



Federation of  
Post-Secondary Educators  
of BC

## **Bargaining Real Solutions Not Stalemate**

Across BC, the 10,000 faculty and staff who work in BC's public post-secondary institutions are being frustrated in their efforts to renew local and provincial collective agreements. Those agreements expired last March and despite the considerable work of our bargaining committees to find local solutions to address local problems, every proposal we make to address those problems is met with the same response from post-secondary employers: they have "nothing" to offer to address our concerns.

The level of frustration among post-secondary educators in BC is ratcheting upward. Several locals have taken strike votes. In one institution, Vancouver Island University, the local has issued a strike deadline. Why are our locals taking this action? They want to send a clear message to their employers that "nothing" is not a solution to the 2010 round of bargaining in our sector. We can find local solutions that make sense for our institutions, but not if our employers aren't prepared to work with us to find those solutions. Their "nothing" response only makes the problem worse, not better.

The provincial government isn't making the situation in post-secondary education any easier. Years of chronic under-funding have meant fewer program and course options for students, less employment security for non-regular faculty and fewer student support services and resources. All of this from a government that claims to have made post-secondary education a priority.

The provincial government is also stifling the collective bargaining process by tightly restricting what local employers can negotiate in their contracts with faculty. By reining in the control of the bargaining process, the provincial government is only contributing to the stalemate we see currently. That approach will not allow achievable local solutions to work and only adds to the frustration that is building across all our locals.

The provincial government has the capacity to address some of the funding problems in post-secondary education. In his February 15<sup>th</sup> provincial budget Finance Minister Colin Hansen set aside \$600 million in contingencies—money that was not

appropriated to any Ministry budget, just held in reserve for the new BC Liberal leader to allocate. Even a small portion of that contingency money would go a long way to addressing some of the problems that our students and institutions face. For example, one-third of that money—\$200 million—would bring real per-student operating grants back to the level they were in 2001 when the BC Liberals first took office.

With additional funding, our institutions could begin to address some of the critical gaps that have emerged within our institutions over the last ten years. Counseling and student support services could be brought back. Wait lists for programs needed to complete degrees, certificates, diplomas and apprenticeships could be eliminated. New degree and program areas could be fully funded. Research and scholarly development could be properly resourced. Curriculum development could be fully resourced. Language training programs could be revived. Classroom, lab and shop technologies could be vastly improved to incorporate the latest innovations that our students need to understand. Facilities could be better utilized and maintained. Recruitment and retention priorities could be effectively addressed.

To record progress on any of these fronts requires a new approach and new thinking from our employers. Ignoring the problems we see at our institutions and forcing faculty to continually accommodate by “doing more with less” is no way to deal with the critical issues in this round of bargaining.

We want our employers to show their commitment to bargaining a new deal in post-secondary education, a deal which builds on real solutions and reflects a good faith approach to finding a resolution to our local and provincial contracts.

Your support as faculty is a critical first step. Work with your bargaining committee to ensure that your employer understands just how frustrated you are. Together we can negotiate a contract that meets your needs and helps our students and institutions thrive.