

NewsRelease



Public Service Alliance of Canada | Representing 160,000 workers

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Flaherty tinkers while the economy burns

OTTAWA - Finance Minister Flaherty and the Harper government would rather tinker with public sector wages than deal with the real problems facing Canada's economy, according to the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC).

PSAC national president John Gordon reacted with anger today to Flaherty's announcement that negotiated collective agreements and arbitral awards in the broader public sector will be rolled back and the right to strike on wages will be suspended through 2010-11.

"Negotiating with the government and agreeing to accept and recommend a wage increase as the PSAC has done over the past week is one thing, legislatively rolling back negotiated, ratified and signed collective agreements and taking away the right to strike is entirely another," says Gordon.

"It's wrong, pure and simple," says Betty Bannon, president of the Union of Taxation Employees (a PSAC component), the largest group of PSAC members directly affected by the legislation. "The union negotiated in good faith, the Canada Revenue Agency negotiated in good faith, and now, a year later, the government steps in and cuts our members' pay," says Bannon.

Legislation to restrain wages has been adopted by Canadian federal governments in the past, but this law is being introduced in spite of the landmark Supreme Court decision in 2007 that struck down sections of the British Columbia government's Bill 29, the Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act, which legislated restrictions on future collective bargaining and rolled back negotiated contract provisions. (Health Services and Support – Facilities Subsector Bargaining Assn. v. British Columbia, [2007] 2 S.C.R. 391, 2007 SCC 27)

"In essence, the Supreme Court said that workers have the right to bargain collectively as part of their freedom to associate, and that the right to free collective bargaining is protected by freedom of association provisions in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms," says Gordon. "This decision is now the law of the land."

"The Harper government appears to be more interested in trying to rewrite the past while leaving Canadians to wait for comprehensive solutions to today's economic problems. Tinkering with wage rollbacks and trashing workers' rights are not the way out of the current economic crisis."

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