

Master Bargaining Update - April 5, 2018

On behalf of the CUPE NL Staff and the seven (7) Bargaining Committees, we would like to thank you for your patience and support as we continue our attempt to secure new collective agreements with this provincial government. We are now in excess of two (2) years without new contracts. The exercise to date has been extremely frustrating for your Committees who find themselves in a political forum dealing with Treasury Board and not with their Employers.

There has been much media around our meetings with the Minister of Finance and his officials since we began Tier 2 bargaining in January of this year. CUPE has not been trying to “reinvent the wheel” at these meetings. We totally understand template bargaining in this province and fully recognize that many, if not most, of the major issues have already been settled at a previous bargaining table. More importantly however we accept our responsibility to bargain fair and reasonable collective agreements for our members without discrimination or jeopardizing the status of those contracts upon their conclusion.

There are three main issues that are preventing us from concluding new collective agreements. They are as follows:

- The government is demanding that CUPE sign a “comfort” sidebar letter regarding the no-layoff article that has been previously agreed. This letter was supposedly required to provide the Minister and his government assurance that this no-layoff commitment wouldn't automatically carry forward into any future agreements.

CUPE offered the following: ***“the parties agree that this document (no layoff letter) will not roll over into subsequent collective agreements ...”***

The government is demanding the following: ***“the parties agree that any provision in the collective agreements...do not automatically roll over into subsequent collective agreements...”***

The difference between these two versions is vast and CUPE can not and will not sign a letter which has the potential to jeopardize the future status of our collective agreements. At contract year end we could find ourselves starting from scratch with every article in the agreement. Current agreement language that has been in our contract for years could be off the table. This isn't a necessary or reasonable proposal from Treasury Board. The government want a comfort letter – we offered them a comfort letter. They are not getting an automatic access to our collective agreements.

- There are still a number of outstanding Local issues which are extremely important to our members, some of which are non-monetary. For instance, five out of six of our Group and Transition Homes are not presently included in the Provident 10 pension plan or the provincial government benefit plan. There is no rational reason why this is the case. There are 21 unionized Group Homes under this provincial government – all of which are presently certified under the Public Service Collective Bargaining Act. Nineteen (19) of them are in both plans, but yet only one out of our six are included. Most of these workers are female and it is very much an equity issue.

Another outstanding issue concerns the Local 1860 Housing Corporation collective agreement. This collective agreement makes no reference to a group benefit plan – even though there is one in place. To date we have been unable to get them to simply acknowledge such a plan. This situation flies in the face of all other CUPE public sector collective agreements. This is a non-monetary issue that needs to be rectified.

- Lastly, we are currently in dispute with government over a new Letter of Understanding regarding the eligibility of retirees to access their benefits. New proposed language seems to restrict access unless you retire from “active employment”. This terminology appears to prevent workers on Long Term Disability, Workers Compensation or unpaid sick leave, who retire directly from these Plans, from receiving their benefits. This issue is still very much outstanding and needing clarification.

CUPE staff and Committee members continue to conference call on a regular basis and are anxious to return to the bargaining table. We will strive to reach new collective agreements, but we must remain committed to not accepting proposals or positions from government such as those noted above.

We will continue to update our members, to the fullest extent that we are able, throughout the process. All updates, including this one, will be posted on our CUPE NL website and will be sent to all Local Officers for distribution. We greatly appreciate your solidarity and support. It is essential for our committees to retain their resolve, energy and determination to take on the task before them.

In Solidarity,

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