

Labour Views Oct 24

Mediation

This week the Union of Northern Workers and the Government of the Northwest Territories will sit with a mediator chosen by both parties in the hopes of reaching a fair deal for our members.

The mediation process is informal and flexible which enables a third party mediator to guide the two parties toward their own resolution. Through a series of sessions and separate caucuses beginning on October 25 here in Yellowknife, the UNW bargaining team is committed to ensuring our members are well represented and heard with regards to our outstanding issues.

We have been fighting this employer on many fronts, and we remain committed to better wages, northern allowance increases, job security, and full-time indeterminate work for our members, and mental health strategies to help all employees.

Having said that, your bargaining team is fully committed and focused to working towards a resolution with the assistance of the mediator. We remain hopeful. Our outstanding issues have not changed. UNW members need to stay ahead of the rising Consumer Price Index. Did you know that it has been over 11 years since the northern allowance has increased in Yellowknife and in a lot of communities outside the city it has actually gone down? MLAs received a 1.6% increase tied to the consumer price index based on the CPI for Canada in April. The Union does not begrudge the MLAs a fair wage increase at all. However, the employer has proposed: 0%, 0%, 1%, 1.1% in a 4 year Collective Agreement, which puts everyone three steps back.

Just recently the Territorial Government announced that it will spend \$325 million on infrastructure on 2019-20, up from the originally planned \$237 million spent in 2018-19. And the Minister of Finance calls it the “largest capital budget ever.” At risk of sounding like a broken record, I ask how the government can cry poor, no money for its valued public servants, and continue to rub this spending in their faces?

Providing for your family and contributing to the overall economic growth of your community is all anyone wants to do.

Just as importantly, and certainly interconnected, job security is vitally essential to the growth of our economy and community vitality. The GNWT is eroding the current full-time indeterminate workforce and wants to continue to expand the use of precarious workers throughout the territory.

We have hit a cross road on many fronts with the GNWT as we are still trying to negotiate agreements on behalf of our members employed with NTPC and Hay River Health Services, with many of the very same issues still outstanding.

We sincerely hope that the employer is willing and actually interested in participating fully in the mediations and conciliations coming up for these three groups. The UNW bargaining teams surely are.

Due to the financial and social disruption strikes cause, (not to mention emotional tolls they can have on communities) strikes are always the last resort.

I want to let our members know that the bargaining teams understand and hear your concerns. A mutually satisfactory settlement for all our members is the ultimate goal and the UNW is doing everything in its power to avoid a strike; it is a powerful tool that we have been given and I hope that we don't have to use it. We all remain optimistic that we will reach an agreement.

It is your bargaining team that is hard at work representing the issues that you brought forward that were important enough to you to provide them with a strike mandate. It is now time for you to show them some support. We are asking all members to wear orange, or a button, or even UNW logoed items this week to show your support.

Union members are community members, and everyone wants to move ahead, and work together to make the NWT a better and better place to live.