

Contract talks with federal lawyers deadlocked, headed to conciliation

iPolitics

Kathryn May

July 12th, 2017

The Liberal government and the union representing federal lawyers are heading to conciliation after the failure of a final bid to break a longstanding deadlock over pay and workload.

Ursula Hendel, president of the Association of Justice Counsel, said the government and union were unable to sort out their differences on five critical issues with the help of a mediation panel. Conciliation hearings have been scheduled for October. A conciliation decision is binding.

The two sides have been engaged in three years of difficult bargaining, with a revolving cast of Treasury Board negotiators appointed over the course of the talks ...

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Prime Minister opens the process to select the next justice of the Supreme Court of Canada

Ottawa, Ontario -

July 14, 2017

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today opened the process to select the next justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, to fill the vacancy created by the upcoming retirement of Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin.

Under the new approach launched last year, an independent and non-partisan Advisory Board, the members of which will be announced shortly, will be given the task of identifying suitable candidates who are jurists of the highest caliber, functionally bilingual, and representative of the diversity of our great country.

Chief Justice McLachlin was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada from the Supreme Court of British Columbia. In recognition of the custom of regional representation, the process will be open to all qualified applicants from Western Canada and Northern Canada. This is the first time that the North is acknowledged in the custom of regional representation.

Quote

“The Supreme Court of Canada is recognized around the world as a strong, independent judicial institution. This strength includes regional representation. The process we are opening up today

will recruit potential candidates from Western Canada and Northern Canada and follow the tradition of appointing only the most exceptional and impressive individuals to the court.”

– Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

Quick Facts

- The application period ends on Friday, September 15, 2017.
- Qualifying candidates who wish to be considered for the upcoming vacancy must complete and submit an application package (questionnaire, authorization form, and a background check consent form) no later than 23:59 Pacific daylight saving time on September 15, 2017.
- Those interested in applying are encouraged to first review the statutory requirements set out in the Supreme Court Act, as well as the Statement of Qualifications and Assessment Criteria that will guide the Advisory Board in evaluating a candidate’s suitability.
- The applications now being accepted are for the purpose of identifying the next member of the Supreme Court following the December 15, 2017, retirement of Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin.
- Candidates may demonstrate that they satisfy the geographical requirement by reference to their bar membership, judicial appointment, or other relationship with Western Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) and Northern Canada (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut).
- From the nine justices of the Supreme Court then assembled, the Prime Minister will identify the jurist best placed to serve as the next Chief Justice of Canada.

Candidates from the North invited to apply for Supreme Court seat

Replacement for retiring Justice Beverly McLachlin will come from the West or the North

CBC News

Peter Zimonjic

July 14th, 2017

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has begun the process to choose the next justice of the Supreme Court of Canada by opening up the eligibility to candidates from Northern Canada.

"The process we are opening up today will recruit potential candidates from Western Canada and Northern Canada and follow the tradition of appointing only the most exceptional and impressive individuals to the court," Trudeau said in a statement.

This is the first time the North has been included in the convention of selecting justices from Canada's regions.

The government is looking to fill the vacancy created by the upcoming retirement of Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin, who served for 28 years.

The 73-year-old jurist was appointed by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1989. She became the first woman to hold the top job on the country's highest court after she was elevated to chief justice by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in 2000.

McLachlin, who will vacate her post Dec. 15, 2017, is from B.C. Traditionally, the court's nine justices are selected to represent different regions.

Three are constitutionally required to represent Quebec's civil law system. According to established convention for the remaining six seats, three are from Ontario, two from Western Canada and one from the Atlantic provinces.

Choosing the next justice

An independent advisory board that will be appointed at a later date will draft a non-binding short list of three to five candidates for the prime minister's consideration.

Lawyers and judges wishing to apply for the post need to submit their application by one minute to midnight Sept. 15, 2017.

Once a new Supreme Court justice has been appointed, and the court is back up to its full membership of nine justices, Trudeau will select one of the nine to be the next chief justice of Canada.

Le prochain juge de la Cour suprême proviendra-t-il du Nord canadien?

La Presse Canadienne

14 juillet 2017

Pour respecter la représentation régionale, le prochain juge devra provenir d'une des quatre provinces de l'Ouest ou, pour la 1ère fois, de l'un des trois territoires...

Le premier ministre Justin Trudeau a ouvert vendredi le processus de nomination du prochain juge de la Cour suprême du Canada qui pour la première fois tiendra compte des trois territoires (Nunavut, Territoires du Nord-Ouest et Yukon) dans la tradition de représentation régionale.

Justin Trudeau doit combler le poste qui se libérera en décembre avec la retraite de la juge en chef, Beverly McLachlin, originaire de la Colombie-Britannique.

Pour respecter cette tradition de représentation régionale, le prochain juge devra provenir d'une des quatre provinces de l'Ouest (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Colombie-Britannique) ou de l'un des trois territoires.

Le nouveau processus de nomination mis sur pied par le gouvernement Trudeau se veut plus inclusif. Tous les juristes intéressés et qualifiés peuvent poser leur candidature.

Ils devront être « effectivement bilingues » en vertu de ce nouveau processus de nomination, peut-on lire dans le communiqué du bureau du premier ministre. Donc, faire preuve d'un bilinguisme fonctionnel.

En vertu de la loi, le prochain juge de la Cour suprême doit siéger ou avoir siégé à une cour supérieure provinciale ou être inscrit au barreau d'une province pendant un minimum de dix ans.

Un comité consultatif choisi par le gouvernement fera ensuite ses recommandations au premier ministre. Les membres de ce comité indépendant et non partisan seront connus à une date ultérieure.

Les candidats ont jusqu'au 15 septembre pour signifier leur intérêt.

Une fois ce poste comblé, Justin Trudeau choisira ensuite qui parmi les neuf juges de la Cour suprême deviendra juge en chef.

Lack of 'criminal' designation for Hells Angels in B.C. allows biker gang to flourish

Vancouver Sun

Kim Bolan

July 15th, 2017

On a recent Wednesday evening in Kelowna, a row of Harleys was parked outside the Hells Angels clubhouse on Ellis Street.

The biker gang was holding its weekly “church” meeting at the clubhouse, despite the fact the B.C. Civil Forfeiture office is fighting in court to get the nondescript stucco building, across from a log yard, forfeited to taxpayers.

The government case to seize the Kelowna, Nanaimo and (Vancouver) East End Hells Angels clubhouses as sites of criminal activity has been winding its way through B.C. Supreme Court for almost a decade.

It started on Nov. 9, 2007, when Mounties broke down the door of the little white building on Victoria Avenue in Nanaimo that housed the Hells Angels clubhouse there.

Cops seized decorative plaques, posters, bar stools and clothing emblazoned with the infamous death’s head logo. They also took Hells Angels documents, including some related to police activities, counter-surveillance efforts and intelligence the bikers had gathered.

A decade and counting

Thus began the legal odyssey that might finally determine whether a B.C. judge believes the Hells Angels are a criminal organization.

The civil trial was supposed to begin on May 1, but was adjourned again until April 23, 2018.

The government’s amended claim against the biker gang, filed in March, alleges that if the Hells Angels get to keep the clubhouses they will be used “to enhance the ability of a criminal organization, namely the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, to commit indictable offences.”

The Angels have filed a counter-claim, seeking to get B.C.’s Civil Forfeiture Act declared unconstitutional.

Police and government officials have long held that the Hells Angels are the most powerful and sophisticated criminal organization in B.C.

Lack of success

But prosecutors have so far been unsuccessful in getting the biker gang convicted on any criminal organization charges in this province, despite four separate attempts in B.C. courts in the past decade.

The latest misfire came last year when B.C. Supreme Court Justice Carol Ross dismissed criminal organization charges against Hells Angel David Giles and several associates.

She had already ruled to limit the testimony of Jacques Lemieux, a retired Mountie whom the Crown called as an expert on outlaw motorcycle gangs to support the criminal organization charges.

Ross said Lemieux's expertise was out-of-date and lacked supporting documentation. He retired in 2008, but was still being used in court years later.

"Mr. Lemieux was first qualified to testify as an expert witness in 2000; however, it appears that nothing changed in relation to his preparation and maintenance of a file relating to his opinion after that time," Ross said.

She said that Lemieux would not be able to testify about his view that "the organization's main purpose is to facilitate the criminal activities of its members" or other opinions about the club's nefarious origins.

It was a crushing blow to the criminal organization part of the Crown's case, despite the fact that Giles, Hells Angel Bryan Oldham and their associates were later convicted of other charges related to a large international cocaine conspiracy stemming from an undercover police probe.

Giles died on July 1, just three months after he began serving a record-long sentence handed to him by Ross in March.

Giles' lawyer Paul Gill said in an interview that he knew there were problems with the Crown's expert when Lemieux testified about stumbling on binders of supporting material in his garage.

"It was like he was moving boxes around and he found these binders," Gill said. "It was dated stuff. So he had this ossified frozen-in-time canned pitch to give and the justification was, well, it has worked in the past, I have been qualified all these other times."

He said Lemieux should have had more current experience and an up-to-date curriculum vitae.

"I think the ground has shifting in terms of what the court expects," Gill said.

He said Giles was concerned about a possible criminal organization conviction.

“They (the Crown) treated this as one of the biggest drug cases out of their office and maybe it was. And they certainly got him good, but I was very worried that the ‘crim org’ count was going to essentially bury him alive,” Gill said a few days before his client died of liver disease.

Gill said it was clear that the focus of the Crown’s case was the Hells Angels in a sting orchestrated by the undercover cops posing as South American drug brokers.

“It was really about the Hells Angels and their role in this stuff and they worked the file with that at the forefront,” Gill said. “That was the common denominator knit through the whole thing.”

Nathalie Houle, who speaks for the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, said she couldn’t comment on the dismissal of the criminal organization charges in the recent case.

“The court rulings in previous cases speak for themselves in terms of the reasons for dismissal of particular charges, the limiting of testimony to be given by expert witnesses, and the elements of criminal organization offences,” she said. “It would not be appropriate ... to engage in out-of-court discussion about particular individuals or entities and their status as or association with a criminal organization.”

Earlier attempts

Lemieux was also called as an expert witness a decade ago when prosecutors had three B.C. cases stemming from an earlier \$10-million investigation into the Hells Angels dubbed E-Pandora.

In the first, Giles and two other associates, David Revell and Richard Rempel, were charged with trafficking and possessing cocaine for the purpose of trafficking in association with a criminal organization.

On March 27, 2008, Giles was acquitted on all counts, dooming the criminal organization case, though Revell and Rempel were convicted of trafficking.

In the second case, a jury heard months of evidence from E-Pandora about the criminality of the Hells Angels before convicting four bikers on a series of charges on July 13, 2009.

But the jury also acquitted the Angels quartet on all the criminal organization counts, prompting B.C. Crown counsel Mark Levitz to say at the time “it’s unfortunate the jury wasn’t able to conclude what judges in other parts of Canada found — that the Hells Angels is a criminal organization.”

In the third case, Martha Devlin, then a federal prosecutor, didn’t even get to introduce her evidence in November 2009 that two Hells Angels were part of or working for a criminal organization.

Justice Peter Leask granted a defence motion to dismiss the counts because of the jury's ruling in the July case.

Commitment roller-coaster

To date, judges in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec have ruled the Hells Angels are a criminal organization.

Brad Stephen, a retired Vancouver police biker specialist, has no doubt that the B.C. bikers are a criminal organization.

“The Hells Angels are involved in every aspect of criminal enterprise in British Columbia, specifically the drug enterprise, because they control a good quantity of the product and they control territory and they have incredible international contacts and influence,” Stephen said in an interview.

And while many Hells Angels have been convicted of other charges in B.C. in recent years, Stephen thinks a criminal organization conviction has eluded police and prosecutors because of a failure to groom new police experts on the biker gang.

“We have not had a sustained, resourced and committed long-standing effort against the Hells Angels in B.C.,” he said. “It has been a roller-coaster ride of commitment, and of success and failure.”

He said in other Canadian jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies “have committed to sponsoring a particular police officer to educate himself to go through all the protocols in order to become an expert.”

“British Columbia has been unable to have any succession planning with regards to biker experts,” Stephen said.

He said that in order for police officers to get promoted, and thus earn more, they need a varied resumé. So they transfer to different units to gain a wider range of experience.

Officers don't always see the benefit of staying long-term in specialty units, like the one investigating outlaw motorcycle gangs in B.C., he said.

But he believes the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit, a multi-police-force anti-gang unit in B.C., is now developing a new long-term strategy targeting the bikers, which he applauds.

“When you drill down to do a quality investigation, a quality prosecution, you need police that are talented in writing affidavits. You need police officers that are talented in handling informants and agents, and police officers that are technically sound in all the latest gadgetry,” Stephen said.

“In order to attract police officers to these sections, you need respectful leaders. You need leaders that are progressive, innovative, that want to really put bad guys in jail — leaders that will take risks, that won’t necessarily take the easy road. That attracts quality police officers.”

There have been a lot of changes in the Hells Angels since the Nanaimo civil forfeiture case was filed in 2007.

- Longtime Nanaimo Angel Robert (Fred) Widdifield, named in the original suit, has since been convicted of extortion and theft.

- Several defendants in the later suit filed against the Kelowna and East End chapters have also now been convicted of criminal charges. Giles, also a named defendant, is dead.

The Hells Angels lead lawyer in the forfeiture case, Joe Arvay, declined to comment for this story. The Hells Angels spokesman, Rick Ciarniello, did not respond to a request for an interview.

Phil Tawtel, the director of the B.C. Civil Forfeiture office, said in an email that he was also unable to comment.

The lack of a criminal organization designation in B.C. has meant the Hells Angels have continued to flourish here, Stephen said.

They have opened two new chapters in the past five years — the most recent, Hardside, in March. The West Point chapter, which opened in 2012, recently rented a house on acreage in south Langley, which they are using for a clubhouse, Postmedia has learned.

There are now 121 Hells Angels in B.C., up from about 100 three years ago.

“The Hells Angels know the gains to be made far outweigh what the consequences would be here in B.C. When there is an expansion, that is a slap in the face to law enforcement,” Stephen said.

He is also concerned about the increasing number of “puppet clubs” — biker gangs that also wear three-piece patches like the Hells Angels and that seek permission from the older gang before starting up.

“When you go over to the (Vancouver) Island, it is infested with outlaw motorcycle gangs. It is expanding like crazy. So why are they expanding? They see the market. The market is there. The punishment or the consequences are such that it has become a very attractive arena for bikers to thrive in.”

When the public service is outsourced, Canadians suffer

The Globe and Mail

Debi Daviau

July 16th, 2017

Debi Daviau is president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC), which represents some 55,000 scientists and other professionals, including more than 13,000 federal IT workers.

The tears started almost before she'd begun to speak. We were standing outside the Tunney's Pasture federal office complex in Ottawa during National Public Service Week, normally an occasion to celebrate working in the public service. It was a pay week. But the long-unresolved problems with the Phoenix pay system meant many weren't in a mood to celebrate and the woman I was speaking to had just returned from maternity leave. Having fought to recover eight months of unpaid maternity benefits, she had now learned she hadn't received more than two years of retroactive pay. As I handed her a "Fix Phoenix" protest button, the gesture seemed suddenly inadequate. So we hugged instead.

Ottawa has a problem. It's called Phoenix, after IBM's brand-name payroll software that has caused more than a quarter of the public service to be paid too little, too much, or (too often) not at all. But that's just its corporate name. The real name for Ottawa's problem is "outsourcing" and its playing havoc with much more than the public-service payroll.

A massive project to consolidate government e-mail accounts, contracted to tech giants Bell and CGI, is years behind schedule and untold millions of dollars over budget. A project outsourced to Adobe to bring all government websites under one Canada.ca site is also overdue and over budget. And a proposal to migrate most government website content to private, for-profit, cloud-based servers is fraught with what IT workers I represent believe is a looming security risk to government and Canadians' data.

While the current government has been right to criticize the previous one for laying off hundreds of compensation staff before it rolled out Phoenix, it's the decisions around outsourcing such projects in the first place that demand a rethink.

In spite of employing one of the largest IT work forces in the country, the government routinely excludes its IT employees from helping projects such as Phoenix succeed. There may be good reasons for this, but I haven't heard any and judging from past experience, they have nothing to do with saving money. (In April, the government set aside any projected savings from Phoenix for the next two years and, in May, announced a further \$142-million would be spent over three years, without any promise of when it would be fixed.)

Why weren't federal IT workers consulted on the implementation of Phoenix from the start? Worse, why was IBM allowed to use its own "test bed" – a staging area to catch system flaws before they're deployed – and not the Government of Canada's? Had the government's own test

bed and IT workers been used, we could have warned the government the system was programmed to fail.

But, as we've so frequently been told since this fiasco began, it was too late to change course.

Lessons then matter.

Shared Services Canada, the department tasked with supplying the IT needs of 42 federal departments, has been the subject of no fewer than two important reports in the past year. Both were released this spring and reveal much about the doublethink behind Ottawa's decisions to outsource.

An Ipsos Public Affairs survey of Shared Services employees last fall found, unsurprisingly, that outsourcing has contributed to a massive drop in the already low morale at the department. (It has suffered from chronic underfunding and poor planning since it was launched in 2011.)

As if to add insult to injury, a report commissioned by Treasury Board last August from consultants Gartner Canada Co. proposes, among other things, spinning Shared Services off into a separate "agency, Crown corporation, strategic partnership, [or] joint venture" and outsourcing on an even grander scale. Among its panel of experts was a former vice-president of IBM.

Treasury Board President Scott Brison's frustration was on full display last month when, during a Senate finance committee meeting, he cautioned IBM about the risks to its reputation if it doesn't help fix Phoenix.

But his enthusiasm for even more outsourcing of federal government projects to small and mid-sized companies leaves one wondering if he's drawn the same lessons Shared Services employees have already learned.

Outsourcing within the public service should, by its nature, be short-term, limited and targeted to areas where missing expertise is quickly transferred to permanent employees. That means engaging federal IT workers at the start and promptly training those without the required expertise to take over, or hiring qualified new employees. To do otherwise is to undermine the very purpose of the public service.

That so many public services – from weather forecasts to processing OAS, CPP and EI cheques – depend on constant government IT services to ensure their delivery is a testament to the value of public employees themselves. Phoenix, by contrast, fails public servants routinely.

The Trudeau government may not have invented the problem of outsourcing, but since promising in its fiscal policy document of the 2015 election campaign to reduce spending on outside consultants to 2005-06 levels, spending on outsourcing has grown dramatically.

The official estimate for the current year is \$12-billion, up from \$10-billion just two years ago – the equivalent of as many as eight federal department budgets combined.

For companies eager to do business with the federal government, this is of course good news. For everyone else, and especially those affected by the disastrous results, it's enough to make you cry.

'We inherited the mess, but we're committed to fixing it,' hundreds of thousands of cheques still affected by Phoenix pay problems

PSPC says there were 265,000 payments in the queue for correction early last month.

The Hill Times

Derek Abma

July 17th 2017

Pay problems for federal public servants caused by the problematic Phoenix system are still ongoing, with little reduction in the backlog of error-ridden paycheques in recent months.

Public Services and Procurement Canada has stopped updating an online dashboard that broke out various statistics on how many paycheques were subject to corrections due to Phoenix issues. Last updated to show data for March, it said there were 284,000 pending transactions at that time that had been delayed past service standards.

The backlog of problematic paycheques appears to have been reduced, but not considerably. PSPC spokesman Nicolas Boucher said that as of June 2, there were 265,000 transactions with Phoenix-related errors awaiting corrections.

"We are constantly making progress and continue to improve how pay is managed to make it more reliable and efficient," he said in an email. "There is still a lot of work left to do, but we remain committed to resolving all pay issues and to stabilize the situation as quickly as possible."

Mr. Boucher said the ministerial working group established in April has been meeting on a weekly basis. That group is chaired by Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale (Regina-Wascana, Sask.), and also includes Treasury Board President Scott Brison (Kings-Hants, N.S.), Finance Minister Bill Morneau (Toronto Centre, Ont.), Natural Resources Minister and acting Public Services Minister Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Man.), Environment Minister Catherine McKenna (Ottawa Centre, Ont.), and Liberal MP Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.), who is parliamentary secretary to the Public Services minister.

When asked why the online dashboard was no longer being updated, Mr. Boucher said it was determined that "the associated numbers and concepts" used for that dashboard "can be confusing."

He added: "To that end, one of the first things the working group of ministers ... identified was a need to provide clearer, more useful information to employees and to the public. We are currently working on a new version of the public service pay dashboard to ensure that we provide employees with useful information regarding our progress."

Mr. Boucher would not identify a target date for achieving stability as it pertains to public service paycheques, but said: “The pay issues currently being experienced by public servants are unacceptable and we are working collaboratively at all levels to resolve them. Ensuring all employees are paid the money that they have earned remains our priority. We are making all necessary efforts to reach a steady state as quickly as possible.”

Scott Bardsley, a spokesman for Mr. Goodale, said cabinet confidence prevented him from providing details on what decisions the ministerial group has taken so far on Phoenix or if they had identified timeline for when these problems would be fixed.

Mr. MacKinnon said in an emailed statement: “Our government is committed to fixing the pay system so employees receive the money they are owed on time.”

He added: “To address the gap in capacity, our government is making the necessary investments, which include increasing the number of compensation staff. These investments demonstrate our commitment to explore all options, leave no stone unturned, and we won’t stop working until this problem is fixed.”

The Liberal government flicked the switch on the Phoenix pay system in two phases in February and May 2016 after the previous the Conservative government made the decision to move to this new system.

Mr. MacKinnon repeated the government’s long-held position that the previous Conservative government is to blame for the pay problems because it “eliminated over 700 compensation jobs in departments, resulting in a shortage of capacity to implement a new pay system. ... We inherited this mess, but we are committed to fixing it.”

While the Liberal government has done a fair amount of finger-pointing toward the former Conservative government for Phoenix problems, it has also targeted IBM, the company that provided the technology for this new payroll system. Last month before the Senate Finance Committee, Mr. Brison said “there is reputational risk for IBM in not helping us fix this. ... IBM needs to be an active partner working closely with us. They have, as the vendor of this technology, a responsibility to help us fix this.”

When asked about its past and ongoing role with Phoenix, IBM Canada spokeswoman Carrie Bendzsa said in an email: “IBM continues to work in close partnership with the Crown on this project. ... IBM performed extensive customization specified by the Crown to a commercial HR solution that the Crown had selected. Responsibility for training design and execution was transferred to the Crown in March 2014.”

Robyn Benson, national president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), the largest federal public service union, said: “There still are issues with Phoenix every payday. ... They still have several hundred thousand in the queue with pay action required.”

She added: “There are still individuals who are not getting their acting pay. There are still individuals who are not getting their overtime. There are still individuals who are not getting their paycheque, period.”

Ms. Benson complimented the ministerial working group for “taking this this very seriously,” but added: “It’s an embarrassment, quite frankly, that the federal government cannot pay their employees. And it’s not just our members who know this. Canadians at large know this. You can stop practically anybody on the street and say the word ‘Phoenix,’ and people will know.”

She said the government is “certainly working to try to rectify this situation, but it will take a long time.” Ms. Benson predicted it would be “a little more than a year” before Phoenix issues are eliminated, or close to it.

“The system itself needs to be changed,” she said. “They need to bring folks in to do the work. ... IBM needs to come in and they need to make the appropriate system changes that will facilitate accurate payment to our members.”

Fellow union president Debi Daviau, of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC), predicted that Phoenix would be thorn in the side of public servants for at least the next two years. She said she gets this sense from things like the government feeling the need to create the ministerial working group to deal with Phoenix, and from its announcement in May that it would spend \$142-million over the next two years on staff to deal with payroll issues.

“That’s a good indication that we’re in it for the long haul, for a couple of years at least,” she said.

Ms. Daviau said that when 7,000 scientists in her union received their first paycheques under a new collective agreement on June 14, about 1,700 of them had errors.

“For the vast majority of them, it was less pay [than owed], and some people even got zero paycheques as well as wrong deductions, etc.,” she said.

She said the union was assured that the issues would be rectified by the time the next paycheques came out on June 28, “but unfortunately we’re hearing from a lot of members that that’s not the case.”

Ms. Benson and Ms. Daviau noted that they have met with the ministerial committee and say that this high-level political involvement appears to be having a positive effect.

Ms. Daviau noted that she got the okay from PSPC to put out a call for 30 to 40 IT experts from her union to join efforts to fix Phoenix. She said she thinks this was the result of a directive from the ministerial group, but she can’t be sure. “No formal recognition is made of that other than we asked for it, and then we were invited to a meeting with PSPC, and then it was made so.”

Ms. Benson said she’s pressed the ministerial group on the need to rehire of scores of compensation advisers who were laid off or moved to other jobs by the former Conservative

government. She's also told them the call centres dealing with workers experiencing pay problems should be staffed with public servants, who actually have access to the Phoenix system, rather than contract workers who don't.

"My understanding is that the call-centre folks don't have access to the system at all, so really they're just there to hear somebody complain," she said.

Ms. Daviau said she's urged the ministers in this working group to use public servants for the ongoing maintenance of the Phoenix rather than contracting it out, a request she said the government has not indicated a position on yet.

"The fiasco should have taught them that it's not the way to go in an intricate government system, and once they have a capacity of 60 or so government IT workers trained and ready to work on this system, there would be no reason whatsoever to waste your money on a private-sector contract," she said.

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