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8 April 2008

Statement on Contract Negotiations and the TA Strike

Dear TAs and Members of the University Community:

As you know, early this morning McGill's teaching assistants declared a strike to fight for better working conditions. We did not take this decision lightly and we continue to hope that the administration will work with us to find constructive solutions to the problems we face as professional educators at McGill.

In a letter sent to the community yesterday, Provost Anthony Masi insisted that the administration "wants nothing more than to settle these issues in a timely fashion." For this to happen, the administration must give its bargaining team a broader mandate to improve both our working conditions and the quality of education at McGill.

In recent weeks, it has become apparent that the university's upper administration is still refusing to give its bargaining team the kind of mandate that would allow us to effectively negotiate an agreeable settlement.

- **We will find a solution** when we can work together to reduce class sizes, ensure proper facilities for meeting with students, and provide adequate paid training for any TA who needs it.
- **We will find a solution** when the university admits that our wages exist within a broader context that includes higher fees, unequal funding situations, and other financial challenges that are unique to McGill's highly mobile, diverse, and international graduate student body.
- **We will find a solution** when McGill agrees to contractually binding mechanism to prevent overwork and allow us to ensure an improvement in our working conditions.
- **We will find a solution** when the university begins to treat us as professional educators who play a central role in our students' university experience.

AGSEM has been preparing for the current round of negotiations since the autumn of 2006. Our GA approved the final set of demands in September of last year and we immediately submitted them to the university. We have given the university ample time to prepare a counter-offer that addresses the difficulties we experience on the ground as professional educators. While negotiations have advanced and agreement has been reached on a few points, the administration has so far refused to move on many of the substantive demands that would make a real difference in our working conditions. Even after two additional negotiating sessions with a provincial conciliator at the Ministry of Labour over the week-end, the administration has dug in its heels and refused to offer a single counter-proposal to our demands.

Refusing to acknowledge our needs will not make them go away. The time for *serious* engagement with our demands is **now**.

AGSEM is ready to find creative solutions to the challenges we face in our classrooms and in our day-to-day lives as graduate students and educators. We hope the university agrees and will send its bargaining team back to the table with a mandate to work through these issues.