



Information Bulletin

To All Employees of the Community Living Society September 25, 2006

Your Pressure on Government is Vital in our Fight for Fair and Equitable Wages

On September 20th an article appeared in the Vancouver Sun written by Vaughn Palmer. We've reprinted his article on the other side of this bulletin in case you didn't see it. Our Minister of Finance appears to need some convincing to keep her promises to non-union workers in the public sector. It is very important that all of us take the time to write to her as soon as possible.

We have enclosed three letters with blanks that you can simply complete, put in an envelope and mail to Victoria. No postage is required. The letters are for Minister Taylor, Minister Christensen and a blank one for your MLA. You can obtain information on the CLS website that will give you information you need to contact your MLA.

If you prefer to write your own letter — please go ahead! The forms are sent because time is of the essence and I know how busy everyone is, but I also know we have excellent writers out there so please, go for it! Some thoughts to get you started are:

- For the past nine months we have been given assurances that this issue is being addressed and been encouraged to wait — without any results.
- You do the same work for our communities and government as other employees who have received increases and bonuses, and your services are provided under the same contracts as those services. Those contracts have been re-opened to provide additional funding.

- Minister Taylor, as Chair of Treasury Board and Chair of the Public Sector Employers' Council, will be involved in any decision to approve a compensation plan for any Ministry, so ultimately approving this plan is a responsibility she cannot avoid.

I strongly encourage you to respond to Vaughn Palmer's column. You can send your thoughts directly to him at vpalmer@direct.ca. As well, you can write to the Vancouver Sun editorial at sunletters@png.canwest.com and don't forget to include your name, address and daytime number. Discuss this issue with your co-workers. You can write as a group. You can also encourage family members to add their voice to this important issue.

Again — don't forget our website www.cls-bc.org for updates, and the Spectrum website www.spectrumsociety.org/RespectAll/default.aspx where you can find a collection of correspondence and updates from the Coalition.

I appreciate everyone's help on this. Please take a moment to send the enclosed letter and let our government know that this must be resolved.

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Those left out of public pay deal present a thorny problem for Taylor & Co.

Vaughn Palmer *Vancouver Sun* Wednesday, September 20, 2006

VICTORIA - Finance Minister Carole Taylor received a plea last week from a lawyer representing dozens of contractors and hundreds of employees who were left behind in the public sector pay settlements. "This is neither rational nor fair," says the letter from Vancouver lawyer Walter Rilkoff on behalf of the Federation of Child and Family Services. His letter, dated Sept. 11, reminded Taylor of her own words on the need for evenhandedness in dealing with everyone in the public sector. "Minister, you were quoted as saying, 'We are asking everyone in the public sector to achieve our financial goals. If we do so, they should all share in the benefits they help create.'

"Unfortunately, one significant group has been left out," he continued. Namely, his client, the federation, and particularly its non-union members and their employees. Federation members, working on contract to the government, provide care, counselling and other services to troubled children, families, youth and the disabled. Some of these public sector service providers are unionized; some are not. And that difference in status made a huge difference for their respective workforces during the recent public sector negotiations.

As Rilkoff tells it, the unionized service providers were for the most part included in the settlements. Their workers got the average eight-per-cent increase in wages and benefits over four years. They were eligible for signing bonuses in the \$3,000-to-\$4,000 range. There was similar treatment at many firms where the workforce was only partly unionized. But the non-union members of the federation were excluded and consequently so were their workers, many of them having been without a raise since 2000. "There is no justification for distinguishing between union and non-union employees in this sector," Rilkoff wrote. "There are no distinctions to be made between the type of work performed by members who are either wholly or partially union and those who are non-union."

A letter from a lawyer wouldn't be complete without at least one legal shot across the bow, and here it is: "Making such a distinction may be unlawful in that it may constitute a violation of Section 9 of the Labour Code, which prohibits using coercion or intimidation that could reasonably have the effect of compelling or inducing a person to join a union." How so? Well word is getting around among the non-union workers about the more favourable treatment of their unionized counterparts.

Not surprisingly, union organizers are helping to spread the word. "Unions are using the absence of a [compensation] plan to organize employees of our agencies," according to a representative of 20 non-union agencies with more than 1,000 employees. Five members of the federation have reportedly gone the union route in the past few months and more are expected to do so.

A bitter joke, circulated by some members of the federation, has the Liberals doing more to unionize the sector than the New Democrats ever did. Adding to the frustrations are promises from government to find a way to address the problem. Rilkoff's letter to Taylor recounts several reassurances from the ministry of children and family development, the main point of contact in government for members of the federation. But that seems increasingly unlikely, as his letter would indicate. "Minister," the lawyer wrote, "my client and its non-unionized members are becoming extremely frustrated both on their own behalf and on behalf of their employees. "I respectfully suggest that frustration is justified," he concludes before a final pitch for the non-union contract workers to be given raises and bonuses in the same range as their unionized counterparts.

Taylor's response, when I spoke to her about the letter, was exceedingly cautious. She began diplomatically. The non-union firms and their workers were "valuable." They were "all good people." Still, she was not inclined to respond favourably. If there is a dispute here, according to Taylor, then it involves the contracts between the ministry and the service providers. If the contract payments are inadequate, then they may need to be increased. But there should be no reopening the contract (as she sees it) in mid-term to fund a raise to employees of the service provider. The time to do that, Taylor indicated, would be at the next provincial budget.

The only other hint as to Taylor's thinking was her passing reference to what would happen if "Maximus" were to make such a request, Maximus being the private company with a 10-year fixed contract to manage two of the public health insurance programs.

From that reference, I took it that the Liberals fear creating a precedent that could extend to all private firms with government contracts. vpalmer@direct.ca © The Vancouver Sun 2006