

W.A.N.T.E Bulletin Please Post

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March 16, 2021

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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

To All W.A.N.T.E. Members,

My name is Bruce Zilkowsky. I have been an active W.A.N.T.E. member since 1999. I have served on committees as well as chaired several committees over the years. I have served on council, the executive and have been the liaison rep at PCERC for several years.

Due to the resignation of the Collective Bargaining Committee chairperson, on January 13, 2021, following proper procedure, a vote was taken, and I became the new chairperson. I was officially installed by the executive and council as the new Collective Bargaining Committee Chair on January 20, 2021. I am confident that my considerable collective bargaining experience gained during my years of service on the committee in 2005, 2010, 2013 and 2017 will be an asset in this new role.

Immediately after assuming the role, I called a meeting on January 28, 2021 with the W.A.N.T.E. President, Carla Paul, my co-chair, Tricia Wiebe and the labour relations lawyer hired by W.A.N.T.E., to determine what our legal options were to move forward. I then gathered the committee together via WEBEX on February 3, 2021 to discuss the legal options we have to proceed forward. The committee was then tasked to compile and submit ideas for bargaining and be ready to make a decision. On March 9, 2021, via WEBEX, the CB committee, together with our labour relations lawyer, met to discuss the different strategies brainstormed to get us back to the bargaining table with the Division. This was a productive meeting, and we expect to have the plan ready to be able to bring to the table shortly.

The Provincial Government's attempt to introduce Bill 28 into law has further convoluted the complex process of collective bargaining. The Public Sector Sustainability Act (PSSA), which forced public sector employers such as the WSD to bargain within the constraints outlined by the government in the Act, such as, the length of the contract and limited wage increases. The Court of Queen's bench has struck the PSSA down and deemed it as unconstitutional. The government is appealing that ruling in the Applet Court, further delaying the bargaining process as they pursue their political austerity agenda. Since the government's defeat in the Queen's Bench, it has brought forward Bill 16 which allows the government to issue mandate letters to public sector employers, forcing them to only put on the table what the government deems "in-line" with their austerity agenda. The government continues to interfere with the already difficult process of contract negotiations. This is the difficult position we are facing as we move forward to the table with the Division.

The bus drivers' strike was one way to get around the PSSA Act to force the WSD into arbitration. Each member needed to be willing to strike for a minimum of 60 days. In fact, they were on strike for almost 90 days in total because the Division attempted and failed to block the request for arbitration that was won after the first 60 days. The average member lost over \$1000.00 in wages per month over the 3 months they were on strike. We applaud their action which resulted in a signed contract. The cost/benefit ratio to the members for a signed contract until August 2021 must be carefully examined.

Continued



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As chair of the CB committee, I know it has been scary, frustrating, and disappointing working without a new contract. I would like to take this opportunity to remind membership that we are not without a contract. Our contract states in Article 42, Section 42.02, that "During the period of such negotiations this Agreement shall remain in full force and effect." W.A.N.T.E. has at no point, not been willing to negotiate with the Division and therefore, the Division and W.A.N.T.E. have been operating under the terms of the July 2013-July 2017 contract when settling grievances and other union business. As chair, I believe it is paramount to get back to the table and settle the contract so that we can negotiate the raises and back pay we have worked so hard for, especially given the circumstances of the past year.

Respectfully,

Bruce Zilkowsky
Chair, Collective Bargaining Committee
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Tricia Wiebe
Co-Chair, Collective Bargaining Committee
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