

# 2023/2024 ANNUAL REPORT

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE  
JOINT EXECUTIVE COUNCIL  
(JEC) OF GRAIN AND GENERAL  
SERVICES UNION (ILWU CANADA)  
– Presented to and adopted by  
the Joint Executive Council at  
their Annual Meeting on  
March 21, 2024**



GSU Members,

We welcome the opportunity to update you on the state of our union and extend our appreciation for your unwavering dedication to our collective mission of enhancing the quality of life for all members and our communities.

## **Joint Executive Council Meeting - March 21, 2024**

The Joint Executive Council convened on March 21, 2024, where, alongside adopting this annual report, we discussed various aspects of the union's current affairs. Topics included union administration, finances, bargaining strategies, and plans to make 2024 a productive year for GSU.

## **Union Administration**

There are seldom dull moments for staff in GSU's Regina and Saskatoon offices. Every day is different with lots of work on our plates and a juggling of the daily responsibilities and strategic actions that help keep moving GSU forward.

Steve Torgerson has been in the position of General Secretary for a year now, and the tasks he previously handled have been integrated into the roles of GSU's three staff representatives. There are currently no plans to hire additional personnel.

## **Finances**

Reviewing the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2023 reveals an operating deficit of \$144,569, which is higher than the budget approved at the GSU Convention in March 2023. This is the result of defending members rights in Local 1 (Viterra Operations & Maintenance), Local 2 (Viterra Head Office) and Local 5 (Western Producer) during bargaining, specifically legal fees

we incurred. Though we did expect resistance from employers, these Locals were met with a new level of pushback. As provided for in a resolution passed by delegates to GSU's 2023 Biennial Policy Convention, the GSU Defense Fund was asked to cover these legal fees. Accordingly, that request has been made by GSU's Executive Committee and it is in front of the GSU Defense Fund's Board of Directors.

While dues revenues remained stable for the year, our operating expenses increased due to heightened bargaining activities. We plan and budget as best we can with what we know, but unexpected costs are a fact of life. In an effort to counter these unexpected costs, GSU has changed its annual budget structure to begin setting money aside for foreseen and unforeseen expenses.

Projections for 2024 show a modest deficit of \$15,000. This budget is the result of work by your Executive Committee and Joint Executive Council to make tough choices and narrow in on our fundamental priorities.

## **Bargaining in 2023/2024**

Bargaining efforts in 2023 have been marked by determination and resilience. Locals have navigated complex negotiations because employers were not open to our basic need to address wage issues and improve working conditions amidst economic challenges.

Locals 1 and 2 (Viterra) reached new collective agreements in January 2024 after a set of difficult negotiations. But their fight is not over. Their employer has decided to back-peddle on the wage increase promised in their Final Offer. Local 1 and 2 members responded immediately by shaming their employer and demanding they honour the collective agreement. This fight will take months and should be a reminder to all GSU members. Our work is never done and the writing in an agreement is only as good as the solidarity of

the members. If you won't fight for what is yours, you are bound to lose it.

Members of Local 5 (Western Producer) have had to endure a difficult round of negotiations with their employer. Progress was steady and slow, and the effects of these negotiations were being felt by members. The print media industry has been under constant pressure for decades, and in this 100th year of the Western Producers' history, members are holding their breaths. This dedication by members to standing firm has paid off as the parties reached a tentative agreement at the bargaining table in early March. As always, this agreement must be vetted and voted on by the membership of Local 5 as the final step. We can not lose sight during bargaining that our goal is to reach a collective agreement that benefits members, and it is their final approval that must be reached before any collective agreement is ratified.

Local 6 (Wild West Steelhead), Local 9 (Trouw Nutrition), and Local 19 (Prairie Co-op) are all in the midst of negotiations. They are actively bargaining the renewal of their collective agreements and are seeking what all GSU member desire: recognition of the impacts that the rising cost of living has had on them; an understanding that a cost of doing business is taking care of your employees; not driving down wages, reducing benefits and weakening protections around hours of work.

Members of Local 8 (Advance) are watching the ongoing and recently-settled negotiations because this spring they will begin renegotiating their collective agreement with their employer Advance Engineered Production Ltd.

We applaud the unwavering determination shown by Locals 1 and 2 during their negotiations with Viterra, as well as the resolve demonstrated by members of Local 5 in their talks with the Western Producer, despite interference from the employer. Additionally, Local 7's successful resolution

with Heartland Livestock/Northern Livestock Sales underscores the power of collective action in safeguarding members' rights.

## Union Education

GSU remains committed to empowering members through targeted educational initiatives. On March 6, 2024, we held new officer training online. This training is for any newly-elected officer or steward and the focus is on union basics and what their role is as an officer or steward. From shop steward training to seminars on labour law and collective bargaining, we will continue to equip members with essential knowledge and skills. This Fall we will hold training that is open to all GSU members. When the course content has been developed and the date is known, it will be announced in the *Tuesday Members' Memo* e-newsletter.

GSU is in a unique position of being small with a dispersed membership, this presents challenges to providing education. However, staff have been looking at this as an opportunity rather than a setback. These challenges mean we need to be creative and consider how we can deliver education to members in a way that works and provides the best bang for our buck.

## Organizing

Recognizing the importance of expanding our membership base, GSU is reinvigorating its organizing efforts. By fostering and building on our internal solidarity and reaching out to prospective members, we aim to strengthen our collective voice and advocate for improved standards across all workplaces. Organizing new workers into GSU is not complicated. It involves talking to people who would benefit from belonging to a union, answering their questions, challenging their current working conditions and building a relationship of trust and mutual support. Workers who belong to a union know that union solidarity is the essential thread that

binds us all together. Non-unionized workers need to see visible demonstrations of this solidarity in order for them to believe in it as well.

Organizing doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and resources. We are committed to organizing as it is our goal to help all working people and build on the already existing strength of this great union.

## ILWU Canada Family

This past summer, resolute members of ILWU Canada at ports along Canada's Pacific coast walked the picket line for 13 days. Approximately 7,500 union members stood firm at key ports such as Vancouver and Prince Rupert.

These union members had pressed for wage increases and protection of their jurisdiction on the ports. They didn't bow to intense pressure from employers or the federal government, and they ultimately secured a new collective agreement.

As part of the broader ILWU Canada family, GSU stands proudly united with more than 15,000 trade unionists in our commitment to economic and social justice. Together, we strive to advance the interests of the working class and our communities.

## Working ahead in 2024

As we conclude this year's annual report, it's evident that our members have once again demonstrated resilience and fortitude in the face of the all-familiar challenges posed by economic shifts and employer tactics. While we may encounter new hurdles and struggles, these are not unfamiliar territories for us. They are the very reasons why unions exist, why GSU exists.

GSU remains committed to confronting these challenges head-on, day in and day out, advocating tirelessly for our members' rights

and well-being. It's heartening to witness our members standing strong and refusing to retreat in the face of these challenges.

Looking ahead, we recognize the importance of adapting to the changing landscape and evolving needs of our membership. With unwavering dedication, we pledge to continue exploring ways to enhance our services and support our members in the years to come.

Let us reaffirm our solidarity and collective resolve. Together, we are stronger. Together, we will navigate the challenges ahead and emerge stronger.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Torgerson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Steve Torgerson  
General Secretary

On behalf of the members of the  
Joint Executive Council of  
Grain & General Services Union  
(ILWU•Canada)

[JEC members will be listed here]