

BG:

I'm Brian Gardiner with BCGEU Communications "In Conversation" with BCGEU president Darryl Walker. Darryl, you've just wrapped up another week of talks with the provincial government. You've been at the table for nine weeks. The bulletin you issued looks like it has been some tough slogging...

DW:

It wasn't an easy week. I think probably it was the most difficult of the lot so far. I'm not sure that's unusual as you kind of get down to the last major issues, which are really those that are left on the table and it becomes a little bit more difficult. But part of the frustration is, that while our members understand the zero mandate so to speak, the expectation was that the employer would talk to us about some language that's important to us in the collective agreement. And we're having a bit difficulty getting some of the simple language I think we'd like to see and of course the job security. At the end of the day, this is really the priority and we're having a difficult time rounding out the key piece.

BG:

Let me just pursue that job security, that employment security. This was the number one demand for members. You talked about it in our previous interviews. Where are we with that – what seems to be holding this up a bit?

DW:

A very good question. What is holding things up? When we talk about job security we're talking about all of our members not just specific groupings. And so we want the ability for people to be able to look at other jobs if theirs' are closed or downsized and so on and have an opportunity to opt into other positions. That's for everybody in the bargaining unit not just a chosen few. So in some cases, they've made a little bit of movement here and a bit there, but in some spots they are very, very reluctant to give us what we need. So we left them on Thursday with a firm understanding that it was coming to the crunch and that they needed to move on job security for every one of our members so that we can get this collective agreement.

BG:

Now with employment security you talked about its importance to the union and the government not moving quite as far as you would like. Has there been any suggestions from government that they want to take some important security measures out of the current collective agreement?

DW:

Well, I think that some of the measures that are there were negotiated four years ago and then two years prior to that in the original extension. So anything that comes out now we would have to consider a concession. So when they start to, I guess, not necessarily come back with a language that we want or the protections we want, we're concerned that they don't necessarily want those protections in the collective agreement, and we're starting to get concessions. I think it's important here to point out as well that, of course, our jobs are the services to the

people of British Columbia. So when we talk about job security, we're also talking about service security for the citizens of BC and in some cases, there's a bit of a danger of losing that.

BG:

Now bargaining starts again the week of March 22. Is it a make it or break it week?

DW:

I don't like to talk about make it or break it. But I think at this stage we have to say if we don't get the movement we need by next week that we may have to talk to our members about our specific mandate. And I think when we talk about our mandate we're also talking about the government's mandate. If it isn't there, if they don't have the correct instructions from the people in charge of this province, we may have to go to our members to help them to get that mandate.

BG:

So we're kind of looking at probably a pretty important week coming up...

DW:

Pretty much so.

BG:

I've been talking with Darrell Walker, BCGEU president. For more information, please go to our website at BCGEU dot ca.