

**CUPE National University Workers Meeting  
Montreal, QC**

**Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel**

**October 12-14, 2006**

**Panel on Co-ordinated Bargaining  
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We have been through a number of rounds of bargaining in the university sector doing various degrees of co-ordination which varied depending on the political climate of the day.

**Who we are**

There are six public Universities in British Columbia and some of the universities have more than one campus.

CUPE is the only union for the support staff at all these universities except for one campus of UBC in the Okanagan. (The jurisdiction is currently in dispute with the provincial union BCGEU.) There are a few small units of other unions at UBC. CUPE also represents Teaching Assistants at UVic and UBC and sessionals at UVic. The sessionals and TA's are represented by the Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU) at SFU.

We call ourselves the University Co-ordinated Bargaining Committee (UCBC) and are comprised of approximately eleven thousand members and twelve bargaining units. There are no terms of reference governing the coordinated bargaining structure.

In the mid 90's, the locals began to meet to share experiences of each bargaining unit. Similar to the institutions the members work for; the autonomy of each local was and continues to be a fiercely protected feature of the group.

One of the first goals was to co-ordinate termination dates of all the collective agreements in the sector, to enable for more fruitful discussions.

**1999 - 2001**

In 1999, the collective agreements expired for all the CUPE locals (except UVic 4163) at UBC, SFU, UNBC, and UVic. Leading up to 1999, the UCBC held a bargaining conference identifying common concerns and identifying similarities and differences.

## **Climate**

Meanwhile, the government of the day (NDP) had a mandate for bargaining of 0,0%, and 2%. However, should the unions and employers and government come to an agreement that involved good public policy where additional monies could be found through an accord? The requirement to get these accords was there had to be a guarantee that the whole sector would be settled as a result of this 'accord' process. This would certainly be a challenge for CUPE locals where provincial bargaining has never existed, and particularly where autonomy is held tightly, both by the Employers and the Unions.

The UCBC group decided that we could act as a sector by ensuring "concurrent" bargaining and a "concurrent" settlement.

Many months of bargaining were spent trying to convince the universities that this was a good thing and an opportunity to get extra money from the government. It was also a challenge to get the government to take us seriously that we could get this group to act like a sector.

## **Proposal Preparation**

Locals prepared their proposals and met to discuss common themes and exchange their proposals. The UCBC targeted pay equity, long-term disability, jointly trustee pension plan, and an accord on research that provided extra money for the universities with our input.

## **Timing**

Initially, the locals met monthly and as bargaining progressed, meetings were held more often.

At the UCBC meetings, the locals decided as a group, by consensus, on all decisions and co-ordinated their dates for bargaining. Some locals required more days of bargaining and met more often than those whose bargaining could go more quickly with fewer days.

The locals agreed on each step in the process; when proposals were exchanged, when applications for mediation were sent in, (all in the same week), when strike votes, job action, and strike notices were served (staggered to escalate pressure on the government and the universities). The locals rotated single days of strike but returned to work between those single days. Eventually, we succeeded in getting all the employers to the same location in Vancouver and the government appointment of a special mediator to assist putting the deal(s) together.

The final stretch took approximately two weeks with each university and local bargaining in separate rooms and the government accord bargaining in another room. To drive our coordinated efforts home with the Employer, we gave one reply to all the universities and presented it to them in one room.

On the last night, strike action started at midnight at all campuses where strike votes had been taken, By morning, we had a deal except for two locals who had some outstanding reluctance by their employers. The strike continued at all campuses until all the employers agreed to the deal.

## **Result**

Our coordination was pivotal in getting the settlement. We not only achieved the mandate of 0,0% and 2% but also signed two (2) accords; one that provided \$11 million dollars for pay equity total for all of the locals (sector was 7,000 members at that time) plus an accord that provided government funding of 1.85% cost of payroll for each bargaining unit for each of three (3) years towards funding long-term disability plans.

The UCBC abandoned the pension accord due to the wide variations of pension plans from institution to institution.

We achieved a research accord that in the final hours of bargaining was killed by the employers.

The members were very pleased with their success.

## **2002 – 2005 Climate**

The government had changed and so did the government monetary mandate for bargaining. In the interim, the mandate was 2,2%, and 2%. Just prior to the expiration of the universities agreements, the mandate changed to 0,0%, and 0%.

The UCBC's goal was to get the 2,2%, and 2% that the other sectors had received. The locals were a bit looser on the process of coordination but generally co-ordinated the timing of their bargaining. All the locals were not sure that coordinating the bargaining as tightly as last time was a good idea. The coordination consisted of exchanging info throughout bargaining and trying to find the best monetary settlement that could be used at other tables. We advised the government that if we (CUPE) delivered the whole sector for a settlement we would want the 2,2%, and 2%. The government said no and so did the universities.

Meanwhile one local was determined to get the issue of tuition assistance addressed. Many other locals were not interested in a dispute or settling quickly and the university was determined to not budge on this issue. It became even clearer, as time wore on, that the government was clearly on the universities' side. However, another local at a different institution was coming close to what they felt was a settlement. With persuasion, the local held off, enabling Local 2278 to continue their plan of action.

Local 2278 started strike action at UBC in February of 2003. Even though other locals in the province were not moving that quickly at the table, there was no doubt that the three CUPE locals at UBC would have to coordinate their bargaining and any action. The UBC Locals had already been meeting together for a couple months prior to this

strike action commencing. All the locals had taken strike votes. The size of the campus presented many difficulties for picketing.

The solution was that Local 2278 would have controlled rotating action to single buildings where their members were working (and would have the biggest impact) (teaching buildings).

As the action progressed, all the locals agreed upon the locations of the next strike action. The plan was not only to rotate but also to escalate.

Local 2950 commenced their strike the beginning of March, enabling non-teaching buildings to be struck, and 116 members to join the picket lines, improving the Union's ability to picket larger areas.

The strike action was having no impact at the bargaining table. UBC's motive was to get major contracting out concessions from Local 116 collective agreement and UBC was not getting any movement from the local.

UBC had no recourse but to turn to their friends in government for help.

One week after Local 2950's strike commenced the government introduced legislation for a three week cooling off period at UBC – and the appointment of the assistant deputy minister as special mediator. The UBC CUPE locals remained on picket lines for two more days and shut the entire campus down with support from all the Unions including faculty.

Shortly after, the three locals, together with the president of CUPE BC, met with the Minister of Labour. An agreement was reached on a process to resolve bargaining.

Meanwhile, Local 3338 at SFU was ready to take strike action. The UCBC met and discussed the situation. To prevent legislating the whole sector, the UCBC decided that in dealing with this punitive government; bargaining was best done one on one. CUPE Local 3338 commenced their strike action as UBC's dispute was settling. This dispute also required intervention by the Minister to get resolved.

For the balance of the bargaining season, we settled each institution one at a time. Each followed the pattern set and each was discussed prior to the settlements.

## **2005 – 2010**

In 2004, the locals held a bargaining conference to debrief the last round and identify the goals for the upcoming round of bargaining. Money seemed to be the key issue for all of the bargaining units. The government of the day (Gordon Campbell's Liberals) had a scheduled election for May 17, 2005. The strategy by most of the locals in the province was to approach their employer to see if a quick deal could be had prior to the election date, which would include a rollover and a substantial monetary settlement. Those discussions took place to varying degrees at the different institutions but none resulted in any settlements. Traditional bargaining commenced and the locals agreed to

share information of their bargaining and identify what the appropriate wage proposal would be for the sector.

## **Climate**

All provincial government employees and provincial funded positions were coming up for bargaining in 2006 with most of the agreements expiring in March 2006. This included teachers, provincial employees, hospital workers, social service workers, K-12 support staff, etc. The government made an announcement in November 2005 that as an incentive to unions to finding labour peace through the Olympics in 2010, there would be an additional signing bonus. The signing bonus was approximately \$3,400 dollars per employee throughout the sectors. The hook by the government was that there had to be a settlement prior to the expiration of the current collective agreement, that there would be no dispute and that the new collective agreement would not expire until after the Olympics in 2010. Since most of the collective agreements in the university sector had already expired and the locals and the employers had already been bargaining, it was unknown how this would apply.

The universities are often overlooked when the government discusses provincial employees or provincial funded employees as they're seen as somewhat distinct. Bargaining does not take place with the provincial government but takes place with the individual institutions. UCBC felt that again this was an opportunity to act as a sector and attempt to get a better deal if we could enable the whole sector to settle at one time. That could be done through concurrent bargaining and concurrent settlements similar to what we had done in 1999 - 2000. The universities were quite adamant that was not going to happen; they would not be dealing together as a sector and in no way were those universities going to be seen together in one room. The government advised us that it was fruitless for us to continue to pursue that process. However, the university locals were concerned that individual groups would get picked off; that there were concerns of concession bargaining, in particular the pension plan at UVIC affecting Local 917 and 951 members; contracting out issues at UBC affecting Local 116; and student issues at Thompson Rivers University. We did not want any individual locals either getting picked off with those concessions or lower wage deals sought with any of the individual locals. The locals agreed that we would file for mediation simultaneously and arrange to have all the mediated talks take place simultaneously in Vancouver. The locals were successful in getting all the employers to mediation in Vancouver. However, the employers dug in their heels on refusing to meet with us at the same time and went to great lengths to make it appear that they were not coordinating their action.

Meanwhile, the government was quite concerned with what CUPE would do in the University sector. All the other sectors that were bargaining at that time were not dominated by CUPE. By this time, particularly after the teachers' disputes last fall, the government was quite concerned about the strong stance that CUPE and the university locals were taking. The government responded by "parking" the university locals and trying to find settlements in other sectors first. Even though the government set the deadline as prior to the expiration of the collective agreements, the University sector was advised in mid-March that the Universities' deadline was also March 31, 2006. There was no doubt that the intent was to corner the CUPE locals into getting a

settlement and not having a dispute. After twenty-five days of mediation, there were settlements for all the Universities before the deadline. Against all odds such as Thompson River University and Local 900's outstanding set of bargaining since 2002, their transition from a College and a merger and proposed pension concessions at UVIC and contracting out concessions at UBC, these settlements were done concurrently as the union had planned. The locals ensured that every local had settled before any deals were signed for each of the individual locals.

## **Result**

Our coordination was pivotal again in getting the settlement. The locals received the signing bonus for all of the members in the sector. No locals were forced to accept concessions. Wage increases varied from one local to another, partly due to the employers' insistence on ensuring it did not have the appearance of a sectoral settlement and partly because the government enforced an extraordinary type of bargaining. Some highlights that were achieved, include sufficient ability job promotion clause at 3799 UNBC, substantial wage increases and wage adjustments for the trades in Local 116 (UBC), substantial job evaluation adjustment for Local 2950 (UBC), joint trusteeship of pension plan for Local 917 and 951 (UVIC); also resulting in increased grid adjustments and employer-paid LTD plan; new pay grid adjustment for Local 900 (TRU) resulting in large wage increases for a number of members; job security for Local 4163 (UVIC) sessionals; creative wage increases for Local 3338 (SFU) and post bargaining Local 3886 at Royal Roads, received substantial pay equity adjustments. TSSU (Teaching Support Staff Union) at SFU, who joined us in mediation, resolved long-standing issues at bargaining and substantial wage increases for their members including a first agreement for the English Language Instructors.

***Submitted By: Connie Credico, University Coordinator, CUPE BC Region***