



2016 General Secretary's Report

As approved at the autumn meeting of the
Joint Executive Council

Thank you for the opportunity to again report on the business of your union. I encourage you to ask all the questions you have about your union's administration and to offer your suggestions for change.

GSU Bargaining in 2016

Agreement renewal bargaining was the main event on GSU's agenda in the first half of 2016 as new collective agreements were bargained and ratified with Viterra, CPS, Heartland Livestock, Prince Albert and District Co-op, Lloydminster and District Co-op, and Prairie Co-op.

On an individual and overall basis, the settlements bargained on behalf of GSU members were better than current trends, but that doesn't mean everything was achieved. There's a lot of work left to do in future rounds of bargaining.

Two employers pushed bargaining past Canada Day, as Hi-Pro Feeds and Discovery Co-op proved to be more difficult to settle. Members of Local 17 will be convening in the near future to review their bargaining with Discovery management. Members of Local 9 rejected a tentative settlement with Hi-Pro and subsequently voted 93 percent in favour of striking, while convincing the employer that more compromise on his part was in the cards.

Congratulations to the members of Local 9, and particular congratulations to the bargaining committee, comprising Kelly Saretzky, Kevin Clarke and Lawrence Maier. Their hard work and skill was essential as they inspired members to forge a united common front.

Congratulations as well to all of the members of all of the Locals who took the time to participate, communicate and vote in their respective agreement renewal bargaining processes. Participation is the first step towards unity of purpose. Unity of purpose and willingness to stand up to management are essential to making bargaining gains.

Bargaining with the Western Producer owner, Glacier Media, will begin this fall as members of Local 5 seek to make progress despite a corporate entity that seems to stray into anti-union territory every so often. Unity and perseverance, as shown by Local 9 members, are the keys to better bargaining results.

Our Political and Economic Circumstances

The seemingly unstoppable economic growth in Alberta and Saskatchewan, fuelled by natural resource extraction, did a virtual 180 degree turn over the past year. The situation for many working people, provincial finances, and public services appears to be growing more precarious by the week.

In the federal election a year ago, a majority of Canadian voters opted for change except for, and despite worsening economic fortunes, the majority of Saskatchewan voters, who did not seem to share the same enthusiasm for change. As a result, the representative make-up of our contingent in the House of Commons changed very little.

The "don't-rock-the-boat" mentality was dominant again in the results of the provincial election held this past spring.

Union Representation

Our work to administer collective agreements to the maximum benefit of GSU members continues to play a large role in the union's broader work plan.

Representing employees in pursuit of a fair deal for all is unique to the employment relationships of employees who are represented by a union. Non-union employees do not have the benefit of contractual rights and representation.

Neither do non-union employees have the right to protection from unjust dismissal and reinstatement to employment when they are wrongfully fired. This protection is a keystone of being unionized.

In response to the economic strength working people gain through unionization, there are regular challenges to the right to union representation. One such challenge is the application by CPS to the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (SLRB) to remove Ag retail branch managers from the GSU bargaining unit. CPS's application is based on the argument that branch managers are actually part of management and subject to the new definition of employee under the Saskatchewan Employment Act.

Several SLRB hearing dates set for the CPS application were cancelled as dialogue between union and management representatives has gone back and forth. Most recently, GSU's elected Joint Executive Council (the union's board of directors) considered a tentative memorandum of agreement (MOA) between GSU and CPS which provides an alternative to litigation of the legal issues of who is in the union bargaining unit and who is not. The JEC's deliberations took place at its semi-annual meeting on September 9.

After careful consideration, Council members voted to submit the MOA to the members of GSU Local 15 for approval or rejection in a vote to be conducted at the annual Sub-Local membership meetings this autumn. The MOA has been distributed to Local 15 members via email in advance of the annual meetings which will be held throughout October.

GSU Administration

At the beginning of September, the union's operations showed a modest surplus of \$25,000 on a year-to-date basis. The year-end results are projected to show an even balance between revenues and expenses, barring some unanticipated major expense. To make a long story short, GSU continues to be in good financial shape.

GSU Defense Fund

At the end of the second quarter, the market value of the GSU Defense Fund was \$3.8 million, a substantial improvement from the fall of 2015. That being said, we expect ups and downs in the value of the fund as it tracks the market.

Each year, GSU members attending annual meetings of their Locals or Sub-Locals have the opportunity to debate and vote on whether to continue paying additional dues into the GSU Defense Fund. This year is no different, and the Joint Executive Council is submitting the following resolution to be voted on at each annual membership meeting. The number voting in favour and against the resolution should be recorded and transmitted to GSU's general secretary.

"Be it resolved that the additional dues being paid into the GSU Defense Fund by members/employees represented by GSU shall continue until December 31, 2017, subject to review by members of the union at the 2017 annual Local and Sub-Local meetings."

A majority of 50 percent plus one of all the votes cast is required for the resolution to be carried or defeated.

GSU Education and Organizing

As we look forward to a bit of a break in GSU's bargaining calendar, there is an opportunity to return union education to the top of the agenda. Your elected officers and staff are planning for education sessions in 2017. We'd appreciate your suggestions for the kind of subjects and the types of programs GSU should be delivering.

Hand in hand with union education is the importance of organizing, and we know full well the potential in the non-unionized ranks in our corner of the private sector. The first big step is to talk with non-union workers to gauge their interest and address their fears and/or prejudices. Our best ambassadors are the elected officers, as well as rank and file members of GSU.

I urge every member and elected officer of GSU to do their utmost to identify organizing prospects and people they know who are interested in having a conversation.

In my opinion, it is our responsibility to fearlessly promote the good that unions do; not just for union members, but in society generally.

The union advantage in wage rates alone is worth an additional \$5.32 per hour in Saskatchewan and \$4.97 across Canada. This is something to be proud of and to promote.

But, it's about more than money. It's about dignity and respect in the workplace; something that is too often overlooked.

The clear benefit of being in a unionized employment relationship has long been recognized by arbitrators and the Supreme Court of Canada, but the real challenge we face is convincing non-union workers to embrace the union advantage.

What we've accomplished together is remarkable, but we have the ability to do so much more. This is a time for action.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hugh Wagner', with a long, sweeping underline.

Hugh Wagner
General Secretary