

As distributed by TFEU to BCTF RA on February 1/08

Why is TFEU taking a strike vote on February 7?

The history:

April 2007: TFEU makes an offer to bring some stability and calm by offering a contract rollover and a 2.5% salary increase for TFEU members. This offer was rejected by the BCTF.

May 2007: All TFEU members are laid off by the BCTF and lose almost 5 weeks pay when BCTF vacates the building, shuts down BCTF operations and locks out CEP.

September - November 2007: Bargaining starts. Two key concessions demanded by the employer (retirement benefits, bonusing). Employer offers 1%/1%/1% in 3 years.

December 2007: An hour before a TFEU membership meeting, the employer presents us with a timed¹ take-it-or-leave-it offer – accept major concessions in exchange for a wage increase of 14% over 5 years or 4% over 2 years, and a \$4000 signing bonus. Choose one or the other – no counters, no discussion. TFEU membership rejects this proposal and endorses a counter proposal. The counter is rejected out-of-hand by the employer.

December 14, 2007: BCTF broke off negotiations until January 2008 after refusing to discuss TFEU's counter proposal on December 14, 2007.

December 16, 2007: The employer withdraws its signing bonus offer in spite of the fact that all CEP members **and** excluded staff received a signing bonus at the end of the CEP dispute.

January 2008: TFEU compromises on the retiree benefits issue are rejected by the employer. The employer's wage proposal on January 29 was 12% over 5 years (2% less than they had offered in December) and the \$4000 signing bonus is still withdrawn. At this stage, TFEU had withdrawn 9 items in an effort to speed up the process; BCTF had withdrawn only 3.

The issues: Salary

TFEU members are underpaid compared to similar positions in other union offices in BC and in other teacher unions across Canada.

June, 2006 settlement for teachers: 2.5% salary + 2% SIP + harmonization + \$4,000 signing incentive + TOC increased rate + harmonization + 2008 labour market adjustment + possible fiscal dividend + \$20m pension plan payment. No concessions were demanded of BCTF members.

Most recent lower mainland municipal workers' settlements: 3.5% per year over 5 years.

January 28 BCTF offers to TFEU: 12% over 5 years conditional on concessions on retiree benefits for new employees and on bonusing. No signing bonus.

TFEU counters with 6% + 6% +6% over 3 years, plus signing bonus and offers a major concession on retirement benefits. BCTF fails to increase salary offer after TFEU offers the concession.

The issues: Concessions

BCTF demands for TFEU concessions:

- elimination of all previously negotiated retiree benefits for new employees,
- elimination of most bonusing.

¹ June 10, 2006, Jinny Sims, BCTF President stated "we are not going to be stuck with an artificial settlement deadline," in the BCTF's negotiations with BCPSEA.

Our argument on retiree benefits: 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 TFEU to take concessions that would severely affect our lowest-paid and most vulnerable future members. **This concession demand would create a two-tier workforce with some having retiree benefits and others not – a dangerous precedent for the union movement. Would you want a two-tier teaching profession?**

In December, TFEU proposed that deductibles be increased for all TFEU members, current employees and retirees, and future employees and retirees, in an attempt to meet with employer's concerns without establishing a two-tier benefit system. The employer rejected this proposal. In January 2008, TFEU reluctantly agreed to accept the possibility of a two-tier structure contingent on getting some protection for new employees, particularly the lowest paid, and contingent on getting a reasonable wage increase. The employer insists that new employees pay 100% of the premium for retiree benefits. TFEU argued that the cost of premiums would be unfairly onerous for the lower pay categories which, at the BCTF, consist mainly of visible minorities and women. Although the BCTF claims to be a social justice union, TFEU's arguments fell on deaf ears. **We repeat: TFEU has proposed a major concession on retiree benefits but the employer has offered no increase to its salary proposal of 12% over 5 years, and has not reinstated the \$4000 signing bonus.**

Our argument on bonusing: Workload is a major issue at BCTF. TFEU members are committed to our jobs and to serving teachers, and are often frustrated by short-staffing and overwhelming work loads which make us feel we cannot do our best. Our bonusing language was negotiated to compensate members who are covering for absent employees in addition to carrying their regular jobs. It is also intended to provide an incentive to the employer to replace employees who are absent, and to fill positions in a timely fashion. This language has been negotiated and refined over many years, and our members are not prepared to give it up.

TFEU is not the intransigent player in these negotiations. As a good will gesture we have chosen not to disrupt this RA. Our patience with the BCTF Executive is running out. We expect a reasonable salary increase, just as the BCTF does for its members. Any TFEU job action will be the result of the BCTF Executive's intransigence and refusal to offer to its employees what it demands for its members: a fair and reasonable settlement.

To find out more about the negotiations, and TFEU's perspective, check out the TFEU web site's negotiations chronology at: www.tfeu.ca/negotiations/2007/chronology.html

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