

November 8, 2019

UPDATE: BEE CLEAN NEGOTIATIONS IN NEW BRUNSWICK

CUPW is negotiating a first collective agreement for Bee Clean workers in Moncton and Saint John, New Brunswick. After negotiations and mediation broke down in May 2019, Bee Clean requested that the New Brunswick Labour and Employment Board order an arbitrated contract. This request was granted, and on Monday, November 4, CUPW and Bee Clean met with arbitrator John McEvoy. The parties presented proposals on a number of outstanding monetary issues including wages, overtime, statutory holidays, vacation leave, bereavement leave, sick leave, shift premium, boot allowance, uniforms, and health benefits.

The employer claims that the cleaning business isn't very profitable and that they cannot afford the union's demands, but when asked by the arbitrator for financial information, they refused to disclose any numbers. They also refused to give the arbitrator a "line in the sand" amount they could pay. The arbitrator seemed to imply that if the employer was to rely on their poverty, they needed to provide proof.

To support our proposals, the union presented about 25 contracts from private and public sector workplaces in New Brunswick, including warehouses like Coke and Pepsi, nursing homes, schools and universities. These contracts show the wages and benefits of other unionized workers in province doing the same type of work.

The employer was apparently trying to have it both ways: They continually asked the arbitrator to enforce the same level of compensation or benefit that the workers had before they were unionized. They used the term "status quo" frequently. The employer relied on four contracts from Nova Scotia in their arguments. But when the union pointed out that these agreements had better benefits than the employer's offer, the employer stated that workers getting a first contract cannot expect the benefits that come from a more "mature" relationship between union and employer.

The distance between the union and the employer was most evident when looking at the wage proposals. The union proposed that Bee Clean cleaners earn the average of all unionize cleaners in New Brunswick, which is \$19.07 per hour, and a two to three percent increase per year. The employer proposed minimum wage plus \$.25 cents for workers with less than two years of service, minimum wage plus \$.30 for employees with two to five years of service, and minimum wage plus \$.35 for employees with more than five years of service. The only raise employees would get are those that occur when minimum wage goes up.

Our information was put forward in a clear manner that was well understood by the arbitrator. A decision is expected no later than the first week of December. Once the arbitrator has settled the money issues, the parties will meet to determine if any companion language is necessary. For example, if the arbitrator decides workers are entitled to sick leave, we will need to provide language on how it works, full day only, two-hour blocks or on a minute-by-minute basis.

We are cautiously optimistic that a fair contract will be awarded to Bee Clean workers in New Brunswick.

CUPW is committed to helping workers gain the wages and conditions we all deserve. Next up in Atlantic Canada, we will be helping Bee Clean workers in St-John's, Newfoundland negotiate their first collective agreement

In Solidarity,



Jean-Philippe Grenier
3rd National Vice-President



Toni MacAfee
Negotiator



Jim Gallant
Negotiator