

You Ought To Know

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With high inflation since 2020, how can we determine if wages have grown in real terms?

High inflation is not new. We've seen it before, and negotiated wage increases (including PNWA) have sometimes fallen below inflation. Since 1992, there have been years when wage increases were higher than inflation and years when they weren't. For instance, in 2008 we saw the biggest difference to-date when wage increases were 5.86% higher than inflation. More recently, in 2020 wage increases were 2.36% higher than inflation. In the last few years, high inflation has outpaced wage increases.

Overall, since 1992, wage negotiations have resulted in a net real wage increase of 19.42%. This means that, while wages have increased more than inflation in some years and fallen behind inflation in others, in total they have been much higher than inflation since we first negotiated a Joint Proposal. For a more comprehensive review, please reference [the spreadsheet here](#).

Why do we use 1992 as a benchmark for wage comparisons?

The 1992 bargaining round was significant because it marked the first time the parties used the Joint Proposal. To ensure consistency and fairness in our comparisons, we continue to use 1992 as a baseline. While we could selectively choose years that favour a particular view, such an approach would be misleading and inaccurate. Additionally, when the parties engaged in Final Offer Selection in 2001, the Selector agreed that 1992 was a reasonable starting point for analyzing real wage gains or losses, given that the Joint Proposal was introduced in that year.

The Joint Proposal was put into place following numerous bargaining rounds that resulted in labour disruptions, which negatively impacted ECAO contractors, IBEW members and our clients. As mentioned in earlier issues of You Ought to Know, Final Offer Selection is a process under the Joint Proposal that Parties can access if they are unable to reach agreement on wages during collective bargaining. The Selector chooses the more reasonable wage offer from the two final offers. The Parties have gone to Final Offer Selection four times since 1992.

In a hiring hall situation, why is it more effective to discipline employees for bad behavior than it is to lay them off?

Disciplining employees for bad behavior instead of laying them off can be a more effective long-term strategy, especially in hiring hall situations. While contractors may prefer layoffs to avoid grievances, layoffs can ultimately lead to the same employee returning to the job, especially during times of full employment, having received little to no guidance on how and why their behaviour was inappropriate and unacceptable. The goal of discipline is to change behaviour. By progressively disciplining employees, contractors can address problematic behaviors and potentially improve employees' performance, creating a more positive work environment.

This approach also demonstrates a commitment to consistency, fairness and accountability, which can strengthen employee morale and reduce turnover.

Should you encourage your workers to attend union meetings?

Yes. Decisions are made that impact their paycheque, their benefits, their pension, and their union leadership, among other things. As you know, we negotiate increases to the wage package, and the union and its members determine the base rate and the union fund amounts. The employer has no control over those amounts, yet it impacts the money your workers take home on their paycheques. It is important to get your employees involved at the local level so they have input into things that matter.

However, there are behaviours that employers must avoid: Paying employees to attend union meetings. Asking them to vote for a particular outcome. These behaviours could result in an Unfair Labour Practice complaint filed against you as an employer. Do not try to influence your employees; just allow them to have a say with their union.

What can I say to my employees during collective bargaining?

Since provincial bargaining is done by the Electrical Trade Bargaining Agency (ETBA) on behalf of all signatory contractors, there is not a lot of information shared while collective bargaining is underway. If we negotiate a Joint Proposal, which includes dates for bargaining, that document will be shared. Once bargaining is complete, ECAO sends out communication to all our contractors.

Unless you, as an employer, are involved in local or provincial bargaining chances are you do not have the details of positions taken during bargaining. However, we want to share the following information with you because it is good to know in the event you do become aware of details during the bargaining process.

Generally, it is permissible to do the following:

- Summarize, clarify or explain positions that the ETBA has taken in bargaining
- Respond to misleading or inaccurate union communications with employees
- Advise employees of the status of bargaining without providing editorial commentary
- Provide employees with objectively true statements about positions taken by the union

Things not to do/say include:

- Making promises or threats
- Disparaging the union or its proposals (e.g. "The union is refusing to compromise.")
- Attributing fault to the union for a breakdown in negotiations
- Advising employees that the union is not acting in their best interests
- "Captive audience" meetings (i.e. mandatory meetings scheduled by employers during working hours to discuss bargaining issues)

We held a webinar in early September to provide contractors with guidance on the topic of communication during bargaining. If you missed it and would like to watch the webinar, please visit [ECAO's Learning Centre](#). There is also a comprehensive document on communications during bargaining including what you should not say, and what the union should and should not say. Please check it out.

Do you know what You Ought to Know?

We hope that you're benefitting from the facts and insights we share through this publication. You can find all previous issues of You Out To Know on the ECAO website under [Publications](#).