

Transcript – Bargaining Update with Darryl Walker – Feb. 5, 2010

[Interviewer] Hello, I'm Brian Gardiner with the BCGEU Communications Dept. communications department. Today, in conversation with BCGEU president Darryl Walker. Darryl, the union's just wrapped up some talks with the provincial government on bargaining with the public service. Can you give us a sense of where the talks are at and what status they might be?

[D. Walker] Well we're slowly but surely Brian moving through the package. There's a number of issues that we've touched on primarily to try to get language pieces out of the way. So quite often in a collective agreement where you may not be able to get the largest increases in terms of monetary package, you look for language increases that would give rights to the members as they work through each year, of something such as vacation and the ability to carry vacation over.

Perhaps the ability to change vacation during the term of the collective agreement or through the year would give them certain rights that we're trying to enshrine for them

[Interviewer] I noticed, Darryl on the union's web , the bulletin from this past session, talked a bit about maybe the start of bargaining was a little slower than you expected. What are some of the hurdles that that you faced it in the last round of talks?

[D. Walker] Well I think you have to understand that first of all it is of what we would call a skinny year, so I'm so looking at wage increases as something that we really have to talk a bit more about. But things such as the benefits package; things such as classification of members and the ability to be reclassified depending on their job responsibilities, and the temporary market adjustments are large pieces of that and we're looking to try and move forward on those.

Quite often we get caught up in minor changes and don't necessarily get a chance to move to the major ones as quickly as we would like. We often find that frustrating and I suspect the other side does as well. So the first day was a little rough. We didn't seem to be getting as much movement as we thought we ought to. But the second and third days I think were much better and I think we started to see the movement that we need to see. Now we have to move on.

[Interviewer] One of the points in the bullpen was the importance of Article 29 committees, and I'm wondering if you can explore a little bit for the members of what the issue is around Article 29 committees.

[D. Walker] Well, Article 29 committees are joint union management committees. They are an opportunity for us and our members to be able to talk at a relatively high levels within each ministry about our issues prior to them becoming grievances. So the employer seems interested in reducing are indeed doing away with the Article 29 committees. We say that would cut many of our senior activists out of the loop around what their rights are under the collective agreement and how things are being dealt with.

Reorganizations and even layoffs in some cases end up being dealt with at Article 29 committees there's a lot of work. And if you think there's probably in excess of 20 ministries that would be 20 committees that would be actually done away with in the hopes of having one larger committee that we don't necessarily think would be able to do the job. So we're very much set in our ways on this one. We will continue to have the Article 29 committees.

[Interviewer] It doesn't sound like bargaining has quite hit crunch time yet and when it does I'm sure you're going to get or the union will get comments from people asking, oh you're asking for too much, the union's asking for too much. How do you respond to the public and to members, some members perhaps who ask that question, maybe we're asking for too much of this round of bargaining?

[D. Walker] Well to start with, bargaining is bargaining and so you ask for a certain level increase. Maybe you do or don't expect to get that, but that's your opening position. We're a pragmatic union Brian. We intend to get collective agreements for our members. We want them on the job sites at work. We want them where they want to be which is doing their job.

So I don't know all that we're asking for too much. I think you have to look back at the precedents set. Nurses and doctors both got three percent a year over two years just prior to the provincial elections. So if that's the standard that the government was willing to set at that time, we believe that there should be something there for us.

But I think that the members of the BCGEU that do the job provincially around this province do a wonderful job of the services they provide. We are the leanest public sector in this country per capita. We continue to do more with less, we have less people on the work site. They deserve respect. They deserve recognition that the job they're doing is important and we expect to see that recognition at the bargaining table in an array of different fashions.

[Interviewer] Bargaining is going to pick up again in the next little bit. What do you expect will be coming up when you sit down with negotiators at the table again?

[D. Walker] Well we're going to continue to work through the package so we're going to continue to look at the language pieces of it. We've set aside specific tables to look at things such as classifications, such as benefits, such as our STIIP agreements there. So we'll be continuing to look at the language itself./ We'll bring in experts from our side, and I suspect that the employer will bring in experts from their side and we'll have smaller tables that will then bring recommendations back to the major table.

[Interviewer] OK so with a full plate of work coming up in the next little while.

[D. Walker] It's not going to be boring.

[Interviewer] This has been an interview with Darrell Walker the BCGEU president, talking about public service bargaining. If you want more details on bargaining and to check bargaining updates, Be sure to go to the BCGEU website at www.BCGEU.ca.