes, whether or not the collective agreements do so explicitly.
- Human rights protection is strengthened by giving labour arbitrators the authority to enforce human rights and other employment-related statutes, and the grievance process has the advantage of being able to resolve disputes relatively quickly, informally, and in a manner that allows for a continuing relationship between the parties.
- Students who believe that they have been unfairly treated because of their accent such as being

Note: While it is important to note that the financial situation of international students is often much more problematic than of domestic students, it is also important not to make promises that TAFAs cannot live up to. This information serves to illustrate the financial challenges international students face and thus show why it is important to give you some protection. A union can only address concerns you have as teaching assistants and teaching fellows.

denied a TA or TFship, are empowered by collective agreements that provide formal support through the union structure.

- **By organizing with a union, students who feel harassed or discriminated against won't have to face these challenges alone.**

For more information please visit www.qtafa.com

Or e-mail us at info@qtafa.com