



Public Service Bargaining

Negotiations for the 16th Master agreement for 26,000 BCGEU public service members concluded September 27 in Victoria after a marathon session which resulted in a tentative agreement. The deal is for two years and expires March 31, 2014.

"This has been a difficult round of negotiations, involving four one-day strikes and an overtime ban, but the tentative agreement we are recommending to the members is as good as we can get with this government given the economic and political situation facing the province", said Darryl Walker, BCGEU president. "Since we opened negotiations with the government, our committee has been steadfast in the view that the BCGEU is not prepared to recommend a new collective agreement without a decent wage increase and continued employment security. With this tentative agreement we are able to present an offer we can recommend for your ratification."

Under the terms of this agreement, the memorandum on employment security has been renewed and will apply to all regular employees employed by the province as of April 1, 2012. Additionally, wages will increase by 4% over the term and the government has withdrawn the request for proposals (RFP) to privatize liquor distribution.

"These changes provide important protection to workers who have been impacted by workforce adjustment since last year, or who may be in future, as the province proceeds with its plans to reduce the size of the public service by 2,000 positions during this fiscal year and next", said Walker.

As has been the case for the last several rounds of negotiations, the last items on the table involved the 3,500 members who work for the Liquor Distribution Branch (LDB). We've campaigned against the latest attempt to privatize the LDB since February, have used the strike to profile this campaign and have collected over 50,000 signatures from BC residents opposed to this sell-off.

"The package we are recommending for acceptance revokes the privatization RFP and renews the commitment for government to continue to operate a minimum of 185 liquor stores and their distribution system."

Highlights of the tentative agreement:

Wages

Four one percent increases over the term of the agreement and continuation of current temporary market adjustments (TMAs). One improvement we made is to include the TMA rates in overtime.

Employee Rights

Improvements in the process to address bullying in the workforce were negotiated.

In addition, we expanded some leave provisions to include stepchildren, stepsiblings and stepparents in Clauses 20.1 and 20.2.

Auxiliary Employees

Auxiliary employees are now eligible for travel advances, standby pay and will receive an additional \$0.06 per hour in lieu of benefits.

Copies of the Agreement

In an effort to be more environmentally friendly, we have agreed to further reduce the numbers of printed agreements in light of the use of the internet.

"These changes represent real improvements for members", said Walker. "The government's cooperative gains mandate was achieved without making concessions to our contract. We approached this set of negotiations in a responsible fashion and initiated strike action to improve the offer as much as possible. We did not leave any money on the table. In fact, we exceeded the mandate given to government negotiators which will require some ministries to find additional savings in their operations budget. We were also aware that our new finance minister, Mr. de Jong, has decried falling revenues and is re-examining existing budget approvals for wage increases across the public sector. This can be a real risk in the run-up to their pre-election budget which is drawn up in November for presentation to the legislature in February. We did not want to get sucked into the pre-election vortex as an election issue or risk re-assignment of current budget allocations to the pre-election goodie bag. We are back to the table in about 15 months' time and will continue to pursue improvements in wages, benefits, job security and working conditions."

"This agreement could not have been reached without membership support. We recommend that members conclude this round with a "YES" vote. We'll be consulting every local in the new year for proposals for the next agreement."

Public Service Bargaining Committee

Darryl Walker – BCGEU President
Brenda Brown – BCGEU Vice President
Dean Purdy – Component 1
Susanne Francoeur – Component 2
Craig MacKay – Component 5
Doug Kinna – Component 6
Sandi McLean – Component 12
Lori Joaquin – Component 12
Byron Goerz – Component 20

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