



Ruling gives U of T profs 4.5 per cent over two years

October 12, 2010

Louise Brown

A labour arbitrator, saying he will not be a "minion of government" and bend to Queen's Park's call for a public sector wage freeze, has granted professors and librarians at the University of Toronto a 4.5 per cent raise over two years.

In a toughly worded ruling released Tuesday, Martin Teplitsky said he refused to give U of T faculty a raise of 0 per cent just because Premier Dalton McGuinty has asked for it through his new Compensation Restraint Act or because the university says it can't afford to pay a raise from its recession-battered coffers.

Taking either of these factors into consideration would "compromise my independence," wrote Teplitsky in a 15-page decision. "I would appear a minion of government."

Instead, he noted his ruling echoes the average private sector wage hike this year in Ontario of about 2.3 per cent.

While the faculty was pleased with the ruling, David Naylor, president of Canada's largest university warned the raise will mean "will be scrambling to try to make ends meet." He said the university also pays about 1.9 per cent more each year in merit pay.

Naylor said every 1 per cent raise in faculty pay costs the university \$4 million, so this contract carries a cumulative price tag of nearly \$20 million — money he said could have been used to hire more than 100 new professors or spare some departments from looming cuts to their budgets.

"If you do the math and we get 0 per cent more funding from the provincial government and maybe 4 per cent more from tuition increases, we're still looking at 2.5 per cent more in salaries that isn't covered," said Naylor, noting his salary has been frozen for three years and those of his vice-presidents for two years.

"Every dollar that goes out in salary must come from somewhere else."

In an email sent Tuesday to all U of T employees, vice-president Angela Hildyard predicted "unwanted consequences" would come from having to pay out the salary hike.

Teplitsky also refused to make the university's 2,500 teachers and librarians pay more toward their pension plan despite a request from the university.

The U of T, Naylor said, already puts in about 11 per cent of pension contributions for every 5.5 per cent that employees pay — exactly twice — whereas many other universities and educational institutions pay about the same as their employees.

The university had sought to pay no raise at all, while the faculty association — which is not a labour union and cannot go on strike — was asking for 3.5 per cent in each of two years.

Association president George Luste said he was pleased the arbitrator had rejected McGuinty's call for a wage freeze for all public employees.

"One size can never fit all situations," said Luste, who noted the top 20 salaries at the U of T have climbed about 103 per cent since 1996, whereas the rest of staff has seen their pay rise during that time by only about 30 per cent, roughly the same as inflation.

With similar settlements, including a 3 per cent raise won by 50,000 unionized nurses this spring at dozens of hospitals, Premier Dalton McGuinty has said he is confident "unionized workers of all stripes will see the wisdom of the deficit-fighting pay freeze after the government spent years restoring public services cut by the previous Tory government."

Moreover, McGuinty has warned, "there's no money. We've made it clear. For the next two years, there's no additional money available for compensation."