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October 4, 2024

**BY EMAIL**

Honourable Nate Horner  
President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance

Dear Minister Horner,

**Re: Provincial Interference in Collective Bargaining**

As President of CUPE Alberta, in support of our 15,000 CUPE members in provincially funded workplaces negotiating collective bargaining agreements this year, I take issue with recent actions and comments made by your government that contradict the spirit and intent of the legal bargaining process.

Your senior press secretary is quoted on September 12<sup>th</sup> in Fort McMurray Today stating:

*“CUPE locals bargain directly with School Boards, the province does not bargain with educational support staff. We encourage all parties to put students and education first.”*

A spokesperson with the Alberta Ministry of Education provided the following statement published on September 23, 2024 by Global news:

*“To be clear, the Government of Alberta does not bargain with CUPE, and your assertion that the government does not care for the employees employed by the province is completely inaccurate. We encourage both the union and the school divisions to work constructively with the mediator towards agreements to prevent disruptions to education and childcare in Fort McMurray.”*

Additionally, a letter sent on September 23, 2024 on behalf of MLAs Tany Yao and Brian Jean stated:

*“In Alberta, individual school authorities are responsible for establishing the terms and conditions of employment for all education support staff, either through collective bargaining with representative unions or as a part of a school authority’s human resource planning process for non-unionized employees.”*

You claim that bargaining is solely between the employer and the Union. However, on September 16, 2024 your government forced CUPE Locals 2545 and 2559 to participate in your appointed Dispute Inquiry Board (DIB) process. This interference in our bargaining process came immediately before the end of the 72-hour strike notice given by these Locals, following their members voting to strike with a mandate of 99.1% and 98.1%. This is the democratic process union members are entitled to participate in being disrespected and undermined.

Having now been through the DIB proceedings, it is clear this interference was used by your government solely as a stall tactic. There has been no movement from the employer's bargaining representative and there is nothing further being put on offer for the Local members to consider. What is on the table was already rejected by a supermajority vote on September 13th.

Your government passed legislation allowing you to provide School Boards with "secret" binding bargaining directives on wages and other bargaining proposals. This mandate has been referenced at every bargaining table as the reason for the School Divisions' resistance to deviate from their identical wage proposals.

These secret mandates have been so prominent in bargaining that one employer simply included a link to your legislation as their wage proposal.

Comments made by the employer representatives confirm that your government is the key impediment to being able to move away from their current austerity position on wages and come to an agreement.

School Divisions across Alberta have been given a direct mandate by your government to hold wages down to 2.75% or below from 2020 to 2024 and well below inflation in go-forward contracts. There is an obviously concerted effort to impose rollbacks through the loss of purchasing power and two-tiered wage cuts.

The bargaining representative directly or indirectly present at, essentially, every table has consistently been an individual hired by the Provincial Bargaining and Compensation Office (PBCO) with accountability to your government. There is no indication that employers are being allowed to negotiate freely and fairly without the direct input and approval of the PBCO.

Mandating wage caps, interfering in the right to strike, and positioning the same bargaining representatives directed by the Provincial Government at every table indicates that your government is, in fact, significantly influencing the bargaining process, contradicting your assertion that the Government of Alberta does not bargain with CUPE.

Please provide clarity for our membership and the public on your role and intentions in ongoing and upcoming collective agreement negotiations.

Will you remove the mandate to allow employers to bargain in good faith, and provide the funding necessary to fulfill the staffing and operational capacity obligations your government is responsible for?

If you continue to influence the collective bargaining process to control and constrain your obligation to properly fund public services in our province, you need to be honest with Alberta workers and admit that you believe they are not worth a fair wage.

Our members are hard-working Albertans who pay their taxes and do their best every day to deliver quality services to the children and families across our province who rely on them. They deserve to know if their government is on their side or working against them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rory Gill', written in a cursive style.

Rory Gill  
President, CUPE Alberta

:sz/cope491

cc:

Danielle Smith, Premier, President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations

Matt Jones, Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade

Demetrios Nicolaides, Minister of Education