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Brookside correctional workers air concerns

Posted By TED AMSDEN

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Members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union Local 337 held an information picket outside the Brookside Youth Centre in Cobourg yesterday to raise awareness of what union president Peter Harding has termed the "slow process" of contract negotiations with the province.

The Ontario government bargained successfully with other sectors of the public service, but a deal with the corrections unit has not been realized. The 159 correctional officers at Brookside want the same contract that was ratified by the facility's 50 unified workers, including kitchen staff, nurses, social workers, secretaries, maintenance workers, etc.

The essence of the local union's argument was put forward in a press release. In it the government is accused of slowing things down and "making veiled threats of strike/lockdown implications."

Under the heading of "What do we want?", five categories are stated:

- * The first involves "dramatic reductions and restrictions placed on (correctional officers' and youth service workers') sick time benefits." Citing a dramatically shorter life span as a direct result of the job, the union's perspective is that the requirements of the job place undue physical pressure on workers. Workers must be in top shape and can't work with minor ailments, the union claims, and thus need more sick days. The present offer doesn't recognize this issue.
- * The union says the needs of probation officers are not being met with regards to pay, overtime, excessive case and workload issues.
- * Groundskeepers, volunteer coordinators, recreation officers and others have been ignored for raises, shift premiums and opportunities, the union charges.
- * According to the press release, other workers in the All Unified Category received an additional 1% above those working in corrections.
- * And finally, unclassified youth workers and probation officers are being offered nothing, the union claims. Full-time work is being offered in other categories, but not theirs.

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