

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Fifteen months is a long time to wait for a new collective agreement. Just ask the 25,000 health care providers in Saskatchewan. They've been without new collective agreements since April 1, 2008.

My union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, represents 12,600 of these health care workers. In June, they showed their frustration by voting 88 per cent in favour of taking job action to protest the slow progress of contract negotiations with the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO). These CUPE health care workers include special care aids, licensed practical nurses, food services, housekeeping, laundry, maintenance and clerical personnel, medical diagnostic, therapeutic and recreation technologists and technicians.

No progress has been made during the last 10 months of bargaining. SAHO is demanding major concessions from CUPE health care workers. These concessions would negatively affect health employees' working conditions and the continuity of care for residents and patients. These concessions would further damage a stressed and understaffed health care system and make working in health care much less desirable at a time when recruitment and retention should be the priority.

SAHO has steadfastly refused to remove these concessions from the bargaining table. As well, SAHO has for 10 months refused to table a monetary offer with CUPE. SAHO has indicated to CUPE that it takes its direction from its "principals", which it identifies as the Premier and his cabinet. This is the same government that negotiated a quick settlement with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses within two months of the expiry of SUN's agreement.

If and when SAHO tables a monetary offer or removes its regressive concessions from the bargaining table appears to be at the discretion of the Saskatchewan government. So why the lengthy delay?

CUPE's strong strike mandate prompted the government to issue a news release on June 15 in which Health Minister Don McMorris urged the parties toward a quick resolution to lagging negotiations. That same day SAHO indicated it would have a monetary offer to CUPE and the other provider unions as early as July 17.

After 15 months without a collective agreement, health care workers represented by CUPE are fed up with second class treatment. They expect this government to direct SAHO to remove its concessions and present a fair monetary offer to their CUPE bargaining committee when talks resume in July. If the government is sincere in its desire to see the parties quickly conclude collective agreement negotiations, it will ensure that these conditions are met.

Submitted by,

Gordon Campbell, President of the CUPE Health Care Council of Unions