

DEFENSE OF PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS IS SELF-DEFENSE FOR AUCE

If there is job action called for in the next few days, it will not simply be action in defense of the 1600 BCGEU workers scheduled to be fired, nor against the labour legislation, but action in defense of all those effected by the legislation. BCGEU is just one of hundreds of unions and community groups belonging to Solidarity.

Under Bill 2, which concerns the BCGEU, the Professional Employees Association and the BC Nurses Union, a union would have no say in hiring (ie. no say in job postings, seniority in hiring), no say in reclassification or downgrading, no say in assignment of duties, relocation, hours of work, job evaluation, training and retraining, or wages. If you add to this the powers given to the employer by Bills 3 and 11, there's nothing left, effectively no union. Bill 2 doesn't effect us directly, but that's because we come under the Labour Code and the groups effected are governed by their own act. But changes are being proposed to the Labour Code, and we could quickly find ourselves in the same boat.

The immediate possibility of job action hinges on Bill 3, and this bill directly effects us. The Public Sector Restraint Act is designed to cut back the public sector. 11,000 government employees were targeted to be cut. Last year 6,000 positions were eliminated through a freeze on hiring and through normal attrition. If half the task has been accomplished this way, why is it necessary to eliminate the rest of the targeted positions through legislated firing?

The amendments which have already been made to Bill 3 do not change the fact that it allows employers to fire employees at their discretion, and with no regard to seniority, bumping or recall rights. UBC is facing large cuts in staff due to our budget deficit. Bill 3 can be used against us. As it stands now, this bill allows the employer the right to terminate employees for a variety of reasons, all of which can be easily manipulated: restructuring, ability to pay, level of production. The regulations allow seniority to be used as a factor, but the units within which this applies can be defined by the employer — ie. they can be as small as the employer pleases, a one-person academic office for instance. It is likely that the cuts we face will include the elimination of whole programs, in which case length of service would be of no use to someone being terminated. In addition, Bill 3 paves the way for the same kind of management practices entrenched by Bill 2: arbitrary reassignment, relocation and reclassification. Add to this Bill 11 which allows up to a -5% (ie. minus 5 percent) 'increase', and Bill 26 which allows an expired contract to be declared null and void, and what do we have left? This is why our opposition to the legislation and our support for Operation Solidarity is essential. Much has been accomplished already, and much more can be accomplished through this movement.