Coral Harbour Housing Authority Workers Vote Overwhelmingly in Favour of Strike After Conciliation fails.

After three recent days of conciliation between the Public Service Alliance of Canada North and the Nunavut Employees Union (PSAC/NEU) and the Coral Harbour Housing Authority, the parties were unable to reach an agreement. The Union went into conciliation hoping that the Iqaluit Housing Authority agreement reached in August would pave the way to reaching a settlement in Coral Harbour. The employer failed to address the Union's concerns on the monetary package, or agree to improved working conditions for casuals, among other issues that remain in dispute.

PSAC/NEU members sent a strong and clear message by overwhelmingly voting in favour of strike action on September 13, 2023. The Union is disappointed to see that it is becoming clear that workers may have no other option but to strike, as was the case with the Iqaluit Housing Authority (IHA) strike that lasted 136 days.

"It is the same old story across Nunavut when it comes to the Nunavut Housing Corporation funded bargaining units. The employer struggles to understand equal pay and that casuals deserve better pay and working conditions," says NEU President Jason Rochon. "Intimidation and threats will not get us to a deal. They refuse to fund housing in Nunavut like it matters. It is time to fund it like it matters!"

The situation in Coral Harbour, and the similarities with the situation at the Iqaluit Housing Authority, make it clear that these negotiations would be more productive if all housing authority workers were part of one bargaining unit.

The systemic injustices facing workers in the North must be addressed. In terms of the monetary package, members are simply asking for the same economic increases and lump sum negotiated in the Iqaluit Housing Authority agreement. In addition to that, some casuals in Coral Harbour have been working full time for two years and more, only earning $20.85 per hour and having minimum entitlements under the collective agreement. This hourly rate makes it extremely difficult to meet their and their families' needs in Coral Harbour and the Union is seeking to correct this injustice.

"Coral Harbour Housing Authority workers want nothing more than dignity and respect. We wish this could be achieved through conciliation, but it is becoming clear a strike may be these workers' only option." says Josee-Anne Spirito, the PSAC North Regional Executive Vice President. "PSAC North will stand with Coral Harbour workers, just as we stood with IHA workers, until their rights are respected."

The Union presented several passes with potential solutions. The employer refused not only any commitment to make employees term employees which would allow them to be eligible for more benefits under the collective agreement, but also significantly increase their wages. Casual work with minimum conditions is contributing to poverty and unfair working conditions in Nunavut and puts casuals in a more vulnerable situation.

The Union remains open for bargaining and considers that a deal is possible. However, the employer needs to recognize the IHA settlement represents a fair baseline for a deal and the employer must address the very deteriorated situation that casuals and other employees face in Coral Harbour. The conciliation period ended on September 17, 2023, and the parties are now in the 21-day cool off period before the parties face a strike or lock-out position.

PSAC North and the NEU repeat their call for Minister of Labour Seamus O'Regan and the federal government to step in and halt the use of scab labour during strikes. They also repeat their call on the Nunavut Housing Corporation to consistently step in and prevent strikes from occurring by ensuring employers offer fair deals to their workers.

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