



HOW PUBLIC SECTOR BARGAINING WORKS IN B.C.

In B.C. today, there are just over 500,000 workers in the provincial public sector. They include the provincial public service, Crown corporations, health, community social services, public schools, and post-secondary institutions like the University of Victoria.

It's a provincial agency – the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat (or PSEC) – that is responsible for labour relations issues with public sector workers. Its responsibilities include wages and other compensation.

What is the *Mandate*?

For many years, PSEC has told public sector employers what their offers for compensation and other contract improvements will be. This means all public sector wage offers are the same - it's become known as *the Mandate*.

In this current round of bargaining, public sector unions (including CUPE) worked together to reject PSEC's first general wage offers and successfully pressured them for a better deal. For the first time since the *mandate* tactic has been used, PSEC revised its compensation offer for a three-year term:

- Year 1 – a flat increase of \$0.25/hour which provides a greater percentage increase for lower paid employees, plus 3.24%
- Year 2 – 5.5% plus a potential Cost of Living Adjustment to a maximum of 6.75% (The 6.75% increase was triggered as of March 21, 2023)
- Year 3 – 2% plus a potential Cost of Living Adjustment to a maximum of 3%

This is how the general wage increase in the tentative agreement between CUPE 917 and the University of Victoria was reached.

Limitations of the *Mandate*

This so-called *mandate* is a problem for public sector workers and their unions. It places limits on the ability of unions to negotiate in free collective bargaining. Public sector unions have been working for years on strategies to deal with it.

Public sector unions did push back to getting a significantly better offer this round. But the main problems remain - any tentative agreement reached that exceeds the terms of the PSEC mandate will not be ratified by the provincial government.

Since *the mandate* tactic has been used, no public sector collective agreement has exceeded the mandated general wage increases - even with strike actions.

Public sector unions, including CUPE, are committed to continuing working together to push back against this *mandate* tactic.

How are other raises, like market adjustments, decided?

As part of its *mandate*, PSEC allocates a certain amount of money to each provincial public sector employer that it can use for other improvements for workers.

It is up to employer and the union to negotiate how this money is used. **BUT** there are limitations. PSEC says this money can't be used for any general wage increases.

This is a challenge for unions. UVic has its own priorities on how this money should be allocated, but your bargaining committee has tried to ensure these adjustments are as fair as possible. The input of CUPE 917 members in the bargaining process is crucial to helping us make our collective agreement stronger and fairer for all members.