

CUPE Health Care Council Bargaining Update #3- October 31, 2008

More Trick Than Treat

Friday October 31st loomed ominously over this week's round of bargaining between the CUPE Health Care negotiating committee and SAHO.

CUPE arrived in Regina prepared to move forward in our negotiations, but SAHO requested time to formulate a comprehensive response to the complex and controversial topic of hours of work.

After a lengthy caucus, the employer's response was to present a hostile bargaining protocol. They presented an "all or nothing" proposal on article 27. We were outraged at this transparent trickery because an "all or nothing" package left us back at square one. Had we bitten into an apple and discovered the razor's edge?

By Thursday's close, it was clear the employer had wasted our time, our money, our patience. As negotiations on Friday closed, the ghostly chill of SAHO's past bargaining mistakes wafted through the re-circulated air.

Our discomfort was not because of Halloween, but because this was the date the health regions would unveil their plans for implementing one of the most anti-union, regressive pieces of legislation this province has ever witnessed, the Essential Services Act. The Essential Services Act was passed by the provincial government last spring and has effectively stripped union members of our right to strike. Total government control and total annihilation of unions forms this government's agenda. The province is looking to the health care sector to witness how the gruesome details of the Essential Services Act will unfold.

The union regrouped in a concentrated effort to review the Essential Services Act and formulate a strategy. On Friday morning, many questions were posed to the Health Region's Vice Presidents and designates, who joined us to discuss a plan to "negotiate" essential services language.

One of the main questions we asked was regarding classifications of health care workers that would be deemed essential and which services would be excluded? What about the role of seniority? Will our members be required to perform duties that are non essential and outside their job description? The answers we received to date led us to believe that in the event of a strike or any other form of job action, it will be business as usual. Throughout the process of negotiating and implementing an essential services agreement, CUPE continues to seek advice from our legal counsel.

In the face of this nightmarish alliance between the government and health sector employers, this bargaining committee intends to continue to represent and vocalize your rights and interests. In the midnight hour, through the eerie haze of these repressive times, one shining fact will slowly resurface to penetrate the political fog. That burning fact is this - **unions have the right to free and open collective bargaining.**

Halloween references aside, this was not a productive round of bargaining. Please look for our next update November 21st.

In Solidarity,

Your CUPE Health Care Bargaining Committee

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