

Transcript: “In Conversation: BCGEU President Darryl Walker on Public Service – February 12, 2010”

[Interviewer] Hello, I'm Brian Gardiner with the BCGEU communications department in conversation with BCGEU president Darryl Walker. Darryl, you've concluded yet another week of bargaining with the government for public service members. Can you give us a sense of how the talks went in the past week?

[D. Walker] Well I think that we're slowly but surely starting to whittle a package down getting into the areas of the things that are perhaps of more concern. For the first part you tend to deal with housekeeping issues and those that may not have a large monetary value to them and at the end of the day you start dealing with the bigger issues. So we're slowly but surely working our way through the package.

[Interviewer] I read your bulletin Darryl and it looked like there might have been two occasions for the bargaining when maybe, I don't know if tense is saying too much, but you made reference to some of the layoffs that were announced a while back and also it looks like the government may have backed off a demand on the Article 29, the labor management committees, can you fill us in on that?

[D. Walker] Well you've hit a very important point here and that is as we work through the package from time to time outside issues – and certainly a layoff is a huge piece for our members – outside issues come to the table and tend to cramp the ability to work with the employer. Sometimes it takes a day or two for us to get back on track and indeed that was the case over the last couple of weeks. Article 29 is an absolutely essential piece of language in our collective agreement that allows us to work on job protection. And job protection is really the primary piece that we will be working on this time around so we did manage to get the employer to back off. They've withdrawn the language to take Article 29 away from the collective agreement and I think that's a piece of good news.

[Interviewer] Good, good and also Darryl I think what's happening now is the main table talks as their called are taking a break and we're now going into component bargaining. Can you fill us in, to our members, just what does the component aspect mean?

[D. Walker] Well for the next two weeks the components, and we have six specific components in the master sector, they are Correctional and Sheriff Services which is Component 1, Component 2 is Hospital and Allied Services, Component 5 is Retail Stores and Warehouse, Component 6 is Social, Information and Health Services, Component 12 is Administrative Services and Component 20 is the Environment, Technical and Operational, each of them represent specific work groupings and the responsibility of the component bargaining committees are to deal specifically with component issues. So issues that would be something to deal with are our stores, our liquor store programs, would be very different than folks who work in the Ministry of Forests, shall we

say, as forest technicians or admin services. Those that work in the institutions such as maybe Oak Bay or The Lodge At Broadmead that are very, very different than the work that is done by a social worker in the Ministry of Children and Family Development so each of them will have an opportunity to work on specific issues after their particular area.

[Interviewer] Do the component agreements have to be settled before the final collective agreement is to be dealt with?

[D. Walker] They will be part of the final collective agreement and the intention is to have them settled in that way. If issues are not able to be dealt with at the component level they will come back to the master collective agreement but all of the agreements will be settled before we try to take this to our members.

[Interviewer] Okay that's very helpful for members, I think, to understand that nature of the bargaining. So you got the two weeks of component bargaining coming up, then you are back at the table again, the main table with the provincial government's bargainers, what are you expecting then, probably early March, what do you think is going to be on the table then?

[D. Walker] Well I think early March we're going to look at what the budget looks like so I think that's one of the first things that again will impact on bargaining. But when we go back in on March the second I think we'll have a relatively pared down package to try and deal with. At that point I think we are going to be in a position of bargaining in good faith is what we want to say and we'll be there at the table to try to get a collective agreement that works for both our members and it's very, very important that it also works for the people of British Columbia. Our members provide services on a daily basis throughout this province. They get up Monday through Sunday really to go to work to make sure those services are there. This will help them to provide those services and it will mean for the people of B.C. those services will be available for a longer period of time.

[Interviewer] OK, thank you very much Darryl. It's a very good report on how our bargaining is going, or at least the progress there. For members who want more information and to check the bargaining bulletins, please go to the BCGEU website at www.bcgeu.ca.