



general secretary's report



Hugh Wagner is the general secretary of the Grain and General Services Union (ILWU•Canada). He joined the GSU as a staff representative in January 1975. In October 1977, Wagner was appointed secretary-manager of the union which is the chief executive officer position in the organization. In 1994 the position became an elected office of the union and the title was changed to general secretary.

Wagner obtained a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Political Science from the Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan. Prior to joining the GSU, Wagner worked in the service sector, the construction industry, and the provincial civil service in Saskatchewan.

In addition to his duties with the Grain and General Services Union, Wagner represents the union on a variety of committees, consultative bodies and labour movement forums.

I appreciate the opportunity to again report on the business of your union and I hope you have a thorough discussion about the direction of GSU, including your suggestions for change.

GSU Bargaining in 2020

GSU is currently engaged in agreement renewal collective bargaining with the following employers:

- The Western Producer – Local 5
- Wild West Steelhead – Local 6
- Nutrien Ag Solutions Ltd. – Local 15

Bargaining has been difficult with all three of the above employers, as GSU members in each Local strive to obtain decent wage increases for everyone in their bargaining unit.

Bargaining with Nutrien was also hampered by the employer's attempt to convince union members to abandon significant portions of their collective agreement rights in favour of company policy. In a late-June vote of Local 15 members, a solid majority of 77 percent rejected a so-called final offer from Nutrien.

Following the Local 15 vote, GSU's committee immediately approached Nutrien to resume bargaining, but Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 were the earliest dates the employer's committee was prepared to meet. Notwithstanding the long hiatus, a tentative settlement was hammered out in the two days allotted and the process of arranging a membership vote on the terms is underway.

While the tentative settlement has yet to be voted on, congratulations to the Local 15 bargaining committee of

Brian Cowan, Lynn Shaw, Curtis Cousins, Dale Markling and Steve Torgerson for their hard work and determination to reach a settlement. And, hats off to members of Local 15 members, who stood their ground against an employer that considers clearly defined contracts to be good business for its customers while asking their employees to agree to employment terms that weren't clearly defined in a collective agreement. Defending collective agreement rights is not only necessary, it is also honourable work.

In related news, on Sept. 11 the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (SLRB) ordered that Nutrien's Ag Retail Outlets in Fielding, Kincaid and Norquay are in the GSU bargaining unit. The SLRB decision vindicated an application filed by GSU on Oct. 31, 2018 to defend the integrity of the union bargaining unit and the right to union representation.

The memorandum of settlement signed by Nutrien and GSU Local 15 representatives on Oct. 1 includes an amendment to the collective agreement referencing the SLRB order that includes Fielding, Kincaid and Norquay in the union bargaining unit.

Bargaining with The Western Producer management didn't really begin until recently as pandemic-related business conditions sidelined matters until September. It is reasonable to expect that the employer will recognize the role GSU members have played in successfully navigating the pandemic by bringing a positive attitude to the table when bargaining gets underway.



(L-r) GSU's Local 15 bargaining committee members Lynn Shaw, bargaining spokesperson and GSU staff rep Dale Markling, GSU staff rep Steve Torgerson, Local 15 president Brian Cowan, and Curtis Cousins.

Bargaining with Wild West Steelhead has also been slow going since the collective agreement expired at the end of Feb. To date, the employer has not presented a wage increase offer worth considering and insists on regressive changes to collective agreement language. This is not a prescription for success and when bargaining resumes, the Local 6 bargaining committee will press the employer to set the negative stuff aside.

GSU's collective agreements with Advance Tank Production/Tank Centres Ltd. and Richardson International Ltd. expire on Oct. 31, 2021 and Dec. 31, 2021 respectively. All other GSU collective agreements expire in 2022 or 2023.

Prospects for success at the bargaining table haven't been helped by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, most of the early talk about frontline heroes was just that, all talk. The essential work performed by front liners hasn't been met by any sustained generosity on the part of employers.

It is as true today as it has ever been that collective bargaining success is directly linked to the involvement and solidarity of members on

the job. The best way to show support for a union bargaining committee is to keep up to date, share information, talk it up in the workplace, and participate in GSU bargaining-related activities.

Not surprisingly, the dominant issue for most is real wage increases as GSU members expect and deserve boosts in pay that actually raise purchasing power after inflation is taken into account.

It is time for change and the bargaining table is the place to begin changing the dynamics around wages.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

Life as we knew it ended in mid-March 2020 and normalcy has not returned as the world continues to grapple with the multiple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even where the impact of the virus has not been as severe, such as in Saskatchewan, uncertainty and unease abound. So much has been said, written and broadcast about every aspect of the virus and its impact that it is difficult to imagine what is left to say.

The overwhelming majority of GSU members have continued

to work throughout the pandemic and no doubt there was and is unease and uncertainty for those who continued to work in their usual workplace. The dedication and efforts of you who are on the frontlines are appreciated. We thank you.

To the best of our knowledge, no workplace employing GSU members experienced any COVID infections or contact issues until this autumn when we received a report of a potential exposure in one location. This news reinforces the apprehension about what the autumn and winter experience will be. Following public health guidelines and protocols continues to be essential, especially in the absence of a vaccine.

GSU will continue to work to ensure proper health and safety procedures are followed in every workplace. Heightened concern for workers' rights is always a key item on GSU's radar as we strive to make sure that responses to the pandemic don't overreach.

GSU will continue to advocate for meaningful employer recognition for the contribution of union members to the wellbeing of their enterprises. With two notable exceptions,

the response by employers to the idea of a pandemic bump in pay was truly disappointing. The employers can do better for the workers.

Autumn arrived and brought with it a provincial election. I hope voters elected a government with the best plan for the future and for addressing the shortcomings in our system exposed by the pandemic.

Eldercare, childcare, pharmacare, education, income protection, fair labour standards and decent wages can be achieved if we work together to build a better future for all.

Elections matter.

Union Representation

Administering collective agreements and assisting GSU members is a big part of your union's daily work even as public health measures have presented real challenges to connecting with members as effectively as before.

Being unable to visit most workplaces means we've had to adapt and respond. Holding in-person membership meetings will still be a challenge this fall and we ask for your suggestions for approaches that best meet the needs of GSU members.

We report on issues identified and resolved as part of our regular communication to GSU

members though the Tuesday Members' Memo. If there are things we are overlooking, additional information we could be including, or other platforms we should be using, please let us know.

Representing employees in pursuit of a fair deal for all is unique to the employment relationships of employees represented by a union. Non-union employees do not have the benefit of contractual rights or an organization to represent them and communicate results.

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 part of the bedrock of being unionized.

If you know someone who is interested in being represented by GSU, don't be shy. Please tell them about us, and just as importantly tell us about them.

GSU Administration

GSU was compelled to postpone its biennial policy convention scheduled for this past March as a result of the sudden turn of events in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. So far the cancellation of the facility did not cost a dime as the Temple Gardens Spa graciously agreed to

move our reservation to 2021.

The cancellation was ratified by GSU's Joint Executive Council (board of directors) at their 2020 annual meeting on April 3. In addition, the JEC approved a motion suspending all in-person meetings until deemed permissible under public health directives.

In response to the policy convention cancellation, the JEC also approved motions extending the terms of office of GSU's president, vice presidents, general secretary and members of the Defense Fund Board of Directors until a rescheduled policy convention is held in March 2021. A vacancy on the Board of Directors was filled this summer by the election of Barb Healey (Local 14 – Edenwold).

Moving the policy convention to 2021 necessitated a provisional amendment to GSU's constitution by the JEC, subject to approval by the members at the Local and Sub-local 2020 annual meetings.

Accordingly, the following motion is submitted for a vote at each annual meeting convened this fall:

M/S

"That section 5.2 of the Constitution of GSU shall be amended to provide for the holding of a GSU policy convention within the first five (5) months of 2021 and every two years thereafter."



It's GSU annual meeting season and, thanks to COVID, we needed to do things differently this time. We have adjusted our practices to address union members' concerns, and we will be adhering to public health guidelines governing gatherings while we provide access to you and your fellow members to participate in the decisions of your union.

The number of members voting in favour and against the resolution should be recorded and transmitted to the general secretary for tabulation.

While taking the necessary steps to adjust and respond to the realities of the pandemic, GSU's finances continue to be prudently administered, but not at the expense of services and representation for union members.

On a year-to-date basis, GSU is running an operating surplus of slightly more than \$90,000, which is the combined result of lower expenses and higher dues revenues. Surpluses today will be utilized in future tomorrows when revenues are down or expenses rise significantly.

The JEC also continues to assess the size of GSU's staff complement and is continuing development of a plan for succession in the general secretary position and leadership development within the membership.

In addition, the semi-annual JEC meeting on October 8 unanimously passed a motion to send a resolution to the 2021 GSU biennial policy convention whereby the process for determining who will be the next general secretary of GSU will cease being done via election by delegates attending biennial policy conventions and will be replaced by a recruitment and hiring process that is subject to JEC approval.

The JEC resolution will require an amendment(s) to GSU's constitution which will be considered and voted on by delegates to the 2021 biennial policy convention.

GSU Defense Fund

As of Oct. 8, 2020 the market value of the assets of the GSU

Defense Fund stood at slightly more than \$4.9 million.

When GSU enters agreement renewal bargaining, union members have the financial resources they need to sustain a collective bargaining fight when the need arises. Currently strike/lockout pay for participating GSU members is 75 percent of the individual's net regular pay, plus payment of premiums to continue group insurance and health benefits coverage.

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 GSU's Executive Committee is submitting the following resolution to be voted on at annual membership meetings.

M/S

"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, 2021, subject to review by members of the union at the 2021 annual Local and Sub-Local meetings."

A majority of 50 percent plus one of all the votes cast at all of the meetings is required for the resolution to be carried or defeated. The number voting in favour and against the resolution should be recorded and transmitted to GSU's general secretary.

GSU Policy Convention

GSU will hold its rescheduled biennial policy convention from March 18 to 20, 2021 at Temple Gardens in Moose Jaw. There will likely continue to be restrictions and rules around meetings of

people from different social/family bubbles. As a result, all steps will be taken to address the business of the union while assuring a safe gathering of elected representatives.

As 2020 has revealed, no one is immune from the effects and challenges of a constantly changing environment. We must constantly adapt and reinvent the union in order to be relevant and resilient in responding to evolving circumstances and new generations of workers.

As with every policy convention, the 2021 GSU convention will give every Local and Sub-Local the opportunity to send a contingent of delegates to put their ideas forward in setting the future direction of GSU. Delegates to the 2021 convention will also elect the president, vice presidents, general secretary and directors of the GSU Defense Fund to two-year terms of office.

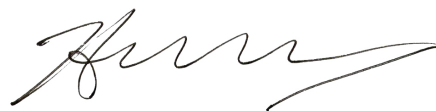
I urge every member and elected officer of GSU to seize the day and help lead the way to a rewarding future for every member of the union.

In my opinion, it is our responsibility to fearlessly promote the good that GSU does not just for union members, but also for the broader community and society.

What we've accomplished together is remarkable, but we have much more to do. Let's shake the foundations of society and build towards a more just society. I urge everyone to get involved.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Solidarity,



Hugh Wagner
General Secretary