

Sam's Strike: The Arrogance of the Man and "The Man"

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, July 31, 2007

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It is clear to me that Sam's Strike is all about the Vancouver mayor's deluded sense of autocracy [see below].

While other municipalities are being lined up to support Vancouver's mean-spirited refusal to bargain in good faith, we wait to watch how long Sam can go thinking that the world will actually revolve around him and his idea that through his immense, sheer will, thousands of people who are actually committed to building community will crack under his might and give in to his petty demands.

His mayoralty is a shame.

Vancouver is the only city in Canada that has had three strikes in the last decade. In a strong economy, to not reward public workers, but instead to demand job insecurity and a contract term to expire days after the Olympics ends is just plain mean. It's also representative of the grand golden straitjacket of neoliberalism that erodes the social fabric we've spent generations building.

[Talks with CUPE 15 break down, city fails again to bargain worker issues](#)

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VANCOUVER – CUPE 15, the union representing striking Vancouver inside workers, returned to the bargaining table yesterday at 9:30 a.m. tabling a 5 year package that addressed Mayor Sullivan's concern about labour stability through the Olympics, with an understanding that the city was prepared to deal with issues that were also important to the union.

Despite this CUPE 15 movement, the City of Vancouver once again refused to bargain and spent less than 2 hours and 22 minutes over a period of two full days speaking with the union. The rest of the time, the city committee "caucused" while union negotiators sat and waited.

"We knew something was wrong when we arrived at the table and the City of Vancouver did not even have their two top decision makers in the room or in the building," says CUPE 15 president, Paul Faoro. "You would have thought that with a strike coming into its second week, civic services at a halt and nearly 5,500 Vancouver city workers on the street, that General Manager Mike Zora and City Manager Judy Rogers would have made it a priority to attend and negotiate a settlement. What else could be more important?"

"There is one thing I give the city credit for," says Faoro. "Consistency. The City of Vancouver has consistently failed to bargain and continues to frustrate the process to this day."

CUPE 15 presented a complete written package to the city for negotiation on Friday morning. The city refused to respond in writing to the proposal.

“Frankly, we have had enough of this circus, and we suspect the public has had enough too. What is it going to take for the city to realize that manipulation and game-playing is not going to bring about a collective agreement?” says Faoro. “How much does the public have to be inconvenienced and how long do our members have to walk the picket-line without a paycheque, unable to provide the services they are proud to deliver to the residents of Vancouver?”

CUPE 15’s chief negotiator, Keith Graham, says the city is still holding onto their “final offer”, tabled on July 9th, 2007. This is the same offer that union members voted down by an overwhelming 89% because it had takeaways and failed to address issues of importance to the union, like job security (no-contracting out language), improvements for auxiliaries, whistleblower protection and harassment resolution language.

Description of major CUPE 15 issues:

*Contrary to common belief, CUPE 15’s current collective agreement has no language in it that protects Vancouver’s inside workers from contracting out. At any moment, the city of Vancouver can outsource whatever services they choose, eliminating jobs and compromising the quality and stability of public services. It is for this reason that CUPE 15’s primary concern is to negotiate language that provides them with **job security** through the term of the agreement.*

“We recognize that it is reasonable for the city of Vancouver to secure labour stability through the Olympics, but it is also reasonable for city workers to seek job security,” says Faoro. “Mayor Sullivan and his management staff have given us no reason to trust that they won’t just contract out our jobs one-by-one over the next 5-years.”

*Another major issue that the union would like to see addressed is **improvements for auxiliary workers**, whom have no right to be scheduled by seniority, no benefits, no statutory holiday pay and have gone from temporary and occasional work relief to a massive under-compensated labour pool. In parks, for instance, two-thirds of the workforce is made up of “auxiliary workers” who are kept in this position for years and years.*

CUPE 15 would like to see more of these jobs converted into full-time jobs with benefits and negotiate improvements for remaining auxiliaries that include scheduling by seniority. Right now, management can and does decide to call into work an auxiliary with less than a day on the job over an auxiliary worker with 14 years service with the city.

*The union has also made it a priority at the bargaining table to negotiate **harassment resolution language** and **whistleblower protection** - contract language that protects workers from discipline and/or job loss when they speak out on an issue of public concern, like water safety, equipment maintenance, safety procedures, etc.*

Union package to city of Vancouver, July 27, 2007:

Using the contract ratified in Richmond as a starting point, CUPE 15 tabled a wage increase of 21 percent over 5 years that they clearly stated was negotiable. The package also included proposed benefit improvements and the above-mentioned priorities.

The city claimed that the union's package amounted to a total cost of 30 percent and was not "affordable and reasonable". Faoro says the city's calculation is more "phantom costing" and just an excuse not to begin negotiations in earnest.

"It is frustrating to be at the bargaining table with people who clearly do not understand or are pretending not to understand how negotiations work," says Faoro. "The idea is both sides present their position and you end up somewhere in between."

Robin Jones, CUPE National representative and chief negotiator for CUPE 394 and CUPE 718, the two Richmond locals that ratified a deal last week is available to comment to the media on the total cost of his committee's initial proposal to the city, which he says began at about 40% cost to the city of Richmond.

"We asked for almost 12 benefit improvements, we agreed to only two in the end, glasses and dietician services. We asked for a \$2 an hour shift differential, we agreed to only \$1 an hour in the end. We asked for \$1.50 an hour dirty pay, we agreed to 75 cents, we asked for 100 percent benefit coverage and we ended up with only 80 percent in the end and the list goes on," says Jones. "That's how negotiations work and today we have a signed collective agreement and both sides are happy. But you can't get there if one party is not willing to negotiate."

CUPE 15 represents Vancouver's 2,500 inside city workers who normally work at city, parks, Ray-Cam, and Britannia Community Centre.