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Mel Martin Addresses Governing Council

By: Krista Cooney

In an address to the Governing Council at its meeting of June 26, 1997, Mel Martin, President of UTSA, explained that the Framework Agreement, the document which formalized the relationship between UTSA and the University, was outside the Ontario Labour Relations Act. Although the agreement's provisions for policy development and handling of grievances had proven to be effective, its inadequate provisions for dispute resolution on salary and benefits, and the absence of job security at U of T, have UTSA's membership increasingly disconcerted. He noted that last year the University of Toronto's non-unionized administrative staff suffered a salary cut of 1.25%. Increasingly, full-time permanent staff are being replaced with temporary and part-time positions. In the past four years more than 500 jobs have been lost from one of Canada's richest universities.

Although a past bid to become certified with the Canadian Union of Public Employees had failed, some UTSA members had continued to view certification as a possibility. The majority, however, had maintained hope the University would grant voluntary recognition. Since the University had proved unwilling to do so, two options remained to the members: stay with the Framework Agreement, or support the creation of a certified bargaining unit for administrative and technical staff. A referendum was held to determine which of these options the UTSA membership preferred. Of 1,521 ballots released, 1,017 were returned. 56% of ballots reflected a desire among members for UTSA to support a trade union and create a certified bargaining unit to represent the technical and administrative staff.

"If a certification vote were successful," Mel said, "UTSA would assume the responsibility of transferring eligible members to the new organization, and those members who were not eligible to be part of the union would continue to be represented by UTSA. If the vote proved to be unsuccessful, UTSA would continue to represent its membership under the Framework Agreement."

Mel clarified: "The referendum was in the best interest of the University and was not intended to cause friction. UTSA would implement the result of the referendum in a positive manner, consulting with its membership at each step."