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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MEDIA RELEASE NOVEMBER 30, 2008

CUPE 3903 Negotiations Update **Union requests continued talks as York University stonewalls**

TORONTO, Ont. – CUPE 3903 has requested a continuation of talks with York University on Tuesday, December 2, but union officials say university negotiators are holding up an agreement by refusing to address the key issues at stake in the strike.

The two sides met for three days last week and some progress was made, but union representatives say university negotiators have stubbornly skirted their main concerns: job security for contract faculty, a reinstatement of benefits and funds to 2005 levels, and subsistence wages adequate for the cost of living in Toronto.

“York would rather sit back, fold their hands and let 50,000 students lose their term than make us a workable offer to take to our members,” said union spokesperson Rafeef Ziadah.

Members of CUPE 3903 do more than half the classroom teaching at York yet their contract represents just 7.5% of the university’s \$848 million annual budget. Even as the economy slows, revenues are growing as a result of tuition fee hikes, increased graduate enrolments, bigger provincial transfers, and donations to the York University Foundation, according to the university’s own recent financial documents.

“Hiding behind the current economic recession is downright deceptive,” said union member Katherine Nastovski. “They’re obviously putting the classroom at the bottom of their priorities, so we want to know where the fees paid by hardworking parents and students, tax dollars and public fundraising are going.”

Ziadah says she finds the attitude of the York administration and negotiators toward employees and students “shocking.” “What is the university’s game here?” she asked. “We are indispensable educators at York and we’re asking for peanuts relative to the university budget. Their four-year accumulated surplus of \$139.9 million by itself is worth twice as much as our annual contract of \$62.5million.”

“Before encouraging the province to get involved, we need to see some leadership from our new university president,” said Nastovski. “President Shoukri needs to step in and press his negotiators to get serious at the bargaining table. “It’s time to stop spending precious university funds on high priced lawyers and public relations flacks and start valuing students and educators by showing some goodwill and negotiating a fair contract,” she added.

The union representing 3,400 teaching assistants, contract faculty, graduate and research assistants has been on strike since November 6.

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For more information, contact CUPE 3903 Communications:
Rafeef Ziadah 416-616-4796 Katherine Nastovski 416-828-3851 Punam Khosla 416-779-3032