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Bulletin No. 11

Bargaining Committee backs province-wide strike vote

The Provincial K-12 Bargaining Committee has unanimously endorsed a province-wide, local-by-local strike vote for CUPE education workers. The move came out of a Wednesday conference call to discuss the lack of progress at the negotiating table.

Local CUPE Bargaining Committees at the 57 school districts will be scheduling strike votes after reaching impasse with local boards over the next two months. The Provincial Bargaining Committee also endorsed a motion reaffirming its commitment to reject any 'Net Zero Mandate' and any mining of collective agreements as a trade-off for long overdue compensation increases.

The Provincial Bargaining Committee has one day of talks scheduled for April 24, but given the lack of movement by the province and the employers' bargaining group, expectations are low. CUPE BC K-12 Coordinator Bill Pegler said that after a recent meeting with the Minister of Education, "we don't expect to be returning to the bargaining table after April 24 for some time."

A handful of CUPE K-12 locals have already reached impasse and are taking strike votes, with the rest on the way. CUPE BC K-12 Presidents' Council chair Colin Pawson said that the strike vote "is the only realistic route open to us unless there is a dramatic shift from this provincial government towards a fair and reasonable negotiation."

The Presidents' Council has also launched a province-wide ad campaign to help raise the profile of CUPE K-12 education workers. The ads running in community papers across BC feature a student with a variety of CUPE workers with the message: Behind every successful BC public school student are 27,000 dedicated, professional, caring CUPE workers keeping our schools CLEAN, SAFE & INCLUSIVE. The ads also list some of the more than 1,900 job classifications held by CUPE support workers in BC. (For a listing of where and when the ads will appear see http://bcschools.cupe.ca/updir/bcschools/Run_Dates_K-12_%282%29.pdf)

The contract talks, which started last year, have been hampered by the chronic structural funding shortfall for school boards and by government interference in the collective bargaining process. The ministry of education signaled to boards that it wanted wage increases in the sector kept to 1.5% per year then said any compensation would have to come from existing budgets.

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