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‘Zero’ progress stalls K-12 talks

VANCOUVER – Provincial K-12 bargaining talks have broken down. Your bargaining committee reports reaching impasse with the BC Public School Employers’ Association.

CUPE BC K-12 coordinator Bill Pegler called Wednesday’s bargaining meeting “very disappointing.” After giving BCPSEA every opportunity to come up with a savings plan, says Pegler, “the CUPE BC Presidents’ Council Bargaining Subcommittee was expecting a proposal that would give the workers who keep our schools clean, safe and inclusive a settlement in line with the rest of BC’s recent public-sector contracts.”

Instead, says CUPE BC K-12 Presidents’ Council chair Colin Pawson, “it became very evident very quickly that they had no mandate to settle. They offered us zero in terms of wages and zero in terms of job security, and that is unacceptable for workers who have been without a wage increase since 2009.”

Local-level talks at many of the 57 CUPE school districts are also breaking down. More than 14 CUPE locals have now passed strike votes (see below) and more are scheduled for next week and next month. The problem, says Pawson, is the provincial government. “The school boards simply have no way to bargain meaningfully – their hands have been tied by chronic underfunding and the BC Liberals’ arbitrary imposition of a new Net Zero Mandate.”

Provincial K-12 bargaining began last November on behalf of 27,000 CUPE education workers. BCPSEA came to the bargaining table 14 times and only managed to approve one minor housekeeping item. In February, CUPE K-12 leaders set up a meeting with BC Education Minister Don McRae, but came away shaking their heads. “It’s about respect for the work we do,” says Pawson, “and so far we’ve gotten zero from this government.”

“We clearly warned the minister that constructive action was needed to avoid the possibility of a major confrontation with K-12 workers. Apparently he didn’t heed that advice,” says Pawson.

The plan now is to arrange an all-presidents meeting to discuss next steps.

Local strike votes so far:

CUPE Local	Location	#members	Vote Results
382	Greater Victoria	201	95% authorizing strike action
411	Chilliwack	695	94% authorizing strike action
441	Saanich	488	95% authorizing strike action
459	Sooke	509	88% authorizing strike action
523	Okanagan-Similkameen	193	84% authorizing strike action
523	Okanagan-Skaha	329	79% authorizing strike action
523	Okanagan-Shuswap	506	78% authorizing strike action
593	Mission	414	89% authorizing strike action
703	Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows	702	97% authorizing strike action
947	Greater Victoria	688	95% authorizing strike action
1260	Langley Bus Drivers/Clerical	637	87% authorizing strike action
1851	Langley	180	98% authorizing strike action
3523	Central Okanagan	1206	74% authorizing strike action
3742	Prince George	667	85% authorizing strike action

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