

# TFEU President's Report : Winter 2011/2012

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## Overview

The BCTF negotiations for a new contract continue and appear to have hit quite a few roadblocks. TFEU has offered considerable support to "un-stick" this standoff and we are assisting in many creative ways. TFEU has also offered to provide a skills bank which will be initiated shortly.

I am really pleased to say that we have made tremendous progress in many key areas through a collaborative yet very firm approach to our committees, joint working groups and liaison meetings. These last few months have been really hard work and there have been times when it felt like we were going "two steps backwards and one step forward". That has dramatically changed recently and we can honestly say that there have been breakthroughs in the areas that count the most.

This has been achieved through a trust system built up between TFEU and Management and through an Executive and Committee team that have been working together. There have been many late nights but it has been worthwhile.

I cannot begin to say how good the Executive team has been and I want to single out Christine Choinski for her dedication and hard work.

## Breakthroughs

So – let's look at the breakthroughs:

- **"No Less than Minimum"** now has a companion called "Close to Minimum" which means that a strong degree of flexibility has been added for most postings where internal staff working towards professional designations; gaining relevant experience; showing related skills; working in nearby functions etc. will gain credit towards promotional and transitional careers.

- This is what we have been pushing for a long time and we have finally "broken through" in this key area. There is still a lot of work and there are bound to be exceptions but the new principle is to provide better support for internal staff.
- **Contracting Out** has been a long running issue with so many contracts being set up without Management going through the Article 6 process. In fact I can honestly say that every contract has gone this route – until now!! We were first able to get apologies for the repeated breach of Article 6; then we got virtually all capital projects moved in-house with TFEU Project Managers. Now we have won a significant grievance with the introduction of a formal process to request contracting out from the Union and the switch of the last contracted out project to in-house TFEU staff. This change has been heavily supported by management and table officers and I think we have finally seen a true change in direction.
- **Joint Accommodations** have received stronger and better language and a more collaborative process that looks for practical and supportive solutions. This is what we really care about – that Members are treated with respect and dignity and helped when they are sick or disabled; that accommodation is meaningful and aids in recovery.
- **Job Evaluations are progressing well** and we are hoping to bring in our Job Organization expert, Vicki Averill, to assist with the backlog. There seems to be more willingness for the Employer to work collaboratively with us. Sometimes there are differences but some of the "stickiest" cases (if that is a real word) are now progressing to resolution. For example some of our Human Resources and Case Assistant classes seem encouraging. There is a lot of work still to be done
- **Contract** : Stay tuned for late-breaking news on this. I am hoping to present something to the membership at a winter meeting in late January and a subsequent ballot.
- **Organizational change / Tech change** : We have made this a priority for stronger and better language and much more up to date provisions. I believe

that we have made a breakthrough in this area by the promise to establish a joint committee to improve language and by more acceptance that Org change/ Tech change can have a negative impact on staff.

- **Privacy of Long Term Disability claims** – this has been a concern for some members. As you are aware there is a parallel process via Human Resources if you do not want to present your case to the Disability Manager – Ritchie Kendrick. We have been meeting with Ritchie and various other staff to identify the process, the neutrality and parallel process and to tighten this up. More meetings are planned to further identify key information and the ultimate goal is to develop a TFEU Members brochure to assist with benefits of this type and rehab options.

### **Liaison and Mediation**

My bread and butter liaison and mediation work has been constant. I meet with members frequently to discuss workplace issues; lack of accommodation for medical needs; local conflicts; special situations that often don't have solutions in the Collective Agreement. I am pleased to say that virtually every case is resolved quickly in a win-win environment.

Examples include determining bonussing; dealing with work outside of the Job Description; extending probations to allow for a better evaluation; arranging Term position "swaps"; interpreting Collective Agreement articles with the Employer and many other similar situations. In virtually every situation we obtain the very best "deal" for our Member.

### **Grievances**

We have had some significant challenges with one Grievance – I suspect it will go all the way to Arbitration. Others have either been resolved to our satisfaction or have not had any grounds for continuing. In this non-winnable category we usually see a request that has no hard data or documentation to support the case. The lesson here is to always keep copies of all information in case they are needed.

I have been working diligently with our Labour lawyer on several cases – some with formal grievances and some that are related to Independent Medical Exams, sick leaves, long term disability or other functions.

## **Bargaining**

I have continued to be actively involved in the Coquitlam Teachers Association bargaining with our sub-local. We are still hoping to develop a first contract by February 2012. We continue to get superb support from Jean Rands in this work. Our strategy for the other contracts, including the BCTF one , is five-fold:

- A member survey – Charlie Naylor will lead this. *It is coming shortly.*
- Grievances will be compiled – Christine Choinski. *This has largely been completed.*
- We will develop Common Language – hopefully across all contracts – Jean Rands.
- Training on Negotiating skills and contract language will be arranged. *Completed with tremendous success. Thank You Kathy Powell for orgainzaing this. We had several sub-local staff attend it.*
- Benefits will be reviewed. *In progress.*

So you can see that the team has been moving along to schedule and we have many of the key requirements in place or well under way. Charlie Naylor is the leader in this area and will communicate the survey and plan in the next few weeks.

We will probably not get into serious bargaining until late summer but lots of preparation work needs to be done in the meantime. Sub-local contracts may start earlier based on demand and local needs.

## Sub-Locals

I have been meeting with sub-local staff and working on local grievances and issues. We have 4 sub-locals: Coquitlam, Vancouver Elementary, Vancouver Secondary and Surrey.

I have met with many of the sub-local staff and plan to get out more to functions and meetings.

Jean and I will be preparing a small handbook for sub-locals over the next few months.

## BCTF Liaison Committee

We have resolved the most important key items for this high level committee. We have held a couple of meetings and more are planned for the new year.

- **No Less than Minimum postings** : This is the "hottest" topic for us. Equivalent skills, experience, knowledge and seniority are not always evaluated as alternatives to specific certificates. *Largely resolved.*
- **Computer Loan Program** : I have been informed that there may not be budget for this year but it should be pursued as a requested benefit. *Some progress with an agreement to review.*
- **Contracting Out** : There have been several consulting contracts where the Union has not been informed; in fact Human Resources is often unaware of these consultants. We will be taking a very firm stance on contracting out as this is directly taking work away from our Members who are fully capable of doing this work. There are 5 contracts that we are aware of currently. *Largely resolved.*

## **Committees**

Several Committees are operating and some new ones will get started in the new year including the Tech Change and Org Change committees. I have also asked management to initiate the technology working group in a new format and potentially some other joint committees.

Committee work is the lifeblood of TFEU and enables us to deliver services and support across a wide spectrum. You will regularly see me asking for volunteers and we have always had good responses.

Thank You, Peter Valbonesi

President, TFEU