

What is a Union?

1.

A Union is an association of workers formed to improve and protect working conditions through collective bargaining. The Union negotiates wages, hours of work, job security and other working conditions for members.

The Union of Northern Workers represents over 4,000 members with twenty-six different collective agreements. We are a component of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. The Alliance is a large national public sector Union made up of 18 smaller components. It provides services to the UNW.

What does the Union do?

1. Negotiates Collective Agreements

A Collective Agreement is a contract between the Union (employees) and the employer. This contract sets out the terms and conditions of employment including wages, benefits, hours of work and all the rules that apply to the employer and employees. This is the primary purpose of the Union. Without a collective agreement, employers are free to change working terms and conditions at will.

Prior to the expiry of a Collective Agreement, an "input call" is sent to members via their local Executive. Through their local, members can submit proposals to change the Collective Agreement. They can also submit their name for election to the negotiating team. In the end, the members have the final say on Collective Agreements. By casting a ballot in a "Ratification Vote" they indicate whether they accept or reject a tentative Collective Agreement.

2. Provides Representation

When a dispute occurs between a member and the Employer or when members are unsure of what they are entitled to, they can ask the Union for assistance. The member discusses the issue with their Shop Steward or another Union Officer. Once there is a clear understanding of the problem, the Union Officer can advise the member of possible options. These can include discussing the issue with Management, filing a grievance and pursuing it through arbitration, or filing a complaint with an outside agency like the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The Union is required to review each case and determine whether filing a grievance is justified.

3. Protects Members' Rights

Your Union and your shop stewards also assist you by:

Encouraging and /or pursuing Health and Safety Issues and the employer's compliance with current Health and Safety legislation;

Ensuring that employers follow the disciplinary guidelines for members subject to discipline. (i.e. progressive discipline);

Fighting discrimination and discriminatory behaviors.

4. How is the Union structured?

The UNW is made up of a collection of Locals. Members are assigned to a local according to the bargaining unit to which they belong or the Department and Community where they work.

Each Local has an elected volunteer Executive. A group of Locals within a geographic area makes up a Region.

Each Region has an elected Regional Vice President chosen by the Region's members. Their term of office is three years. Election results are announced at the UNW Triennial Convention which is held every third year. Regional Vice Presidents are the political representatives in the Regions and form the UNW Executive.

Currently there are seven Regions: Somba Ke (Yellowknife), North Great Slave (Yellowknife), Inuvik, Fort Smith, Deh Cho, Hay River and the newest Region - the Kimberlite Region representing UNW members working at the Ekati Diamond Mine.

Additionally, the Union Executive includes the First and Second Vice Presidents, and the President. These three positions are the "Table Officers" and they are elected at the UNW Triennial Convention. It is at Convention, where delegates meet to decide issues of policy and set the direction for the UNW.

The President of the UNW is also a voting member of the National Board of Directors of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. PSAC also holds a Convention where delegates from all of the components meet to decide issues affecting all members of PSAC.

5. Where do my dues go?

Union dues are collected from all bargaining unit employees by the employer. Dues provide the Union with the operating funds necessary to provide services to members. Dues go directly to the Public Service Alliance of Canada, who in turn provides services to the UNW. They retain a predetermined portion and the remainder is provided to the UNW. The dues enable the UNW and PSAC together to jointly provide:

Negotiators, Service Officers, Grievance and Adjudication Officers, Research Officers, Classification Officers, Education Officers, Health and Safety Officers; Clerical Support Staff, Negotiation Costs, Arbitration Costs, Legal Costs, Membership Education and Operational Costs.

Finally, a portion of the dues is rebated to each active Local so that they have funds to operate the Local and send their members for special education courses and to Labour Conventions or seminars.

For further information on how to get involved with your Union, contact your Local Executive.

6. How do I become a member and what does it do for me?

All bargaining unit employees in UNW unionized workplaces are automatically covered by the

Collective Agreement. All have their union dues deducted by the employer. This does not mean you are automatically a member of the Union. To become a full Union member you must sign a Membership Application Form and submit it to your Local Executive or to the UNW Yellowknife Office. Full members are issued a UNW Membership Card and a PSAC Membership Card. Your UNW membership card should arrive within one month of signing it and if it does not arrive, please contact your Local Officer.

7. Why should I sign a membership application?

If you sign a membership application you become a full member of the Union. You have the right to attend Union meetings and vote on motions. Only full members are entitled to take part in Union functions and courses, or hold office as a Union Steward or Officer.

8, What if I don't sign an application card? What does "Rand mean?

If you do not sign a membership application card, you remain a "Rand Deductee." Rand deductees are required to pay union dues but do not enjoy all the benefits of membership. Rand deductees are not entitled hold union office or attend local meetings. The term "Rand Deductee" is derived from a Court Decision issued by Justice Ivan Rand in the 1940's. Justice Rand ruled that all employees who receive the benefits of a Collective Agreement negotiated by a Union, - like wages, annual and sick leave, etc - are required to financially support the Union even if they choose not to join as a member.

If you still have unanswered questions, please contact the Union by e-mail using our "Contact Us" web page.

The Union relies on the active participation of its members - together we can achieve our goals.

EXERCISE YOUR RIGHTS

Sign up, and be heard