

Yes, dear spectators of matters unionist, I admit it's been a long time since I've written you and I know that my epistolary hiatus is a cruel thing to do to you. It's just that I was suffering from an acute crisis that in Latin is called *tempus fugit*, which, combined with a new whim of mine to live by the tenets of socialism (the "Marc" - and not "Marx" - version of this doctrine which holds that that being a socialist means leading an extremely active social life), have stripped me of all my free time. But here I am again for your pleasure, at least for a newsletter.

So, what has occurred in the world of labour relations since the last time I wrote you? Many things, I must confess, so hang on because this one's going to be long. Very long. In fact, if I were honest with myself, I'd say this will be too long and I'd let it go. But as a superman *in excelsis* I am committed to the impossible, so I'll start. And for those indomitable souls among you who are courageously reading these lines, I'm generous enough to include subtitles, so feel free to skip from one subject to the next like a bee does from flower to flower on the springtime prairie (notice the clever allusion to the changing seasons - I'm really worthy of the admiration given by my legions of emulators).

But before you throw yourself headfirst into reading, do not forget to mark the next general meeting date for the Translation Bureau Local in your calendars: May 17! All the details are on our Web page at http://www.acep-cape.ca/EN/local_900/.

On CAPE's activities

Bargaining

As you will already know if you keep minimally up-to-date with union activities, CAPE is in the middle of preparing for bargaining of the collective agreements for the EC and TR groups, set to expire in April 2011. I hope you have been able to take advantage of the opportunity to complete the survey which aims to clarify the bargaining teams' positions. For now we are putting the finishing touches on our demands, until the new government is ready to negotiate. Since bargaining as a rule always takes place behind closed doors, the news will not come thick and fast, but nevertheless, I recommend that you keep track of the announcements on the CAPE web site: www.acep-cape.ca.

Communications

Speaking of the Web site, surely you are happy to see that the Communications Committee has begun to modernize it, reorganizing the information in a more logical manner and introducing some new things, including a section reserved for members. This section is still under development, but it already features electronic voting and will soon include a discussion forum where members will be able to discuss with each other and their elected representatives. We also hope to make our announcements more dynamic and instantaneous.

Upcoming elections

The triennial elections to the CAPE National Executive Committee will be held this year and, as usual, in October the Local will elect half of the representatives to its Committee. Follow the postings on the CAPE Web site, exercise your right to vote when it comes and, if you are up for an adventure, become a candidate! Union participation is an enriching experience and is encouraged by the Employer, so don't hesitate, because you have everything to gain!

Please note that CAPE is looking for volunteers to sit on its Elections Committee, which is responsible for supervising the electoral process. This task, which is essential to the democratic character of our association, is not a huge amount of work, so help us out! Contact Claude Danik (cdanik@acep-cape.ca) to become a volunteer.

Services of CAPE's Labour Relations Officer assigned to the Bureau

Since the beginning of 2010, as you know, our official Labour Relations Agent has been Lionel Saurette. Yet the workload generated by the Bureau is enormous and some among you have noticed that it's not always possible for Lionel to respond immediately to the many e-mails he receives. Please rest assured, however, that he treats all cases seriously and understands the urgency of each. You will also be happy to learn that a new Labour Relations Officer has been partially assigned to our local branch: Walter Belyea, who will manage a portion of the cases that Lionel handled previously.

Lionel (lsaurette@acep-cape.ca) remains the first person to contact to discuss all problems particular to a case. He will then handle your inquiries together with Walter.

Please note that if you have any general questions, for example "How does bereavement leave work?" or "What is the deadline for using my vacation leave credits?", you can contact Isabelle Borré (iborre@acep-cape.ca), the CAPE Education Officer, who will give you an answer or send an acknowledgement of receipt within 48 hours.

Changes at Sun life

Some of you have notified CAPE after having received a refusal of reimbursement from Sun life, which this past autumn has changed some of its reimbursement rules – for example favouring generic drugs, and refusing to reimburse exams performed in private labs. Unfortunately, our medical insurance system is not negotiated with the unions, and only a few unions (excluding CAPE) sit on the advisory committee that supervises the contract with Sun life. Thus, CAPE plays no part in decisions made on its behalf, nor is it given notice of changes any more than its members. This does not stop our president, Claude Poirier, from representing members in all forums available to him, but the fact remains that CAPE is not in a position to warn you when changes risk affecting you. The best thing to do is to contact Sun life before incurring medical costs to find out if they are reimbursable.

On the Translation Bureau

Transmission of personal information by e-mail

Please note you should never send personal data by e-mail, including your date of birth, regardless of who is asking for it. Some Security Officers at the Department have already requested this type of information by e-mail for the renewal of security codes, but we confirmed that they were not supposed to do this, as the e-mail system is not encrypted. Consequently, never mind who is making the request: never give out your personal data by e-mail.

New job descriptions

I'm frequently asked what employees should do if their job descriptions are revised and they are asked to sign the new version. This is what Lionel Saurette, our Labour Relations Officer, recommends:

It is the duty of each employee given a statement of duties to confirm that he/she is in possession of a complete and current description of his/her functions and responsibilities. If the employee does not agree with the contents, he/she may still sign and date the statement of duties, adding remarks that he/she does not agree that this statement is a complete and current description of his/her functions and responsibilities. Subsequently, if desired, he/she will send me a detailed report which will serve as evidence and will justify that which he/she is contending. In consultation with the member, I will determine if it is appropriate to file a complaint.

You can also find information on reviewing a new job description at http://www.acep-cape.ca/pdfs/General/files/ECWritingAdviceJune_07_e.pdf. This document, drafted for the EC conversion, nevertheless gives tips that are applicable to all situations.

Performance evaluations

In the end we straightened out the subject of TR-3's power of evaluation according to the instrument of delegation. It thus appears that only the TR-3s in the Terminology Standardization Directorate and TR-3 heads of individual subsections have the power to sign performance evaluations. All other TR-3s in the Translation Bureau officially have no hierarchical relation with TR-1s and TR-2s and thus may not sign their performance evaluations; they may only make recommendations to the TR-4 Manager, who then has the power to sign. Do not forget that a performance evaluation signed by someone who is not authorized with the power of evaluation has no legal validity.

Other pertinent information concerning performance evaluations: signing an evaluation only means that you have familiarized yourself with it, not that you agree with it. Also, you may add some observations if you disagree with certain points. Finally, the person who is responsible for your evaluation should not include anything but objective notes in your evaluation, and thus should not make any subjective remarks such as "Mary's personal problems [a fictional name, and any resemblance to real persons would be truly unbelievable] have really hurt her performance."

Services of compensation advisors

According to information we have obtained, PWGSC has increased its interim payment processing staff and there should not be any more delays in payments. In any case, please contact us if the employer is late in making a payment you are owed.

Another piece of important information: PWGSC has decided to centralize the processing of pension files and retirement in its Shédiac office. Also, starting April 11, Bureau compensation advisors are no longer taking on these cases. A toll-free number will be made available to people who are retiring or are already retired so they can talk to a pension expert.

Medical leave

Rejoice, O ye employees in the grips of intransigent managers! PWGSC has published its interpretation of Article 2.2.3 of the Directive on Leave and Special Work Arrangements of the Secretariat of the Treasury Board, i.e. the article concerning paid half-day leave for doctor's or dentist's appointments. As the interpretation document clearly states, this Article provides for the preventive nature of the medical (including an optometrist or any other specialist) and dental appointment and there is no annual quota, only a limit of 3.75 hours per day. As soon as the appointment concerns treatment of a known affliction and not prevention, the absence must be charged to medical leave credits.

The document should be posted in The Source soon.

Ergonomics

A good piece of news: thanks in part to the presence of our Local on the Working Group on Ergonomics at PWGSC, the purchase of tables that can have their height adjusted by users themselves (via a lever) has been added to PWGSC's office management standard, and the Bureau has decided to buy these tables for its new facilities, particularly in Quebec. This decision benefits the well-being of employees who will no longer need to wait for a technician to adjust their table height. This is a small step forward which leaves us hoping for more advances in the future.

Evacuation of client offices

Please note the Bureau has a policy in all offices where it is not the principal tenant that in case of an emergency, its employees should follow the instructions of the principal tenant if it orders an evacuation. In other words, your manager should not wait for permission from the Bureau; if the principal leaseholder evacuates its employees, the Bureau's employees should also evacuate the facilities.

Telework

Management has received a new legal opinion concerning its obligations towards the health and safety of its teleworkers and has announced that while it waits to learn all the repercussions of this legal notice, it has decided not to approve any new telework requests. This situation concerns us deeply and we have requested Management to keep us abreast of its deliberations.

Terminology Standardization Directorate

Termium VI and new performance standards

Management has announced it is maintaining the suspension of targets for adding to Termium while it waits for all functions to be ready. Consequently, it is planning to revise its performance standard contingent on the new tool. We have insisted that employees be consulted in the process of revising the standard and we are monitoring development in the situation.

Professional services sector

Training

You must have heard about the open letter which the local union has published to protest against the cancellation by Professional Services of all TR courses for budgetary reasons. We believe this decision was unjust and unjustified and that it was an additional barrier to the professional development of TRs. Management calculated that an average of 3.2 training days nevertheless have been taken by TRs, but after verification, it turns out this average is misleading, because only half of all TRs in Professional Services, approximately, have had their three days of training.

To remedy this situation, we have requested Management to permit TRs who have not yet been able to take their three minimum days of training during the past fiscal year to recover their lost days this year, in addition to the usual days to which they are entitled in the current year. Management responded, explaining that in view of the financial situation it would be impossible to comply with our request, but it announced that employees may benefit from their three minimum training days in 2011-2012. However, I suggest that you not wait for the end of the current fiscal year before using them...

English translation

At the request of the union, Management has agreed to try to provide English proofreading services for use by all Anglophone translators in Professional Services, regardless of the section. Currently, Professional Services has two Anglophone proofreaders, one in Science and Technology and another in the Montreal Regional Centre.

If you translate into English and wish to access proofreading services, please contact David Lowe, who will tell you how to proceed. Make your request immediately, because it appears these proofreaders are rather busy (moreover, the Bureau has dismissed another this past autumn due to lack of work). It is important to make good use of these resources and to ensure they are so busy that the Bureau will have to recruit others! Anglophones also have a right to get support.

Incentives

The plan has been renewed for two years. The only changes that have taken place are administrative.

Moreover, having received the remarks from the TRs concerning the loss of incentives, Management has taken the initiative to put in place a new method of tallying translations completed with the help of translation memory - a method which does not tally this work in hours, thus providing incentives for this work. At first glance, we are happy about this initiative, which allows TRs to be compensated for their work. We hope the new method will really produce the expected results.

New EC job description

We have been assured by Management that the new EC job description will be applied only to newly-created jobs. In other words, currently-employed ECs will keep their current job description.

Interpretation and Parliamentary Translation Directorate

Call-back during leave

We have heard that certain managers will ask their employees to inform them of the times they will be home during their leave, in case they need to be called back to work. Please note that you are not required to supply this information, nor do you need to stay at home in case your manager should call.

Access to the Government's extranet and to departmental information

We have kept up the pressure on Management during the past few months so that IPTD employees can access the web application for compensation, and we will continue to increase our efforts so that the useful information from the Department reaches the IPTD.

Parliamentary system and additional hours

As a reminder, please note that employees who benefit from the parliamentary system are not entitled to any additional compensation other than parliamentary leave prescribed for their overtime. This is the very principle of the parliamentary system. If, in a bout of generosity, a misinformed manager offers you "free" leave to compensate for a long day's work, you should refuse, because Treasury Board could require you to reimburse the leave if it finds out.

General work conditions

Even if these efforts do not always produce tangible results, we never stop asking for better conditions for interpreters, easier access to professional development for sections where the only TR-3 posts opening up are evening posts, better control of translation requests, be they legitimate or not, etc.

Conclusion

My, that was long! If I was a little more flexible, I would have given myself a good pat on the back to congratulate myself for my perseverance in writing this message which, to make up for lack of inspiration, attempted to be superbly informative. However, since congratulating myself would be out of place, I would like to congratulate those of you who have survived this information avalanche like Saint Bernards braving the Alps with the cognac flask around their necks. Okay, I admit it, the image may not be too well chosen and could use some work...

To conclude, like an American artist at the Grammys, I would like to thank God, my wife, my parents, and above all my special colleagues who allow me to represent the TRs and ECs of the Translation Bureau each day with undeniable verve. Would you like to be among these colleagues and be able in your older years to brag about having associated with my illustrious personage? Please write me!

Marc Vallée
President and Doctor in Self-Overrating