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2021 General Secretary's Report

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 2021

GSU will soon be engaged in agreement renewal collective bargaining with the following employers:

- Advance Tank Production/Tank Centres Ltd. – Local 8
- Richardson International Ltd. – Local 14

A major focus in bargaining will be wage increases as renewed inflationary pressure seems to be working its way into the economy. The Bank of Canada is forecasting a three percent rise in the consumer price index for most of 2021. Accordingly, GSU members in each Local will strive to obtain decent wage increases for everyone in their bargaining unit.

Bargaining with Advance will be influenced by the fortunes of the energy sector and the amount of investment allocated to hauling petroleum and petroleum products. On the other hand, bargaining with Richardson International will occur as the effects of the devastating drought of 2021 are still being measured across western Canada.

There is no doubt that crop yields and deliveries will be down very substantially and there are concerns about layoffs being one of the results of the drought. Fortunately, most GSU collective agreements contain supplementary employment insurance benefits which will help lessen the sting of layoffs.

GSU will be available to work with every member who is laid off and needs assistance navigating the system. Laid off employees retain their GSU member status and access to union services.

Determination at the bargaining table will be required in order to break new ground and improve wages. This is not new and I am confident in GSU's ability to bargain, including the resources we have to support our bargaining positions.

Bargaining on behalf of other GSU members will ramp up in 2022 as the collective agreements with Wild West Steelhead (February 28/22), Grain Millers (March 31/22), Western Producer (July 31/22) open first. They will be followed by the expiry of the collective agreements with Viterra (2), Discovery Co-op, Lake Country Co-op and Lloydminster Co-op all of which expire on Oct. 31, 2022.

Hopefully we'll have a clearer understanding of the enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on work and the economy by the time 2022 rolls around. Save it to say, a lot more certainty could be injected into the situation if everyone is vaccinated against the virus.

Whatever the challenges, GSU will continue to work, communicate, educate and organize members to support one another in the struggle for improved wages, working conditions and benefits.

Among the truths revealed by the pandemic's impact on society, the need for strong labour unions stands out and along with it, the need to have a constant focus on improving the lot of working people. Going back to so-called normal is not good enough.

It is time for major change and the bargaining table is as good a place as any to start making change.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Life as we knew it ended in March 2020 and normalcy has not returned as the world continues to grapple with the multiple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Uncertainty and unease abound as we wade into the so-called fourth wave. 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 at their usual workplaces throughout the pandemic. No doubt there was and is unease for those who are compelled to work in close quarters as a result of being designated as essential.

It's too bad and all too familiar that the essential designation doesn't translate into greater consideration or care when it comes to the wages, working conditions and recognition afforded to working people.

It's a telling sign of the true nature of our system that being designated as essential often isn't accompanied by better wages and working conditions. The dedication and efforts of you who are on the front lines are appreciated by your community and your union, if not your employer. We thank you.

GSU will continue to work to ensure that proper health and safety procedures are followed in every workplace. Workers' rights are always on GSU's radar as we strive to make sure that responses to the pandemic don't overreach or fall short.

Autumn has arrived and the federal election has come and gone. It is therefore time to focus on making sure those who were elected live up to the promises they made during the campaign.

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.

Let's show the political parties and the pundits that elections matter to the people.

Union Representation

Administering collective agreements and assisting GSU members is a big part of your union's daily work even as the pandemic has presented real challenges to doing our jobs in the usual way.

Holding in-person membership meetings this fall will still present challenges, but we will take them into account and proceed to provide GSU members the opportunity to be heard.

We report on issues identified and resolved as part of our regular communication to GSU members through 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 held its re-scheduled policy convention in March on a combined in-person and remote participation format. This enabled us to get the necessary business done, but I think it is fair to say that the remote format lacks the quality of getting together with others under one roof and in one room to discuss and debate the direction of the union.

I am hopeful that the pandemic will be a distant memory by the time GSU's 2023 convention rolls around.

GSU's finances continue to be in good shape as we are running an operating surplus of \$90,000 as at Aug. 31. That being said, I do expect a drop in dues revenue as drought-related layoffs affect GSU bargaining units.

While taking the necessary steps to adjust and respond to the realities of the 2021 drought and pandemic, GSU's finances continue to be prudently administered but not at the expense of services and representation for union members. In that connection, GSU proceeded to fill the staff representative vacancy resulting from Dale Markling's retirement.

I am extremely happy to report that the Joint Executive Council meeting on Sept. 24 approved the hiring of _____. We welcome _____ to a long and happy career of serving GSU members.

In addition, the Council approved hiring _____ into a temporary staff representative position for an 18-month term. We welcome _____ to the GSU team.

_____ will be based in Saskatoon and will be responsible for providing union representation to employees in the territory previously assigned to Dale Markling.

_____ will work out of the Regina office and the finishing touches are being put on his designated territory.

GSU Defense Fund

As of Aug. 31, 2021 the market value of the assets of the GSU Defense Fund stood at slightly more than \$5.3 million.

As GSU enters agreement renewal bargaining this autumn, union members have the financial resources they need to sustain collective bargaining fights for better wages and working conditions.

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 Joint Executive Council is submitting the following resolution to be voted on at annual membership meetings.

"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, 2022, subject to review by members of the union at the 2022 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 Bylaws and Constitution and the Path Forward

Delegates to GSU's 2021 policy convention amended the union's bylaws and constitution to update the wording and reflect new forms of communication. The amendments are highlighted in red and do not increase the powers of any elected or representative body in the union or reduce the rights of members.

The most substantive changes are associated with holding the biennial policy conventions in odd-numbered years and converting the general secretary position from being an elected office to being hired.

As the past 18 months have 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.

There are tremendous changes occurring in the Ag, grain handling and crop processing sectors as new market entrants expand operations and capital is invested in new processing operations. This presents GSU with an enormous opportunity to organize. Our challenge is to get out there and do it.

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 should just be the beginning. Let's make the next years of this decade the years in which we changed the world profoundly and for the good.

I urge everyone to get involved.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hugh Wagner', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Hugh Wagner
General Secretary