



**ONTARIO  
FEDERATION OF  
LABOUR**

**LAURA WALTON**, President

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## OPEN LETTER

May 25, 2024

VIA EMAIL: [president@utoronto.ca](mailto:president@utoronto.ca)

Meric Gertler  
Office of the President  
University of Toronto  
27 King's College Circle, Room 206  
Toronto, ON M5S 1A1

Dear President Gertler,

### **OFL to U of T: If you move against the students, you'll have to go through workers first**

I am writing in my capacity as the President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), which represents 54 unions and one million workers in Ontario.

As the voice of Ontario's labour movement, the OFL unequivocally supports the right of students to engage in peaceful protest on campus, as they call for a ceasefire and divestment from companies that are complicit in war and occupation.

I was therefore disappointed to hear about your ultimatum to the student encampment at the University of Toronto: clear out by Monday at 8:00 a.m. or be in violation of a trespass notice.

As trade unionists, we know what good-faith bargaining looks like. You should, too. In most instances at the bargaining table, our members and your representatives have successfully negotiated numerous collective agreements, without resorting to strikes or lockouts.

The same approach should apply here. Negotiations must continue *in good faith*, and without threats of police intervention. The recent successful conclusions to the encampments at Ontario Tech University and at McMaster University, for example, shows what's possible.

By contrast, when administrators choose repression, it rightfully provokes a response well beyond the students. On Monday, thousands of academic workers at the University of California [went on strike](#) to protest their employer's use of violence to clear the encampments.

Universities should be where we learn to debate and disagree with each other—*without the fear of violence*. For Canada's largest university to decide unilaterally when the debate should end, and when police repression should begin, is a betrayal of the values we claim to uphold.

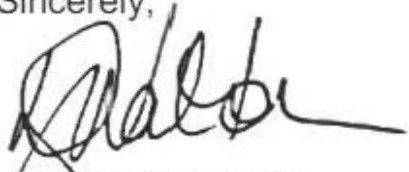
Indeed, your own [Statement of Institutional Purpose](#) describes these values clearly:

Within the unique university context, the most crucial of all human rights are the rights of freedom of speech, academic freedom, and freedom of research. And we affirm that these rights are meaningless unless they entail the right to raise deeply disturbing questions and provocative challenges to the cherished beliefs of society at large and of the university itself.

This is a mandate to support the students, not repress them. In this spirit, I urge you to reverse course immediately, and choose negotiations and discussion over ultimatums and repression.

As a gesture of encouragement, I am calling on all trade unions and allies to join **a solidarity rally on Monday at 8:00 a.m. at the student encampment at the University of Toronto**. If, by then, you decide to move against the students, you'll have to go through the workers first.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Walton', written in a cursive style.

**LAURA WALTON**

President

*Laura Walton is the author of "[Students are making history. All of us should join them.](#)" which appeared on [rabble.ca](#) on May 17, the one-month anniversary of the student encampment movement.*

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