



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

BARGAINING BULLETIN

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Gitx'san workers' cultural rights attacked by health society representative

Gitx'san health care workers and the Hospital Employees' Union are defending the unique cultural provisions and language of their collective agreement currently under attack at the bargaining table by a hired representative of the Gitx'san Health Society (GHS).

Since discussions began in July, the GHS negotiator has continued to demand dramatic concessions in all areas that recognize the specific cultural traditions and needs of the Gitx'san workers and their community.

These demands include the elimination of all collective agreement references to Ayoo'kum Gitxsan – the Gitx'san hereditary law – as well as the removal of provisions that allow workers to honour their traditional responsibilities and practices such as Clan obligations, food gathering activities and funeral customs.

But according to Gitx'san bargaining committee representative, Peggy Underhill, moving backwards on the historic gains made in the 2001 agreement is not an option.

“We are proud of our collective agreement,” says Underhill. “It meets our community's health needs and respects and reflects Gitx'san cultural practices and values. We will not turn back the clock and start over.”

Despite reporting a surplus in their 2005/2006 fiscal year, the GHS has also asked for a 25 to 35 per cent cut in wages and benefits, as well as a reduction in vacation time, compassionate leave and special leave.

After six days of bargaining in July and August, the bargaining committee and GHS representative met during a mediation session on October 12th and 13th, but the talks broke down over the employer's insistence on these and other concessions.

The health care providers' fight for fairness has the full backing of their union. “It is an honour for HEU to have supported Gitx'san workers to achieve such a ground-breaking collective agreement,” says secretary-business manager, Judy Darcy, “and we will support them one hundred per cent in their efforts to maintain it.”

On behalf of the Gitx'san health care workers, the HEU has invoked a binding tribunal, and hopes to meet with an arbitrator and the GHS in the next two months to conclude an agreement that addresses the needs of the community, health care workers and the Gitx'san Health Society.

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