



Collective Bargaining 101

For many of our members, especially our New Hires and TPTs, and for those who have not worked in a unionized environment, the mere mention of “contract negotiations” may seem overwhelming. To help alleviate some of this uncertainty, Union leadership thought this would be a good time to explain how the collective bargaining process works and what to expect over the next several months.

What is collective bargaining?

Collective bargaining is a process of negotiation between an employer (General Motors) and a group of employees, commonly a trade union, (Unifor) aimed at agreements to regulate wages, working conditions, benefits, and other aspects of workers' compensation and rights for workers.

A **collective bargaining agreement** (CBA) reached by these negotiations functions as a labour contract between an employer and the union and establishes terms regarding wage scales, working hours, training, health and safety, overtime, grievance mechanisms, and rights to participate in workplace, union or company affairs

Our collective agreement, or contract, with General Motors consists of several parts; a **Master** and a **Local** Agreement as well as five other agreements that cover health care benefits, insurance, pensions, legal and income maintenance plan. The Master agreement includes terms that cover the St Catharines, Oshawa and Woodstock sites and the Local agreement is specific to St Catharines.

Our current agreement is for three years and expires September 18th, 2023, at 11:59pm. (Paragraph 177 of the Master Agreement). This is a deadline that can be extended depending on how negotiations are going and if an agreement is near.

Bargaining Demands

The Bargaining Process begins **first** with the participation of our membership(you!) in the form of demand sheets. The demand sheets are where the Bargaining team asks the membership to identify their top 5 demands going into this year's bargaining. You may recall that back in March we distributed and collected the forms. This was your opportunity to give your input on what improvements you want to see in the new contract. The Bargaining Committee compiled the demands of the membership from these sheets and forwarded them to the National Union. Together, with the other locals (Local 222 Oshawa & Local 636 Woodstock), we reviewed and discuss these demands. They were then divided into Local or Master demands.

Strike Mandate

In August the Union will call for a strike mandate vote. A strike mandate vote does NOT mean we are going on strike at that time. Rather, it IS a vote to show the company that you support your bargaining team by giving them a mandate to call for a strike, at some point in the future, if necessary to secure a fair contract for all of us. It is very important that this vote is strong. It sends a clear message to the Company that the Union has the backing of the membership and that they support the Bargaining Committee.

This strike mandate vote will be communicated later this summer.

Pattern Bargaining

Pattern bargaining started as a collective bargaining strategy in which unionized workers across an industry or sector attempt to bargain uniform standards in their contracts. Pattern bargaining serves an important purpose: it levels the playing field, so companies compete based on the quality of their products or services - not how much they pay their workers. With a pattern collective agreement one company cannot gain a competitive advantage over other companies with wages. Pattern bargaining is a core part of Unifor's bargaining strategy with the Big Three automakers – General Motors, Ford and Stellantis (formerly Chrysler).

On Labour Day Monday the National Union will pick the **Target Company** they want to bargain with first. This decision will be made by the National President. There is always a lot of speculation leading up to negotiations as to which company will be the target. National President, Lana Payne, will consider many factors, a couple of which are the financial situation of the company and the relationship they have with Union. The National

Union, along with bargaining committees from the target Company's locals, will then enter a period of negotiations.

A new aspect this year that the National President will also take into consideration before making her decision who the pattern Company will be is the UAW negotiations, which are set to start at the same time. Communications from the National Union known as AUTOTALKS will be made available to the membership when they are issued.

Once a contract has been negotiated and a settlement is reached with the target Company, the National Union will then select the second Company they wish to negotiate with. The expectation will be to accept the pattern contract negotiation with the first Company.

Tentative Agreement and Ratification

The Bargaining Committee will negotiate the best terms of a proposed agreement with the Company, this is called a **tentative agreement**. The tentative agreement will be presented to the membership at a ratification meeting and will be voted on by the membership. If majority of the membership vote "YES" the tentative agreement is considered **ratified**, and it then becomes a current collective bargaining agreement.

If negotiations stall and an agreement cannot be reached, or the membership fail to ratify a tentative agreement, the National Union can call a strike. The Union will work hard to negotiate the best proposed agreement possible with the Company to avoid this from happening. In fact, 98% of all contract negotiations are settled without a strike.

Bargaining Environment and Expectations

Over the years, the process has pretty much remained the same - how well we do at the Bargaining Table depends on several factors:

- Solidarity amongst the members/Willingness to go on strike
- Market share – Capacity – Public demand – Company profits – exchange rates - etc

A critical factor is how well the Union is prepared and who is doing the negotiating on your behalf.

We have, and will continue to have, numerous meetings and discussions with the bargaining committees from the other GM plants as well as Ford and Stellantis so that we are prepared for the challenges that are important to our members locally and the Canadian Auto Industry as a whole.

The number one priority will be maintaining and expanding our footprint of the industry in Canada. Calling for each Company to commit to bringing new products to Canada, and for specific investment mandates for Canada in both Assembly and Propulsion operations.

Achieving improvements in other key areas such as wages, pensions, benefits and converting TPTs to full time and improving working conditions are also going to be priorities in contract negotiations.

In the past, several sacrifices were made to help turn the Company around from their financial troubles. These concessions helped put the Company back on solid ground to become profitable again. As negotiations approach, we are in a much different situation than 2008. GM is now making record profits in the wake of Covid and supplier shortages.

As we continue the Bargaining Process over the next several months, union leadership want to thank the membership for your continued support.

If you have any questions regarding bargaining, do not hesitate to reach out to the members of our bargaining committee.

Issued by,

Trevor Longpre, GM Unit Plant Chairperson

On behalf of the Shop Committee, Scott Little, Tony Verde, Stan Kuczma