

WELCOME TO THE USW LOCAL 1-1937 ORGANIZING CENTRE

We hope this page will help answer your questions about how our Union works and how it can assist you and your co-workers to get the help you need in forming a Union in your workplace.

First of all, what is a Union? A Union is a group of workers who join together to achieve better wages, better benefits, respect on the job, an end to favouritism and a stronger voice in workplace decisions. With the help of a Union, workers negotiate a contract with their employer to ensure these issues are addressed.

Without a Union, employers have 100% control over their employees and complete authority to make all decisions. Through Unions, employees take some of this control to make their workplace better. A Union's major goal is to give workers a voice on the job for respect, safety, security, better pay and benefits, and other improvements to working conditions.

In the Organizing Centre, you will find out how you can come together with your co-workers to make work a better place for everyone.

IN THE ORGANIZING CENTRE

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If you want improvements in your workplace, organizing is the most important way to raise the working and living standards of workers.

Union workers earn 30% more money than non-union workers and 44% more when you include the total compensation of health and welfare benefits.

The Union advantage is clear. Organizing more workers will strengthen our Union, our contracts, and our communities with good jobs. Over 1 in 3 workers in Canada belongs to a Union. United, we are a powerful voice for justice at work. Together. We can protect the good jobs that workers and their families need to achieve their potential at work as well as life after work.

UNION BENEFITS

Why Union?

Unions have always made a positive difference. With most of the economic benefit of our economy going to corporations, working people are using the power of collective action to get their fair share.

This is a reason that Unions work. Individual workers may ask for a from time to time but it is proven in the old adage that says "United we stand divided we fall" that workers do far better when they join together and act as one. If you are a sports fan, you only have to look at the NHL as an example. For decades players toiled for low wages and in poor conditions until they formed a Union (NHLPA) that has seen their decision to unionize turn them into millionaires who have a say in their workplace. That is an extreme example (wage wise) but the same holds true for all kinds of jobs where working together to form a Union in your workplace will give you and your co-workers areal say in the terms and conditions of your work. The future of working families depends on a united voice that can stand up to powerful interests.

The working men and women of the USW are that voice.

The USW is the product of many mergers with other Unions and members who work in numerous different industries in Canada the USA, but the largest number of members is in the forest industry.

Unions are making a difference.

With most of the economic benefits of our economy going to corporations, people are using the power of collective action to get their fair share.

Every worker deserves living wages, safe working conditions, equal opportunity, health and welfare benefits, a secure pension, and a voice in the workplace.

The USW is working to make sure workers get their fair share. USW members enjoy the security of a Union contract and the strength of 750,000 members behind them.

Workers never got anything without uniting.

When workers stick together as a Union, they have bargaining power and a collective voice that they simply do not have when they are not unionized. Being a member of a Union not only gives you a better position to get better wages, benefits and working conditions, you also get job security.

The items below are some of what has been achieved by being united.

- The 40-hour workweek
- The 8-hour workday
- Overtime
- Sick Leave
- Paid Vacation
- Company Paid Health & Welfare Benefits
- Pensions

- Safety and Health Protections
- Grievance Procedure for Violation of Worker Rights
- Fairness in Promotions and Training
- Higher Wages
- Fair Treatment on the Job
- Right to Respect from Managers

Just think of what you and your co-workers may be able to win if you had a Union contract!

Non-union workers have limited rights and can be fired "at-will", for no reason. Just because your boss is having a bad day and decides he/she does not want you around anymore. Non-union workers also find that the rules can change at the whim of the employer.

One day you have paid holidays and vacations and next week you don't;

A raise is promised but never given;

You have got too many hours one week but the next you are not making enough to get by.

In a Union contract, everything is spelled out in black and white, as decided upon between the workers' negotiating committee and the employer during bargaining, and rules do not change until workers renegotiate. For instance, raises are guaranteed, holidays, vacations, hours, etc. can all be defined by the contract.

In addition, discipline and firing are not at the whim of the employer for Union members. There are certain rules the boss has to go through, a series of steps, to show that they have just cause for discipline or firing you. Throughout this time, a Union representative will be working on your behalf to represent you and make sure you get a fair deal, and your rights are protected through a grievance procedure.

Just think of what you and your coworkers may be able to win if you had a Union contract.

WHERE WE WORK USW INDUSTRIES

- Logging
- Sawmills
- Construction
- Trucking
- Mining
- Casinos
- Recreation Complexes
 - Representing Lifeguards, Maintenance, Custodian, Arena, Fitness Workers, Parks Workers and Clerical Staff
- Automobile Dealerships
- Aquaculture Industry – Processing Plants
- Hospitality Industry in Camp Environments
 - Housekeepers, Food & Beverage Servers, Cooks & Dishwashers
- Manufacturing Plants

WHO IS THE UNION? YOU ARE THE UNION

In the United Steelworkers, you are the Union. You come together with your coworkers; you nominate and elect Union officers; you determine the working conditions and concerns that will be bargained in a contract; you will be part of a larger movement to improve the lives of working men and women in the workplace and in their communities.

The more workers join together for the good of all, the more management listens to what they have to say. In Union there is strength. Without a Union, you have only a few rights such as minimum wage, overtime after 40-hours and unemployment insurance. With a Union, you enjoy numerous other benefits guaranteed in a Union contract. The members of the Local Union are workers just like you who have organized their workplace or joined an already established Union workplace.

HOW DO WE UNIONIZE OUR WORKPLACE? IMPORTANT FIRST STEPS

The first step is to contact the USW to get confidential advice on how to approach organizing your workplace.

The second step is a committee among the workers with someone from each department and shift. The committee's job is to attend meetings and educate themselves about the Union. Then they can educate their co-workers and help dispel false information spread by management. The committee should be made up of those co-workers you know can be trusted to not disclose the organizing drive to management.

ANY CONTACT YOU HAVE WITH A USW LOCAL UNION REPRESENTATIVE IS COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL

Next, the majority of the employees must sign cards stating they want to have a Union in their workplace.

After a majority of workers have signed cards, the Union can apply to the BC Labour Relations Board to become certified as the bargaining agent for the employees.

These cards are **confidential**, and your employer will never know you signed one unless you told them you did.

Currently, if the majority of employees sign authorization cards, government representatives from the BC Labour Relations Board will order and conduct a secret ballot vote amongst the employees within ten (10) days of the Union's application.

During those ten (10) days (and sometimes before if they hear about the organizing drive) employers often try to convince employees to not join the Union. Sometimes they try the carrot approach by saying "give me another chance to improve things" or more often they will fearmonger by spreading false rumours about the business having to close or the threat of job losses.

The reason they do this is their fear that you will gain rights in the workplace, rights they want to keep to themselves.

Prepare yourself and your co-workers for these types of threats, as they time and again prove to be empty threats designed to frighten employees.

Advise your organizer when threats or promises are made as he has legal means to deal with them. Threats and promises by the employer during organizing drives are illegal and can be dealt with through the BC Labour Relations Board as unfair labour practices. If the Union wins a majority of votes, then the Union can begin the process of negotiating a collective bargaining agreement (contract).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHO ORGANIZES THE UNION?

The employees work from the inside to sign up co-workers, usually through individuals or a committee is formed within the workplace, who inform and sign up their co-workers. The committee receives direction and direct assistance from a USW Organizer who meets with them regularly.

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS TO CERTIFICATION?

The law requires that at least 45% of the affected employees must sign a Union Membership Card.

The Union then applies to the Labour Board for a certification vote but generally only does so when a good majority of employees sign cards.

The Labour Board would then conduct a secret ballot vote within 10 days of the application.

The vote is generally conducted at the workplace.

At the end of the voting time, the Officer from the Labour Board in charge of the vote counts the ballots with representatives from the Union and Management present. The final outcome is determined by a simple majority of ballots cast.

CAN I HELP MY CO-WORKERS IN JOINING THE UNION?

Yes.

Organizing a Union and participating in one are legal activities and rights, and those rights are protected under the British Columbia Relations Code (BCLRC).

DO YOU LOSE ANYTHING WHEN YOU JOIN THE UNION?

No.

Once a Union applies a certification vote. The Labour Board requires that all terms and conditions of employment are "frozen" and cannot be changed without the Unions consent for a period of 3 months while bargaining is underway (Section 32 of the BCLRC).

That means that if the Union gets a 'Yes' vote, then bargaining would start from your current conditions and move up from there.

CAN MY EMPLOYER TAKE ANY ACTION AGAINST ME FOR JOINING A UNION?

No.

The decision to join is solely up to the individual without any undue influence, threats, or coercion from Management.

Every person is free to join a Union of their own choice.

Section 5 of the BCLRC.

DOES THE EMPLOYER EVER FIND OUT WHO SUPPORTED THE UNION?

No.

The BCLRC guarantees the secrecy of all membership evidence. Employers never find out and never get to see membership cards. Section 25 (2) of the BC Labour Relations Board Rules.

***WHAT HAPPENS IF AN EMPLOYER VIOLATES WORKERS' RIGHTS?
DURING AN ORGANIZING DRIVE?***

Notify the Union, immediately.

The Union can file an "Unfair Labour Practice Complaint", with the Labour Board, who in turn has the authority to order any remedy that they feel is appropriate and that addresses any violation of the BCLRC. Sections 13 & 14 of the BCLRC.

CAN MANAGEMENT STAFF BELONG TO THE UNION?

No.

The Labour Relations Code prohibits people that exercise managerial functions from belonging or interfering with the formation of the Union.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE UNION IN OUR WORKPLACE?

The **EMPLOYEES ARE THE UNION** in the workplace.

Union Stewards and other positions are elected to represent their co-workers with management and to ensure that the company does not violate the contract.

USW Local representatives provide assistance, direction, research and education to Stewards and other employees in the workplace.

The USW Local Representative also assists in the settlement of grievances.

WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT?

A collective agreement or a contract is a legal agreement between a Union and an employer, covering wages, hours of work, working conditions, benefits, right of workers and the Union, and a procedure to be followed in settling workplace disputes.

WHO NEGOTIATES THE CONTRACT?

After a successful organizing campaign, the affected employees meet to put forward proposals for the contract and to elect from amongst themselves their own bargaining committee.

The committee along with a USW Local Representative who chairs the committee would then proceed to meet with the employer to obtain a satisfactory agreement as mandated by their fellow co-workers.

A USW Representative directs and lends expertise at all stages of negotiations with full input from the elected bargaining committee at all levels.

WILL I HAVE TO PAY DUES?

Like members of most organizations, we pay dues.

Our dues bring large rewards in pay raises, benefits, job security, representation and working conditions.

The added pay and benefits workers receive through belonging to the Union are much more than the cost of Union dues.

The dues go to pay for organizers, representation on the job, legal assistance, support staff, rent, materials, etc... which are all needed to maintain good contracts and adequate representation.

No one pays dues until workers have voted to accept a contract. Dues are tax deductible and are known as the cheapest job insurance available. You insure your car, your house and your job are just as important.

ONCE UNIONIZED HOW DO WE GET A CONTRACT?

A Union contract is a legal document that spells outright, your job and Local Union representatives meet with the organized employees and find out what they want to see in the contract and the Union also advised the employees on what other contracts in similar industries have in place and what important language is needed to every contract.

Once demands are voted on by the employees the Union elects representatives from the group forming a negotiating committee and bargains with the employer guided by an experienced Local Union representative. Contracts usually have a duration of between 1 to 5 years.

In order for the contract to be ratified, a majority of the workers voting need to accept the proposal. If workers feel they have not gained enough in the contract. They can reject the contract when it is time to vote. If a majority vote against the contract, the negotiating committee will go back to the bargaining table or ask the employees to vote on whether or not to strike. Strikes, which require a majority vote of the employees at the worksite are rare and only occur as a last resort.

Union leaders and Managers are not allowed to vote on a contract which is done by secret ballot.

WILL I HAVE TO GO ON STRIKE?

Whether or not to go on strike is a decision made by you and your co-workers.

A strike is not authorized unless a majority of the workers vote to do so.

STRIKES ARE UNCOMMON.

Labour statistics show that 97% of all contracts are negotiated without strikes. A strike is really only even a possibility if management refused to negotiate honestly and fairly.

YOUR RIGHTS - UNDER THE LAW

Excerpt taken directly from the BC Labour Relations Code:

Part 2 - Rights, Duties and Unfair Labour Practices

Rights of employers and employees

- 4 (1) Every employee is free to be a member of a trade union and to participate in its lawful activities.
- (2) Every employer is free to be a member of an employers' organization and to participate in its lawful activities.

Prohibition against dismissals, etc., for exercising employee rights

- 5 (1) A person must not
 - (a) refuse to employ or refuse to continue to employ a person,
 - (b) threaten dismissal of or otherwise threaten a person,
 - (c) discriminate against or threaten to discriminate against a person with respect to employment or a term or condition of employment or membership in a trade union, or
 - (d) intimidate or coerce or impose a pecuniary or other penalty on a person,because of a belief that the person may testify in a proceeding under this Code or because the person has made or is about to make a disclosure that may be required of the person in a proceeding under this Code or because the person has made an application, filed a complaint or otherwise exercised a right conferred under this Code or because the person has participated or is about to participate in a proceeding under this Code.
- (2) If no collective agreement respecting a unit is in force and a complaint is filed with the board alleging that an employee in that unit has been discharged, suspended, transferred or laid off from employment or otherwise disciplined in contravention of this Code, the board must forthwith inquire into the matter and, if the complaint is not settled or withdrawn, the board must
 - (a) commence a hearing on the complaint within 3 days of its filing,
 - (b) promptly proceed with the hearing without interruption, except for any necessary adjournments, and
 - (c) render a decision on the complaint within 2 days of the completion of the hearing.

Unfair labour practices

- 6 (1) An employer or a person acting on behalf of an employer must not participate in or interfere with the formation, selection or administration of a trade union or contribute financial or other support to it.
- (2) Despite this section, an employer may permit an employee or representative of a trade union to confer with the employer during working hours or to attend to the trade union's business during working hours without deducting time so occupied in the putting of time worked for the employer and without deducting wages for that time.
- (3) An employer or a person acting on behalf of an employer must not
- (a) discharge, suspend, transfer, layoff or otherwise discipline an employee, refuse to employ or continue to employ a person or discriminate against a person in regard to employment or a condition of employment because the person
 - (i) is or proposes to become or seeks to induce another person to become a member or officer of a trade union, or
 - (ii) participates in the promotion, formation or administration of a trade union,
 - (b) discharge, suspend, transfer, lay off or otherwise discipline an employee except for proper cause when a trade union is in the process of conducting a certification campaign for employees of that employer,
 - (c) impose in a contract of employment a condition that seeks to restrain an employee from exercising his or her rights under this Code,
 - (d) seek by intimidation, by dismissal, by threat of dismissal or by any other kind of threat, or by the imposition of a penalty, or by a promise, or by a wage increase, or by altering any other terms or conditions of employment, to compel or to induce an employee to refrain from becoming or continuing to be a member or officer or representative of a trade union,
 - (e) use or authorize or permit the use of the services of a person in contravention of section 68, or
 - (f) refuse to agree with a trade union, certified under this Code as the bargaining agent for his or her employees who have been engaged in collective bargaining conclude their first collective agreement, that all employees in the unit, whether or not members of the trade union, but excluding those exempted under section 17, will pay union dues from time to time to the trade union.
- (4) Despite subsection (3), except as expressly provided, this Code must not be interpreted to limit or otherwise affect the right of the employer to
- (a) discharge, suspend, transfer, lay off or otherwise discipline an employee for proper cause, or
 - (b) make a change in the operation of the employer's business reasonably necessary for the proper conduct of that business.

**ADVANTAGES OF USW MEMBERSHIP
EMPLOYEE CONCERNS**

UNION	NON-UNION
Dignity, Rights and Respect must be given at all times	Only given if they like you
Wages and Other Compensation Spelled out in the Contract	SECRET – privately negotiated by management
Raises will be bargained for everyone and everyone votes	Favouritism can determine individual raises
Discipline/Dismissal The Union will defend you with Legal Assistance and a Grievance Process	Good luck, you're on your own
Problems on the Job Your VOICE is heard You have a Grievance Process	Their way or the highway
Seniority Rights Union Contracts give recognition to time of service for numerous applications	No seniority rights apply
Policies Remain Consistent	Forever Changing
A Voice in the Political Arena Work for laws to protect employees and their families	No Voice

CONTACT US

To join our Union or for more information contact us at the toll-free phone numbers below:

- 1-866-746-6121 Duncan
- 1-800-663-5594 Courtenay
- 1-877-611-2171 Burnaby
- 1-888-956-4312 Port McNeill
- 250-724-0171 Port Alberni *(local calls only)*

Or email the Union at: bbutler@usw1-1937.ca

An organizer will contact you within the next few days on a completely confidential basis.

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(FORMS\Organizing\Organizing Centre Info)