

NewsRelease



Public Service Alliance of Canada | Representing 160,000 workers

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Union slams Parks Canada Agency for walking away from negotiations

OTTAWA – The union representing about 5,000 workers at Parks Canada denounces the employer’s attempt at undermining contract negotiations when the Agency’s negotiators walked away from the table.

The union adds that the employer’s inflexibility on its meagre wage offer, on the elimination of pay zones and on closing the pay gap for Parks trade workers is a strong indication that the Agency is not taking negotiations seriously.

“After we reached impasse last February, the employer contacted us and asked us to return to the table because they said they were ready to respond seriously to our demands,” said the Public Service Alliance of Canada Regional Executive Vice-President for Atlantic, Jeannie Baldwin. “We came back to the table last week. After seven days of talks where they refused to budge from their positions, they walked away from bargaining and are now proposing mediation to which we don’t agree.”

Baldwin says in order for mediation to work, the two parties have to be close to an agreement, but this is not the case given that the employer refuses to deal with the major issues. “We want the employer to come back to the table and negotiate,” Baldwin says.

Contract negotiations began in May last year but reached impasse after 10 months when the employer refused to respond to the union’s major issues, including job security, contracting out, misuse of student hiring and wages. The PSAC filed for third-party conciliation, called Public Interest Commission, on April 21, 2008. The union had agreed to return to bargaining talks “without prejudice” on May 5.

The employer proposed a four-year collective agreement and tabled an offer of 2.1 per cent wage increase in the first year, two per cent in the second, 1.5 per cent in the third and 1.5 per cent in the fourth. The employer also rejected the union’s demand to eliminate regional pay zones, where the same work is paid differently according to geographical locations. The employer further refused the union’s demands for an increase in allowances.

“Their offer is less than half of what we were demanding for fair annual wage increases that would protect our members against inflation and reflect the current strength of the Canadian economy,” Baldwin said. “Not only has the employer failed to consider our position at the bargaining table, they’ve been misrepresenting our bargaining demands in communicating with our members and the public.”

Media articles have quoted Parks Canada Agency spokespeople saying the union’s demands for wage increase amount to a total of 47 per cent.

“That’s a total distortion of our demand,” says Baldwin. “Our proposal for wage increases includes demands to eliminate pay zones and to close the wage gaps identified in a pay study for our members working in trades. I don’t know what kind of calculations the employer is making, but even if you take all our demands into consideration, it would not amount to 47 per cent.”

The pay study by the firm Moreau-Sobeco in 2003 clearly indicates that the wages paid to Parks trades workers are much lower than those paid to other private and public workers doing similar work.

“The Agency and the federal public service sector are having problems with retaining employees,” Baldwin said. “The employer’s wage offer is a long way from solving this problem. We’re left with no choice now but to take action. The employer can expect our members to bring our message to UNESCO at the World Heritage events in Quebec city and at world heritage sites this summer.”

PSAC members at Parks Canada have been without a contract since August 2007.

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