



2015

GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

Approved by the Joint Executive Council of Grain and General Services Union (ILWU • Canada) November 4, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to report to members of GSU on the business of your union. I encourage you to ask all the questions you have about your union's administration and to raise your suggestions for changes in how we go about serving you.

GSU Bargaining in 2015

In 2015, GSU has focused a lot of energy on meeting its representational and collective bargaining responsibilities flowing from the divvying up of Viterra in the aftermath of the 2012 takeover by Glencore PLC.

GSU members were asked to identify and share their ideas for agreement renewal bargaining priorities. The response was gratifying and two elected delegates meetings for Locals 1, 2, 14 and 15 were held to consolidate members' input into a series of bargaining proposals that have now been presented to three major employers.

Similarly, work is underway to prepare and bargain with Prince Albert Co-op, Discovery Co-op (North Battleford), Lloydminster Co-op, and Prairie Co-op (Strasbourg), while the first round of bargaining in October resulted in a tentative agreement for members of CHS Ag (Edenwold).

In the meantime, bargaining with Heartland Livestock drags on, as the Local 7 bargaining committee attempts to convince company management that a cheap labour policy is counterproductive.

Ironbridge Equity Partners is now the new owner of what was Advance Engineered Products Ltd. (AEPL), and Local 8 members are hoping for a better future as they emerge from a painful and frustrating experience under the Companies' Creditors Arrangements Act.

Since bargaining developments for all Locals

and the ongoing saga at AEPL have been reported on regularly through updates on the GSU web site and our *Tuesday Morning Memo*, I won't dwell on those subjects in this report. Save it to say, GSU confronts a lot of challenges, and I always have confidence we will weather the storms as long as we stick together.

Our Political and Economic Circumstances

The seemingly unstoppable economic growth in Alberta and Saskatchewan, fuelled by natural resource extraction, has slowed down dramatically in the past year. The consequences for many working people, as demonstrated by the impact on Local 8 members, is sobering.

The loss of a good paying job is a catastrophic event for working families, especially when the effects of an economic slowdown are so widespread, and alternatives to the job lost become scarcer.

As it turned out, the 2015 federal election coincided with our descent from economic peaks and gave us a chance to make our views known directly. Going forward, let's not be shy about demanding more from a system that never hesitates to ask the most of working people.

Canadian voters made their choices on October 19, resulting in a strong majority mandate for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Dramatic change is needed in a system dominated by the powerful. Let's work together to make sure the federal election of 2015 was truly the beginning of real change for Canadian working people, our families and our communities.

Those who currently pull the levers of power won't change our system. That job falls to us.

Take income protection as an example. GSU has pioneered workplace adjustment provisions that provide paid notice of job elimination, relocation rights, supplementary employment insurance benefits and severance pay. The income protections provided by GSU's collective agreements are much better than the meagre offerings in federal

or provincial labour legislation and/or private employment contracts.

Our public programs should be much better, but they aren't, so GSU has done its best to bargain with employers to fill the gaps. But isn't that also the job of government? For example, nothing has been done to improve and expand on employment insurance in the last 10 years. Change is long overdue.

The right to protection from unjust dismissal and unjust treatment at work are rights provided to unionized employees that simply do not exist for non-union employees. No matter what the days ahead bring, GSU will continue its work to protect and improve on the pioneering work your union has accomplished.

Union Representation

Not every GSU Local will be at the bargaining table in 2015. Our work to administer bargained collective agreements continues to play a large role in the union's broader work plan.

The work of representing employees does not let up once a collective agreement is settled. In fact, the work multiplies.

Intervening on employees' behalf and advocating for employees' rights 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 simply do not have the benefit of representation and employment contract enforcement.

Neither do non-union employees have the right to protection from unjust dismissal and reinstatement to employment when they are wrongfully fired.

In response to the economic strength working people gain through unionization, there are business associations, individual companies, and political power brokers who seem focussed with limiting or eliminating the right to union representation altogether.

I anticipate employer-initiated challenges to GSU members' right to union representation over the next 12 months as companies such as Agrium/CPS try to dismantle long-standing representation and bargaining unit structures. In fact, on October 23, 2015, Agrium/CPS filed a successor employer application with

the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board, which seeks to remove all ag retail managers from the scope of the bargaining unit.

The Agrium/CPS application seeks to overturn more than 40 years of union representation for the employees in question. These efforts will be opposed by GSU and no effort will be spared to defeat any interference in employees' right to be represented by the union of their choice.

The clear benefit of a unionized employment relationship has been recognized by arbitrators and the Supreme Court of Canada in legal proceedings involving the calculation of damages when a worker has been dismissed without good or sufficient cause. Arbitrators regularly top up damages with an additional 15 to 25 percent in recognition of the loss of a unionized job.

GSU commits to continue providing the high standard of representation and the protection of workers' rights long associated with this union.

GSU Administration

At the end of September,

the union's operations showed a modest surplus of \$49,000 on a year-to-date basis.

GSU will continue to incur significant legal expenses this year and next as a result of grievance arbitration cases and labour relations board applications. These expenses derive from important legal questions affecting the rights of GSU members that cannot be avoided and won't be shirked.

With all of the agreement renewal bargaining to be done this fall, I don't expect GSU's operating budget to do much better than to end the year with a modest deficit. That being said, GSU has the financial resources and management practices to get the job done.

GSU Defense Fund

The market value of the GSU Defense Fund has slipped somewhat to \$3.5 million at Sept. 30, 2015, as a result of recent turmoil in financial markets. Nonetheless, the Defense Fund investment strategy with RBC is resilient.

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, as the Executive Committee of the union is submitting the following resolution to be voted on at each annual membership meeting. The minutes of each meeting should record the number voting in favour and against the resolution.

"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, 2016, subject to review by members of the union at the 2016 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 Convention 2016

GSU's elected officers and staff are planning for the union's 12th biennial convention of elected delegates, which will be held from March 17 to 19, 2016 inclusive, at the Blackstrap resort near Dundurn, Sask. Next year will also be GSU's 80th anniversary.

I urge members and elected officers of GSU to make sending a full contingent of elected delegates to the 2016 convention a priority. The business of your union is too important to be left to a few.

Our job, as I see it, is to seize the bull by the horns and fearlessly promote the good that unions do; not

just for union members, but for society in general. 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.

Let's take pride in what we've accomplished together and commit to accomplishing more.

This is a time for leadership.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Sincerely,



Hugh Wagner
General Secretary

November 2015

As a member of GSU, you are never alone in facing changes and challenges.

Don't hesitate to contact us with your questions about this report, your collective agreement, or problems in your workplace.



GSU Contact Information

GSU email: gsu.regina@sasktel.net

GSU – Regina Office

2334 McIntyre Street, Regina, SK S4R 3S9

Toll-free: 1.866.522.6686 (Regina)

Local calls: 306.522.6686

Fax 306.565.3430

GSU – Saskatoon office

2154 Airport Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7L 6M6

Toll-free: 1.855.384.7314 (Saskatoon)

Local calls: 306.384.7314

Fax 306.384.1006