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Bulletin No. 10

Presidents call for province-wide strike vote

RICHMOND – The Presidents’ Council met Tuesday to discuss this provincial government’s latest attack on K-12 education workers.

CUPE K-12 local presidents at an all-day session in Richmond voted overwhelmingly in favour of authorizing the council’s provincial bargaining committee to prepare a province-wide, local-by-local, strike vote.

While K-12 locals are in various stages of bargaining and the provincial table has met several times with the government’s BC Public School Employers’ Association, little or no progress has been made. Council chair Colin Pawson emphasized that the goal remains a fair and reasonable contract settlement for 27,000 CUPE support workers, but that “we must be prepared for job action to get there in light of the direction this government has chosen to take.”

While a strike vote does not necessarily mean there will be a strike, it clears the way for job action if needed. This gives the provincial bargaining committee the support it needs to deal with the provincial government.

Pawson reported he has had no reply yet to his written request for a frank and open discussion with BC Minister of Education Don McRae on chronic underfunding and concerns that the government is interfering in the collective bargaining process.

McRae told school boards late last month that “there must not be any incremental cost to boards or the province as a result of collective agreements” which is just a new version of the Net Zero mandate that has kept us from getting wage increases since 2009. Earlier, the ministry suggested to school boards that there could be no wage increases above 1.5%, jumping the gun on any monetary discussions at the bargaining table.

Local presidents backed the call for a strike vote and job action saying their members “are very frustrated and more than ready” to take action to push for adequate funding of the public school system and long overdue wage increases. CUPE K-12 coordinator Bill Pegler called the vote “a clear signal to the province that K-12 education workers will stand up for what’s right.”

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