

## **CUPE, SEIU and SGEU held a news conference in Regina on January 28 to comment on SAHO's decision to table "a final offer" and cancel conciliation.**

### **The following statement was made by CUPE's chief negotiator, Mike Keith:**

Good afternoon. My name is Mike Keith, CUPE's chief negotiator at the health care bargaining table. I'm joined today by Barbara Cape, President of the SEIU West and Bob Bymoen, President of SGEU.

Together, our three unions represent 25,000 health care providers in the province. We have been without new collective agreements since March 31, 2008 – nearly two years. And we have been bargaining for 16 months!

Yesterday, our three unions received a final offer from SAHO and the Saskatchewan government through conciliator Doug Forseth. This offer came after only five days of conciliation.

Just to be clear. It was SAHO that requested the conciliation process in early December, saying they would no longer negotiate face to face with us at a common table. Our tri-union bargaining committee felt conciliation was premature because we had only spent a total of 4 hours in discussions with SAHO. But we agreed to the process and commenced conciliation with Doug Forseth on January 18.

Last Thursday, January 21, we presented yet another reasonable offer to the conciliator to present to SAHO. We felt it could form the basis for a settlement – or at least serious bargaining. The conciliator presented the offer and then told us that SAHO wanted to adjourn the talks for six days to give them time to respond. We agreed to that request.

Yesterday, we returned to the conciliation table to receive SAHO's response. We were told by conciliator Doug Forseth that the employer had decided to give us a "final offer" and cancel conciliation.

We are bitterly disappointed by the employers' actions. We are appalled that SAHO's first "move" in conciliation talks was to cancel conciliation. What a shame. They have abused the conciliation process, used the department of labour's conciliation services and misled the public **and** our membership about their true intentions.

We feel betrayed. We feel used.

This so-called "final offer" is not a serious offer. It contains the major concessions our 12,600 members rejected last June, when they voted 88% in support of job action. These concessions are a license for health employers to understaff and overwork our members **and** mismanage our health care system.

The offer is completely unacceptable. We have lost all confidence that SAHO is serious about negotiating a fair agreement.

We believe SAHO either doesn't have either the mandate or the will to negotiate fair agreements for our members.

That has to change. We want to negotiate with the puppet masters, not the puppets.

We are calling on the government to get serious about our contract negotiations and stop trying to provoke a strike.

Our message is clear: We want to return to the bargaining table and negotiate a reasonable contract settlement. And we want the government to put a bargaining team in place that can make that happen.

Collective bargaining is not a one way street. All or nothing packages are not productive. Face to face discussions are the only way to resolve this conflict.

Respect the process. Let's bargain.