



# Being Prepared

Strike & Lockout Guide for  
**Union Members**







**Dear UFCW Canada members,**

UFCW Canada has prepared this short guide for those members who find themselves faced with the possibility of a strike or lockout. More than 95% of our collective agreements are negotiated without work stoppages. But strikes and lockouts are possibilities, and a very important part of the collective bargaining process that must not be ignored.

Doing some basic advance personal planning will make it possible for you to reduce many of the potential problems and stresses that can affect you and your family during a strike or lockout. The information in this booklet is general in nature, but we hope it – taken together with the advice of your local union leadership – will be of value to you.

In solidarity,

**Paul R. Meinema**  
National President





## MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION

It is a fact that more than 95% of contracts are reached without ever resorting to a strike. Yet, from time to time unfortunately, strikes are necessary to maintain what we currently enjoy in our collective agreements, and to achieve the bargaining goals we have set.

In the event of a strike or lockout, we must stick together and help one another. The union will do all it can, and you will receive full support from each other – in many cases, levels of support you might never have imagined possible.

Support will also come from many areas not directly connected to your strike or local union. It will come from the national office and the international union, from other bargaining units and locals in your sector, from the labour movement in general, and from certain community organizations as well as the community itself.

Always remember – you are not alone!





## WHAT IS A STRIKE?

A strike is the withholding of labour by workers to place economic pressure on your employer with the aim of encouraging agreement in bargaining. Strikes happen when an acceptable contract cannot be reached between the union and the employer.



## WHAT IS A LOCKOUT?

A lockout occurs when the employer decides to stop workers from working, thus applying economic pressure on you and your co-workers in an attempt to persuade you to give in to the employer's demands. A lockout can be regarded as a strike by the employer.



## HOW DOES A STRIKE OR LOCKOUT BEGIN?

In collective bargaining, your union negotiating committee meets with the employer in an attempt to achieve your bargaining objectives. If this is not achievable at the bargaining table, a legal strike or lockout could occur because the parties cannot agree on the issues.

There is a specific process and rules in order for a legal strike to take place. Under the law, the union must conduct a strike vote. A strike can only happen when it has been approved by the members of the bargaining unit. The majority vote of members who participate in that vote will determine the results for the entire membership. It is imperative that you attend in order to have your vote count and your voice heard.

Remember that a successful strike vote does not always lead to a strike. Strikes and strike votes are a last-resort means of showing workers' resolve at the bargaining table.





## WHAT IS A SCAB?

Scabs are individuals who make a conscious choice to betray and undermine workers or co-workers – and their own standard of living – by trying to defeat a strike by crossing union picket lines. Sadly, at the time this guide was being prepared, scabs are still permitted in most jurisdictions in Canada. Consult with your local union to be sure of what applies in your case.

Scabs are often referred to by employers and politicians as “replacement workers” in an attempt to make it seem as if it is okay to be a scab. It is not okay. It is an intentional attack on the group of workers on strike for improvements to their workplace and livelihoods.

Scabs who are members of the union can be charged under the terms of the union’s constitution and, if convicted, can lose their membership in the union, and even their jobs in some instances.

If you are aware of someone who is considering crossing a picket line or working to defeat a strike by the union, try to stop them – for their own sake. Meet with them and try to suggest alternatives to their intended actions, or solutions for the problems that are making them consider such actions.





## BEING PREPARED

**1. Prepare financially.** If there is the possibility of a strike or lockout in your future, it is vital that you budget accordingly and plan your personal finances and obligations. Most of what you need to do in preparation is common sense, but there are also some avenues to be followed that many people never consider.

First, save as much money as you can. Strike pay itself is rarely sufficient, especially over the long term. Do not make major purchases if they can be avoided. If there is a large expenditure that you simply cannot put off, look at ways of cutting corners on the purchase until after a strike is settled.

Contact creditors in advance and advise them of the possibility of a strike in the near future. It is possible you will be able to make arrangements to reduce your payments – credit unions are usually more flexible than banks when it comes to negotiating changes – such as interest-only payments during a strike.

Consider renegotiating any loan over a longer period, which would reduce immediate costs. If your mortgage should fall into arrears, try to make at least the interest payments to help

forestall any attempt at foreclosure, which can take many months to carry through.

Do not ignore credit obligations. If you encounter unreasonable creditors or serious financial problems, talk to your picket captain or contact the local union office to see if they can assist you. Any difficulties you experience will be treated with confidence.

Finally, in a protracted dispute, strikers may need to seek temporary jobs elsewhere. In most cases, your local union will be able to assist in this area as well.

**2. Medical coverage.** Find out if your medical benefits and services are continued while you are on a strike or lockout. Sometimes they are, but in many cases you are not covered by the benefits from your collective agreement during a strike or lockout. Contact your local union office to find out about coverage.

If you or a family member needs life-sustaining medication or treatment, talk to your family doctor prior to the strike or lockout and see if it is possible to increase the prescription size or move treatment up while you are still covered.

Always inform your union representa-

tive about any medical needs. Once again, this information will be treated in confidence. Do not wait until medication has run out or other problems have developed before contacting your local union office for assistance. Plan ahead.

**3. Stock up to cut costs.** Certain items and costs are simply unavoidable, but following are a few simple suggestions that can really have an impact on reducing un-needed expenditures:

- avoid unnecessary purchases
- stock up on non-perishable items
- keep an eye on advertising flyers and coupons
- buy bulk items with co-workers
- purchase only items that will be used whether there is a strike or not – remember that not every strike vote leads to a strike!
- people with home freezers can let co-workers know they are prepared to share freezer space.

**4. Family matters.** If you have children in child care, contact your child-care provider ahead of time and advise them of the impending strike or lockout. Inquire about making arrangements to:

- reduce payments, or
- make up payments after the strike, or
- suspend service and make alternative arrangements with friends, relatives, or co-workers.

In some cases, the local union may make arrangements for collective child care during a strike or lockout. You should contact the local union ahead of time to find out if this will be the case in your situation.

Keep an open line of communication about the strike or lockout with your spouse or partner and other family members, both leading up to and during any strike. Make them aware of the issues and reasons, and share any information from the union with them.

Make sure your spouse or partner knows how you are feeling, and, together, make sure your children understand such things as:

- this will not last forever
- there will be food
- there will be a place to live
- for the time being, but there will not be enough money to buy whatever they want.



Once a strike or lockout begins, it is sometimes a good idea to bring children and other family members to the picket line or to a rally – good both for the children as well as spirits on the line. On the other hand, there are many other circumstances where children’s presence would definitely not be recommended. Use good judgement, and remember to always follow the direction of your picket captain and union representatives.



## PICKET PAY & DUTY

Strike pay, or picket pay, is provided by the union to every qualified striker. The amount depends on the terms that apply to your bargaining unit, but can be drawn from sources ranging from the international union strike fund, the UFCW Canada National Council strike fund, the UFCW Canada National Defence Fund (if applicable), and other resources that might be available to your local union.

In order to be eligible for picket pay, each member must meet certain minimum conditions. For example, you must attend and participate on the picket line as assigned (alternate qualifying strike duty may be assigned in certain circumstances). Hours will be assigned by the local union and, while every effort is made to accommodate individual needs, remember that many picket lines operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Your local union will inform you when and where picket pay will be distributed. You, personally, must sign all picket pay sheets as required in order to receive your picket pay.

Following are some of the many responsibilities of a picketer. Your union representative and picket captain will be able to provide more detailed lists,

including items specific to the circumstances of your strike or lockout.

All members who want to collect picket pay must be registered with the picket captain.

- ▶ All members who want to collect picket pay must perform all required picket-duty hours.
- ▶ There is a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol or any prohibited substances on the picket line or at any other assigned picket duty.
- ▶ There is a zero-tolerance policy for members attending the picket line or other assigned picket duty in an inebriated or intoxicated state.
- ▶ Arrangements must be made in advance if a member wishes to picket at an alternate location or time.
- ▶ All questions from non-picketers (including media, police, security, general public, other unions, management)
- ▶ should be directed to the picket captain or union representative in accordance with your local union policy.





- Picketers must keep the line moving at all times.
- All picketers must wear an authorized bib or carry an authorized sign at all times while on the picket line.
- Picketers must not use rude or threatening language or gestures, or physically touch anyone approaching or crossing the picket line.
- Threats to the safety of picketers – such as violent or aggressive persons or vehicles travelling at speed – must be immediately reported to authorities.
- Picketers must always be aware of and follow local union policies regarding behaviour on the picket line, especially in areas of legal concern – such as laws, bylaws, and court injunctions.
- Picketers must also be aware that, while the support of outsiders (other union members, customers, members of the community) on our picket lines is welcome, we are responsible for all actions, and all participants must obey the rules of the picket line.

*This booklet is intended as a general guideline. Your local union policies or strike-specific protocols and procedures may take precedence over these suggestions. In such instances, members should follow the direction of their picket captain, local union officer, union staff representative, or other strike coordinator.*









**Paul R. Meinema** *National President*

300-61 International Blvd.  
Toronto ON M9W 6K4