

The Worker's Wordbook

What does it all mean?

A mini-dictionary of some words
and phrases used by trade unionists.

AGREEMENT, COLLECTIVE — A contract (agreement and contract are used interchangeably) between one or more unions acting as bargaining agent, and one or more employers, covering wages, hours, working conditions, fringe benefits, rights of workers and union, and procedures to be followed in settling disputes and grievances.

ARBITRATION — A method of settling disputes through the intervention of a third party whose decision is final and binding. Such a third party can be one person or else a board with a chairman and one or more representatives. (The arbitration process is often the last step in settling grievances and, in cases where the law prevents certain workers from taking strike action, can be used as the final stage of collective bargaining.)

BARGAINING AGENT — Union designated by a labour relations board or similar government agency as the exclusive representative of all employees in a bargaining unit for the purpose of collective bargaining.

BARGAINING UNIT — Group of workers in a craft, department, plant, firm, industry or occupation, determined by a labour relations board or a similar body as appropriate for representation by a union for purposes of collective bargaining.

BASE RATE — The lowest rate of pay, expressed in hourly terms, for the lowest paid qualified worker classification in the bargaining unit. Not to be confused with basic rate, which is the straight-time rate of pay per hour, job or unit, excluding premiums, incentive bonuses, etc.

CERTIFICATION — Official designation by a labour relations board or similar government agency of a union as sole and exclusive bargaining agent, following proof of majority support among employees in a bargaining unit.

CHECKOFF — A clause in a collective agreement authorizing an employer to deduct union dues and, sometimes, other assessments, and transmit these funds to the union.

CLOSED SHOP — A provision in a collective agreement whereby all employees in a bargaining unit must be union members in good standing before being hired, and new employees hired through the union.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING — Method of determining wages, hours and other conditions of employment through direct negotiations between the union and employer. Normally the result of collective bargaining is a written contract which covers all employees in the bargaining unit, both union members and non-union members.

COMPANY UNION — A one-company group of employees, frequently organized or inspired by management and usually dominated by the employer.

CONCILIATION AND MEDIATION — A process which attempts to resolve labour disputes by compromise or voluntary agreement. Decisions by a mediator, conciliator or conciliation board are not binding and the parties are free to accept or reject recommendations. The conciliator is often a government official while the mediator is usually a private individual appointed as a last resort, sometimes even after the start of a strike.

CONTRACT PROPOSALS — Proposed changes to the collective agreement put forward by the union or the employer and subject to collective bargaining.

COST OF LIVING ALLOWANCE (COLA) — Periodic pay increase based on changes in the Consumer Price Index.

FRINGE BENEFITS — Non-wage benefits, such as paid vacations, pensions, health and welfare provisions, life insurance, etc., the cost of which is borne in whole or in part by the employer.

GRIEVANCE — Complaint against management by one or more employees, or a union, concerning an alleged breach of the collective agreement or an alleged injustice. Procedure for the handling of grievances is usually defined in the agreement. The last step is usually arbitration.

JOB EVALUATION — A system designed to create a hierarchy of jobs based on factors such as skill, responsibility or experience, time and effort.

LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD — A board established under provincial or federal labour relations legislation to administer labour law, including certification of trade unions as bargaining agents, investigation of unfair labour practices and other functions prescribed under the legislation.

LOCAL — Also known in some unions as lodge or branch. It is the basic unit of union organization. Trade unions are usually divided into a number of locals for the purposes of local administration. These locals have their own constitutions and elect their own officers. They are usually responsible for the negotiation and day-to-day administration of the collective agreements covering their members.

LOCKOUT — Tactic used by management to get a settlement on its own terms, by refusing work to employees or else closing its establishment.

NATIONAL UNION — A union whose membership is all-Canadian.

PER CAPITA TAX — Regular payments by a local to its national or international union, labour council or federation, or by a union to its central labour body. It is based on the number of members.

RAND FORMULA — A union security clause in a collective agreement stating that the employer agrees to deduct an amount equal to the union dues from all members of the bargaining unit, whether or not they are members of the union, for the duration of the collective agreement.

SENIORITY — Term used to designate an employee's status relative to other employees, for determining order of layoff, promotion, recall, transfer, vacations, etc. Depending on the provisions of the collective agreement, seniority can be based on length of service alone or on additional factors such as ability or union duties.

SHIFT DIFFERENTIAL — Added pay for work performed at other than regular daytime hours.

SHOP STEWARD — A union official who represents a specific group of members and the union in union duties, grievance matters, and other employment conditions. Stewards are usually part of the work force they represent.

STRIKE — A cessation of work by employees in combination with a common understanding for the purpose of compelling an employer to agree to terms or conditions of employment. Usually the last stage of collective bargaining when all other means have failed. Except in special cases, strikes are legal when a collective agreement is not in force. A rotating strike is a strike organized in such a way that only some of the employees stop work at any given time, each group taking its turn. A Sympathy strike is a strike by workers not directly involved in a labour dispute — an attempt to show labour solidarity and bring pressure on an employer in a labour dispute. A Wildcat strike is a strike violating the collective agreement and usually not authorized by the union.

STRIKEBREAKER; SCAB — A person who continues to work or who accepts employment to replace workers who are on strike. By filling their jobs, the strikebreaker may weaken or break the strike.

STRIKE VOTE — Vote conducted among members of a union to determine whether or not to go on strike.

WORKING CONDITIONS — Conditions pertaining to the workers' job environment, such as hours of work, safety, paid holidays and vacations, rest period, free clothing or uniforms, possibilities of advancement, etc. Many of these are included in the collective agreement and subject to collective bargaining.



Canadian Union of Public Employees

