

Bargaining Bulletin (2nd edition) No. 17

SAHO

Date: October 6, 2020

Greetings Sisters and Brothers,

Since our members rejected the tentative agreement presented in the spring of 2019, your SEIU-West Bargaining Committee has continued to try to negotiate an acceptable tentative bargaining agreement our members who work for the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SAHO) and its affiliates.

To review, our members were provided with a tentative agreement in May 2019 to vote on. The tentative agreement was rejected by our Members. Subsequently, we continued negotiations with the SAHO who is the bargaining agent for SHA. We were blunt in our assessment that the outstanding issue was monetary. The rejected tentative agreement had a general wage increase of 0%/0%/1%/2%/2% for the years 2017-2021.

While we continued to talk, negotiations were not fruitful and SEIU-West put forward the option, in the fall of 2019, for voluntary mediation, using the services of an experienced mediator, Dan Ish. Through several sessions, we tried to generate creative ways to address both parties issues. Mediator Ish challenged the parties to be creative.

During this time, the one of the crown corporation unions, UNIFOR, took a two week job action. Initially, SAHO indicated the crown corporations settlements would have an influence on the SEIU-West bargaining. SAHO delayed responding to the union until those settlements were finalized and published. At that time SAHO said they would not be guided by the settlements. As a result, voluntary mediation failed and SEIU-West advised SAHO that we would be going to our members for direction.

The members provided direction in the form of a strike mandate in December of 2019.

We again met with SAHO in early 2020 to advise SAHO of the strike mandate and the determination that our members expressed to us to get a fair collective agreement that recognized their contributions to the skill and professionalism of our healthcare system. SAHO indicated that they heard our call for creativity. SAHO proposed the Union withdraw a long standing unfair labour practice claim at the Labour Relations Board, and change our seniority system to date of hire (as opposed to the hours based system we currently use to calculate seniority within SEIU-West) in exchange for an amount between 'a lump of coal and \$500' for each member affected. The exact number was never articulated although we asked repeatedly. We also asked for clarity around the change of seniority and how this suddenly became a priority at the bargaining table; and how this would be coordinated with the other healthcare provider unions, CUPE and SGEU. Misleading and unclear messages were the response.



If you have any questions or concerns about your workplace or your collective agreement, please call the Member Resource Centre (MRC) at 1-888-999-7348 ext. 2298. The MRC Officers are able to answer your questions and, if necessary, will forward your concerns to your workplace Union Representative.

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This exchange continued through the spring of 2020. We saw no progress toward a tentative agreement that we could bring to our members. We requested a Special Mediator from the Minister of Labour Relations and Workforce, Don Morgan. Instead of a Special Mediator, we engaged in ‘facilitated discussions’ with a senior executive within the Mediation/Conciliation branch of the Ministry of Labour Relations.

The most recent offer from SAHO provided \$150 per member for changing our seniority system, withdrawing the unfair labour practice and agreeing the Employer could transfer work from any SEIU-West bargaining unit in Saskatchewan to another without consequence or penalty; a one-time payment of \$50 per member for 2021 in exchange for permanently reducing our Family Illness Leave entitlement by 16 hrs (from 45 hours to 29 hours/year) with any remaining surplus funding put towards an provincial education fund administered by SAHO. And for the general wage increase, SEIU-West proposed and SAHO said they would consider (if we agreed to all their concessions) an additional year at 2% for a total general wage increase of 0%/0%/1%/2%/2%/2% for the years 2017-2022.

In our last proposal to SAHO, we indicated that we were disappointed with the proposal of rollbacks. We saw talks as moving further away from an agreement. We countered with the same monetary proposal, a lump sum payment of \$750 per member, and we would look at a letter of intent to explore the change to seniority. All other items that were previously agreed to would constitute part of the new collective agreement. We gave SAHO seven days to respond.

They protested that during the election period they were prohibited from negotiating, but at that time, the election hadn’t been called. They had four days to seek direction and agreement of their ‘principles’ – Executive Government. We didn’t hear from them by the deadline, but were passed a message from the Executive Director of Labour Relations and Mediation services that SAHO indicated it could set dates to meet to continue negotiations, but those dates wouldn’t occur until after the October 26 provincial election.

This state of affairs is unacceptable. The Government of Saskatchewan clearly understands from the bargaining committee and from our members that the ‘mandate’ is not acceptable from our members’ perspective; that the Federal government’s temporary wage subsidy should have been applied to ALL health care workers during this pandemic and that despite a world-wide pandemic, SEIU-WEST members have continued to work short staffed and under incredibly challenging conditions. Politicians worked from home after giving themselves a self-negotiated cost of living increase at the beginning of 2020 and health care workers deserved no less.

Today, SEIU-West served formal notice of impasse to the Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. We were prevented from doing this prior to this point because SAHO continued to produce proposals that we were legally required to consider. We believe that



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we are moving further away from a negotiated settlement and we have no choice but to move into the next legal step in this process.

We do not believe that SAHO, and the principals that they represent, are interested in negotiating an acceptable collective agreement. We believe that the other side feels comfortable in ignoring the demands of our members because they believe our members will “cave-in” if SAHO’s response is no. The idea that you have to negotiate concessions to buy your own general wage increase is not collective bargaining – it’s extortion.

The union has been told quite firmly by our members that this sort of bullying behavior is not acceptable. Members have demanded that we take job action to show the government and SAHO that we mean business. We are now at that point.

We are seeking your support for the demonstrations and information pickets that we will be undertaking across the province to build on the public’s support and understanding of these issues. We continue to seek your input on the essential services determination.

During this election period, we are telling the Government of Saskatchewan that you cannot ignore us, underpay us, treat us with disrespect, and expect that we will not respond. Shame on SAHO and the SaskParty government.

#DoneWaiting #Ready2Go #PowerToThePeople

Should you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact the Member Resource Center by phone 1-888-999-7348 ext. 2298 or through our contact form on SEIUWEST.ca.

In Solidarity,

Your SEIU-West SAHO Provincial Bargaining Committee:

CHR: Janice Platzke (SEIU-West Treasurer) • **FHHR:** Brenda Berry; Donna Gallant • **HHR:** Colleen Denniss • **SHR:** Judy Denniss; Rick Brown; Carla Saworski; Kim Wyatt; Charlene Sarafin; • **Staff:** Bob Laurie (Dir. of Bargaining and Contract Enforcement); Russell Doell (Deputy Dir. of Bargaining and Contract Enforcement); Cam McConnell (Negotiations Officer) • **President:** Barbara Cape