

TFEU SALARY CASE

Salary discussion in bargaining

- November 29, 2007 the employer tabled a signing bonus of \$4,000, but no salary proposal.
- December 6, 2007, TFEU tabled a salary proposal of 6% and 6% in a two-year agreement
- December 13 the employer proposed 3%, 2.5%, 2.5%, 2.5%, 2.5% and the union countered with 4%, 4% and 3.5% in three years.
- December 14 the employer reduced their offer to 2%, 2.5%, 2%, 2%, 2.5% and the union re-tabled the proposal which had been adopted by the membership and presented the previous day: 4%, 4% and 3.5% in three years.
- December 14 the employer rejected the union's counter proposal and refused to counter it, and on December 16 they withdrew the signing bonus.

The case for a salary increase

TFEU members, like BCTF members, want a fair and reasonable increase. Current BC salary settlements are far higher than BCTF has offered us. TFEU members also face high cost of living, especially housing, in the greater Vancouver area.

If BCTF is going to attract and retain employees, we need to achieve parity with other trade union offices.

- Our receptionist would need a 25% raise to reach parity with the receptionist at HSA.
- Our mailroom and bindery clerk would need a raise of 12% to reach parity with the Alberta Teachers' Association mail clerk.
- Legal assistants at BCTF would need a raise of 24% to match the legal assistants at HSA.
- The network administrator here would need a 20% increase to bring them up to a similar position at HSA.
- BCTF researchers would need a 15% raise to equal CTF researchers, a 49% raise to equal researchers at Elementary Teachers Fed of Ontario.

More examples

Former members of the TFEU bargaining unit have left BCTF for comparable positions and found salaries elsewhere much higher.

- A member who worked as systems support/trainer in IT went from a salary of \$40,821 (min) - \$51,344 (max) to a similar UBC job paying \$52,004 - \$62,430 to start, \$69,560 (max).
- A researcher found salaries at another large BC public sector union were \$10,000 more than BCTF, plus there were other benefits (car provided, expenses, better vacations) that added up to about another \$10,000 for a total of about \$20,000 more in take-home pay.

Falling further behind

In our last agreement, TFEU salaries went up by 2%, 1%, and 0.5% in a two year agreement (July 1, 2005, July 1, 2006 and Jan. 1, 2007). TFEU members need a substantial increase in salary in order not to fall further behind.

In comparison:

- BCTF teachers' salaries went up by about 5% on July 1, 2006 (2.5% on grid, 2% allowance for SIP, plus harmonization increases, plus \$4,000 signing bonus, plus remote district bonus, plus \$20 million to pension fund, plus possible fiscal dividend, plus TOC increases)
- Vancouver municipal workers' recent agreements provide wage increases averaging 3.5% for each of five years compared to the BCTF offer of 2.2% average over five years. The municipal agreements also include job reclassification and some benefit improvements (and no cuts to existing benefits).

Retirement benefits issues

The BCTF appears adamant that benefit costs are 'too high' and must be reduced. In spite of asking for evidence some time ago, the TFEU Bargaining team only received much of the evidence in early December. It now appears that many of the BCTF documents were produced months ago, yet were not provided to us in order that we could conduct a thorough analysis of the BCTF's concerns. The BCTF team has stated explicitly that retirement benefit costs are not the issue, which is appropriate as they are declining. They claim that the overall benefit costs for TFEU members are too high, and to reduce these they will attack the retirement benefits of those employees hired after the ratification date. A month ago TFEU tabled a proposal to maintain retiree benefits and increase the deductible for all retirees, current employees and future retirees, a proposal which would result in immediate cost-saving for the BCTF. This was rejected out of hand.

TFEU urges the BCTF to reconsider their attack on retiree benefits for the following reasons:

1. TFEU members earn much less than CEP members, and have no access to any retiree benefits other than through the TFEU collective agreement. 70% of our members earn less than \$50,000. While we do not condone the concession demanded and gained from CEP, we argue that most TFEU members earn less than half the salaries of CEP members, thereby having a reduced capacity to save for retirement, while also accessing lower pension payments. Demanding this concession therefore severely impacts our future members.
2. Most of our members on the lowest salary grades are women, and/or visible minorities and/or single parents. The BCTF's attack on them while identifying the

BCTF as a 'Social Justice' union is troubling. How can the BCTF support Social Justice while shafting its own lowest-paid workers?

3. The assault on retiree benefits when their costs are declining is problematic. The employer has admitted that the cuts to retiree benefits will not result in any significant savings in the short-term. Neither are retiree benefits costs increasing – by the employer's own data retiree benefit costs are declining. Does the BCTF assault on retiree benefits signal a future assault on other member benefits, or on the benefits of those already retired?
4. Any shortfall in funds for TFEU benefits in the coming years is a result of the BCTF Executive's financial management decisions. The BCTF has enjoyed a minimum of 5 years of pension holidays since 1999, and another two years of minimal payments, with savings estimated at over \$4m. Instead of allocating funds during years of pension holidays for future benefit costs, the BCTF Executive Committee chose to spend its members' dues elsewhere. Now it expects its lowest-paid and most vulnerable future employees to take concessions because of its financial decisions, an action which TFEU strongly opposes, and which should concern BCTF members.
5. Attacking TFEU retiree benefits sets an unfortunate precedent. The BCTF as an employer has set other potentially disastrous precedents causing consternation within the labour movement in BC. A recent example in the CEP dispute was the initiation of a BCTF LRB injunction, later withdrawn when the ramifications were identified by the wider labour movement. An earlier BCTF disaster-in-the-making was an effort to cut support staff wages during a work to rule in an earlier dispute. These examples illustrate that the BCTF when acting as an employer attempts to set precedents which, could have been disastrous for workers in BC. Cutting benefits for BCTF employees signals to BCPSEA that teacher benefits can also be cut. Does the BCTF want to set this precedent?
6. A well-respected (Hewitt, 2006) survey found that only 3% of Canadian retirement plan sponsors intended to eliminate retiree benefits. The BCTF appears set to align itself with the most regressive employers in Canada, another move which will endanger its claim to be a Social Justice union. While the BCTF will undoubtedly argue that the cuts apply only to new employees, the high number of post-50 employees means that there will be a significant influx of new employees, none of whom will access any retiree benefits if the BCTF gets its way. Not only will the BCTF's Social Justice claims be discredited, but the BCTF's affirmative action stance will also become dubious. Aboriginal and other potential employees might well be told that while the BCTF has an affirmative action policy, no successful applicant for employment at the BCTF will access retiree benefits that are currently accessible to other BCTF employees.
7. The cuts will produce a divided work force, some with retiree benefits, some without. Would the BCTF negotiate or accept a deal which kept benefits for its

current members but removed them for any joining the BCTF after ratification of an agreement cutting but grandfathering benefits?

8. The recent municipal disputes did not involve employers' demanding cuts to existing retiree benefits. Does the BCTF want to be seen as worse than Sam Sullivan in attacking retiree benefits for lower-paid workers?