

# 2006 UPDATE on **Bargaining** #10

For the latest updates call our hotline at : (604) 473-5444 (Lower Mainland) or 1-800-335-5665 (toll-free)

March 10, 2006

## Cutbacks have turned community social services sector into a 'wage ghetto'

*Time running out for employers to address the issues at bargaining table*

Fair wage increases, restored benefits, job security, and a long overdue pension fund for community social services workers. These are key features of the monetary proposal tabled March 9 by the unions representing 15,000 community social services workers across BC.

The initial response from the employers' bargaining agents after they had reviewed this major package for scarcely over an hour? They walked away from the table.

"Our proposal is designed to build an agreement that benefits both workers and employers, and strengthens client services," says Chris Mullen, spokesperson for the Union Bargaining Association (UBA). "We were astounded by the reaction of the Community Social Services Employers' Association (CSSEA).

"We've asked CSSEA to reconsider their actions, and give our proposal the serious consideration it deserves. They've now said they won't bargain over the weekend."

The unions' proposal for a three year collective agreement includes: increasing starting wage levels effective April 1, 2006; a 6 percent general wage increase in the second year (most of which goes to workers' investment in starting their pension plan); a minimum 3 percent cost-of-living increase in the third year; plus wage equity adjustment funds totalling \$22.5 million.

The employers' proposal is for a four year contract with a 1.5 percent wage

increase in each year – which falls below projected cost-of-living increases.

"We know that employers are nearly unanimous in their concern that the cuts to wages and benefits that they and the government forced through in the last agreement have turned the community social services sector into a low-wage ghetto," says Mullen.

"Employers have identified the need to address recruitment and retention issues as their number one priority in bargaining. They've discovered it is impossible to find qualified workers who are willing to work so hard for so little.

"The question today is whether the employers' bargaining agent, CSSEA, mandated by government, is committed to negotiating a genuine solution to these issues," Mullen says.

"We are running out of time," he warns. "Employers need to engage in sincere negotiations if we are to achieve an agreement before the March 31 deadline imposed by government.

"Further, if the Liberal government truly intends this to be a 'golden decade' for all British Columbians, they need to restore funding to services, and return some of the over \$80 million that Bills 29 and 61 have taken from our members' pockets over the last two years."

*For more details of the union proposals, go to [www.respectbc.ca](http://www.respectbc.ca)*

B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Hospital Employees' Union

Health Sciences Association of British Columbia

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union

International Union of Operating Engineers

Construction and Specialized Workers' Union

United Steelworkers of America

National Automobile, Aerospace, Transportation and General Workers Union of Canada (CAW-Canada)

British Columbia Nurses' Union

Canadian Translators and Interpreters Guild

Professional Employees' Association

Christian Labour Association of Canada