

We are "refusing to cross picket lines": Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Student Union and the SFSS CUPE Lockout

by Guest Contributors - Wednesday, July 13, 2011

<http://politicsrespun.org/2011/07/we-are-refusing-to-cross-picket-lines-gswssu-and-the-sfss-cupe-lockout/>

This open letter was originally written by Chelsea Mackay and the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Student Student, published originally [here](#) and republished on PoliticsRespun.org with permission.

Dear SFSS Board Members and President Jeff McCann,

The Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Student Union (GSWSSU) has been blindsided by the recent lockout of CUPE 3338 workers at the SFSS General Office, Out On Campus, and the SFU Women's Centre.

Firstly, we are shocked that you have justified this lockout on our behalf. We were not consulted on this issue, and we absolutely do not find a lockout to be an appropriate solution to the financial issues of the SFSS.

The GSWSSU received \$100 in Core funding this semester, and have not requested any grant money so far. While we understand that other Student Unions and clubs use more money than we do, we still do not find the cuts you suggested for CUPE 3338 Unit 5 workers to be acceptable, nor justifiable. Full time staff, according to your website, get paid \$30.48/hour, and you argue that they should take a decrease in pay to \$26.66/hour. According to our calculations, if staff were to work 30 hours/week, and 48 weeks/year, they would be going from \$43,891.20 per year before taxes to \$38,390.40 per year before taxes. **This is a pay decrease of over \$5,500 per year.** As a collective, the GSWSSU agreed that this is an unacceptable pay decrease, and that the refusal of this wage is absolutely justifiable. We are offended that the SFSS would suggest such a large wage cut for workers who we greatly respect, and we are especially offended that this has supposedly been done on our behalf.

Also, while we have heard from your office that the cuts were meant to be 12% across all workers from all areas, we have heard differently from CUPE workers. Specifically, we have heard that student part-time workers are facing cuts of 40%, and even 50% for recently hired employees. We have also heard that the staff of the Women's Centre and Out on Campus are facing higher wage cuts than the staff from the General Office. Please correct us if we have heard wrong, but the GSWSSU does not support these unequal cuts.

Every interaction the GSWSSU have had with the staff of the General Office, the Women's Centre, and Out on Campus has been extremely positive. We were, in fact, in the process of planning summer and fall events with both the Women's Centre and Out on Campus at the time of the lockout. This lockout has disrupted the planning of these events, and it is likely that they will not happen. The staff at both of these locations has been incredibly knowledgeable, friendly, and excited to collaborate with us, and the GSWSSU is very saddened that we will not be able to hold our events, nor work with these staff this

semester.

On the SFSS website, it reads that:

"The permanent staff of the SFSS are professionals who have specialized skills related to organizing, non-profit administration, finance and accounting, peer support, graphic design, project management and much more. Several of them have worked for student unions for more than 10 years, some more than 20. Each staff person has a detailed job description and a fairly well defined area of responsibility, but also flexibility to help the organization deal with whatever the current situation requires."

We really couldn't agree more that the staff of the General Office are professional and very skilled. The GSWSSU have dealt most closely with Antonio Daling, the DSU Organizer. Without Antonio, our student union would not run nearly as smoothly as it does, if it ran at all. He has always been extremely friendly, professional, knowledgeable, and accessible. He has gone out of his way to make sure that we have been able to hold meetings, access funding, and be well-trained in our positions. He also has a family to support. This is his career. Some of these workers, according to your website, have been working for students for "more than 10 years, some more than 20". These workers are not students, and these are not summer jobs. These are careers for people who have dedicated their lives to students. Yet the SFSS has privileged university politics, student unions and clubs over the livelihoods of these workers. The GSWSSU does not agree with this.

The SFSS has put our student union in a tricky position. While you are supposedly doing this lockout in order to provide funding for student unions, we would now have to cross picket lines in order to access this funding. In solidarity with the General Office, Women's Centre, and Out on Campus staff, and in opposition to the terms of this lockout, the GSWSSU is refusing to cross picket lines. We now have no access to funding, which is supposedly the entire cause of this lockout.

We are also requesting transparency from the SFSS, as many of our members are wondering why this lockout is necessary on a financial level. As stated earlier, our members were blindsided by this lockout, and students are wondering what sorts of spending have led to the need for a lockout. Many members have been looking at the recent Highland Pub renovations as a possible reason for the financial position of the SFSS.

Finally, we do have to call into question the timing of this lockout. While the lockout.sfss.ca site says that the lockout was held during the summer because fewer students would be affected by it, we also have to question whether the summer was chosen because fewer students would be available to stand up with the locked out workers. That the lockout happened only a few days after SFPIRG was denied a lease also appears incredibly suspicious. This can be interpreted as an attempt to break up the Rotunda group, and if these moves were not intended to break up this group, we have to wonder why they occurred so closely together, and during the summer. The SFSS must have realised that these actions could be interpreted as an attack on the Rotunda group, who are essentially SFU's social activism network.

Please be aware that the GSWSSU will be standing in solidarity with the workers who have been locked out, and will be sending a letter to SFU President Andrew Petter. We request from the SFSS Board that

you end the lockout and return to negotiations as soon as possible, and that you focus on transparency with students.

Sincerely,

[The Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Student Union](#)

The Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Student Union represents undergraduate students in Simon Fraser University's Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies department. It is a departmental student union of the Simon Fraser Student Society, the employers of the locked-out members of CUPE local 3338.