

BARGAINING COMMITTEE HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to give newly appointed members of Negotiating Committees (or whoever is given the responsibility for bargaining) an outline of their duties, where they can turn for advice, and the names of CUPE Education Department courses that will help them to be more effective committee members.

I- Introduction to Bargaining

Bargaining is the most important activity undertaken by any union.

Unions bargain rather than just submitting a "wish" list of contract improvements that employers automatically accept. We bargain because the interests of employers and workers are opposed. Public sector employers want a free hand to provide public services as cheaply as possible. Workers want decent, safe working conditions and a rising standard of living.

Because there is conflict, unions must force employers to pay more than they otherwise would, to give employees more say over promotions, more job security, etc. Even in a time of cutbacks, wage freezes and contracting-out, unionized workers do better than those with no protection and if we work together, we can minimize the assault on our living standards and job security.

The difference between bargaining and begging is the power to effect change. Unionized workers who act together and support one another have more power than individual workers who can't even complain about working conditions, harassment by supervisors, racism, or being passed over for promotions for fear of being labelled a troublemaker.

II - Role of the Bargaining Committee

The purpose of the bargaining committee is to see that the local negotiates the best possible settlement. The best possible settlement means a settlement that reflects the priorities of the membership and which is the most that the employer is prepared to accept at the time of the negotiations.

Bargaining committees do this by seeing that the members have information about how their wages, benefits and conditions of employment compare with other workers doing similar work.

Once the members are informed, the committee determines the members' bargaining priorities. The committee uses the information about the members' priorities to develop a bargaining strategy.

When negotiations begin, the committee represents the wishes and priorities of the membership.

Finally the committee explains how the tentative agreement was arrived at and recommends that the membership either accept or reject the tentative agreement.

III - Duties of the Bargaining Committee

Information Gathering

- Obtain comparisons of the local's collective agreement provisions with contracts of workers in the same sector from the local's CUPE Representative.
- Obtain information on public sector settlement trends.
- Obtain a list of unresolved complaints.
- Survey the membership to determine bargaining priorities.

Bargaining Proposals

- Based on the information gathered, develop bargaining proposals in conjunction with the CUPE Representative.
- Write up the proposals in contract language.
- Develop arguments for why each proposal should be incorporated into the collective agreement.
- Explain to the members how the proposals reflect their priorities and concerns.

Bargaining Strategy

- In conjunction with the CUPE Representative develop a bargaining strategy aimed at improving the chances that the employer will accept the most important bargaining proposals.

Negotiations

- Sit in on negotiations. Note that the CUPE Representative usually acts as the union's chief spokesperson.
- Decide which proposals to withdraw, which ones to revise and which ones to leave as is during negotiations.
- Recommend acceptance or rejection of a tentative agreement and explain to the membership how their priorities and concerns are reflected in the settlement.
- Explain to stewards the meaning and intent of any new contract language.

IV - Tips for the Bargaining Committee

- Form the bargaining committee well before your contract terminates.
- Meet with your CUPE Representative as soon as you have formed the committee to work out a plan on how to prepare for bargaining and who will do what.
- Almost all of the information you will need to prepare for bargaining is available from the CUPE Research Department. Your Representative can obtain the information you require.
- The best place to learn about local bargaining trends and the bargaining problems faced by other locals is the CUPE District Council and the local Labour Council. If your local is not already affiliated you should consider participating in these structures as part of bargaining preparation.
- The CUPE Research Department has prepared a book called "The CUPE Standard Agreement" that is invaluable when it comes to writing up proposals in contract language. It is available from your Representative.
- The main impact that the bargaining committee can have on the outcome of bargaining is during the preparation period. The more information about bargaining trends, how your contract provisions compare with those of other workers, how your proposals deal with workplace problems, and how the proposals correspond to the members' priorities, the more the members will feel involved in the process and the more pressure will be put on your employer to accept your most important proposals.
- Every member of the bargaining unit should know the bargaining priorities and why they are important.
- Every member of the bargaining committee should take at least one of the three bargaining courses offered by the CUPE Education Department.

V - Knowledge and Skills Required

- Knowledge of the bargaining process
- The Collective Agreement
- Settlement Trends
- Comparisons with other agreements
- Unresolved workplace problems
- Priorities of the membership
- Ability to develop and implement a bargaining strategy
- Knowledge of how to communicate bargaining information to the membership
- Negotiating skills

VI - Sources of Advice and Assistance

- Former members of the bargaining committee
- Bargaining Committee members from other locals (meet them at the CUPE District Council and the Labour Council)
- CUPE Research Department (for bargaining statistics)
- Your CUPE Representative
- CUPE Education Department Courses

VII - Relevant Education Department Courses

- *"Introduction To CUPE"*
A short course for newly selected executive and committee members introducing them to CUPE and to effective union administration.
- *"Introduction to Bargaining" (Collective Bargaining, Part I)*
An introduction to bargaining designed for those members of bargaining committees who have never been involved in bargaining before.
- *"Preparation for Bargaining" (Collective Bargaining, Part II)*
This course concentrates on the concrete steps that a bargaining committee can undertake in the six months preceding negotiations to get a better deal at the bargaining table. This course will be of interest to both new and experienced members of bargaining committees
- *"Collective Bargaining Part 3"*
This week-long course centres on a mock bargaining session. The course is designed to give bargaining committee members experience in using statistical information at the bargaining table. It is also designed to help bargaining committee members become familiar with the emotions and tensions associated with negotiations. This course will be of interest to those who have already taken Bargaining "I" and "II".
- *"Face to Face Communication"*
A course in how to communicate effectively. Useful for anyone who would like to have more effective listening and communication skills.
- *"Assertiveness Training"*
A course on how to present your ideas and proposals in a straightforward manner and how to deal with other people's ideas and criticisms. This is an excellent course if you are uncomfortable in conflict situations.

Contact your CUPE Education Representative for more information on these courses as well as other courses offered by the CUPE Education Department or by your Federation of Labour.

