



Newsletter

Health unions hold first post-Bill 37 meet with health employers, government

THE HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION and its bargaining partners met with health employers and government representatives Monday afternoon to deal with the aftermath of Bill 37 – government legislation that imposed a collective agreement on 43,000 health care workers.

A key issue for HEU was to find ways to give members a voice on the distribution of the compensation cuts contained in the Campbell Liberals' imposed contract.

Government had already rejected a union request to delay the May 13 deadline by which to opt for arbitration of these issues. A delay would have provided an opportunity for members to vote on whether to take an 11 per cent cut to hourly wages or put a combination of wage and benefit cuts valued at ten per cent to arbitration.

At today's meeting, HEU pressed for health employers' assurance that if arbitration was pursued, the wishes of members expressed at the ballot box during the arbitration period would be respected.

For example, if members voted for straight wage concessions only, then health employers would only place straight wage concessions in front of an arbitrator. And the same would apply if members voted for a combination of wage and benefit concessions.

Health employers and government refused to provide such assurances.

"I'm frustrated though not surprised that health employers and government have not accommodated our members' desire to have a say in how Bill 37's cuts are handled," says HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt.

"After all, the only people who got to vote for the imposed collective agreement were members of the Campbell Liberal caucus – not front-line health care workers.

"Given government's rejection of a deadline delay, and health employers' lack of assurance that a membership vote would be respected in the arbitration process, the union's Provincial Executive must now determine if there is any meaningful way members can vote on compensation issues flowing from Bill 37."

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Health employers and government did agree that Vince Ready would be the arbitrator if that option was pursued (he's already the arbitrator for issues arising out of the May 2 memorandum that capped contracting out and ended union protest lines).

But HEABC refused to discuss changes to the collective agreement – allowed for under the non-arbitration provision contained in Section 3(4) of Bill 37 – as follows:

- Renewal and funding for the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Health Care;
- Extension of the monthly supplementary benefit on LTD claimants disabled before 1998;
- Retention and recruitment issues for professional and technical groupings; and
- Trades and maintenance premiums.

Health employers did agree to look at improving bumping language but it seemed clear at the meeting that there would be a dispute over the implementation of the longer work week.

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