



# BARGAINING BASICS

INFORMATION ON HOW AGREEMENTS ARE REACHED AND  
HOW YOUR INVOLVEMENT CAN HELP WIN FAIR CONTRACTS

## WHAT IS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING?

Collective bargaining is the legal process where a labor union and an employer negotiate a contract that covers the terms and conditions of employment. These include wages, hours of work, paid time off, benefits, employment security and protections against unfair treatment or discharge.

## WHY IS HAVING A CONTRACT IMPORTANT?

A contract means that management cannot simply decide on its own to make changes such as cutting wages and benefits, firing employees, playing favorites or changing schedules and holidays. Contracts also guarantee that there is a grievance and arbitration procedure that protects members if the employer violates the agreement.

## HOW DO WE GET A GOOD CONTRACT?

We need to build our bargaining power. Bargaining power is the ability to achieve our bargaining goals and strengthen our contract. It comes from our solidarity—our determination and willingness to stick together.

Taking action to show our employer we support our Bargaining Committee can send a message that we are not satisfied with the status quo or our employer's demands. When our employer sees that we are united, it puts us in a stronger position at the bargaining table.

## WHAT HAPPENS IN NEGOTIATIONS?

Negotiations take place at the bargaining table where representatives from our employer and our local union come together to put forth and discuss proposals. Both sides caucus (meet separately), make counter proposals, test out ideas and look for ways to bridge differences.

The union and the employer have mutual interests: both want the employer to prosper and grow. But the union and the employer may have different views on issues such as economic improvements and job security. The goal is to reach an agreement that will be mutually acceptable and beneficial to the employer and the union's membership.

## WHAT KINDS OF PROPOSALS ARE DISCUSSED IN NEGOTIATIONS?

Proposals range from pay raises to safety conditions. Generally, contract proposals fall into the following categories:

1. Economic proposals, such as wages, benefits, retirement and healthcare
2. Non-economic items, such as safety standards, breaks, grievance procedure and seniority

## DO MEMBERS GET TO VOTE ON A TENTATIVE AGREEMENT?

Union members in good standing may vote to ratify or reject a tentative agreement. Your bargaining committee may make a recommendation regarding a proposed agreement.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T FINISH NEGOTIATIONS BEFORE THE CONTRACT EXPIRATION DATE?

If the employer and the union have not reached an agreement by the contract expiration date, we each have three options.

The union can:

1. Negotiate an extension of the old contract, or
2. Continue to work while we increase pressure on management and build power for bargaining, or
3. Strike.

Similarly, the employer can:

1. Negotiate an extension of the old contract, or
2. Continue to operate while negotiating with the union, or
3. Lock out the bargaining unit.

It is common for local unions to negotiate beyond contract expiration dates as both parties work through the bargaining process and get closer to a deal.

In order to reach a fair and reasonable contract, we must be prepared to take action to show our employer that we are united and support our Bargaining Committee.