

The Shop Steward Glossary



Canadian Labour Congress

CanadianLabour.CA

Across-the-board adjustment

Change in pay rates made for all employees in a workplace or particular group.

Adjudication

The equivalent to grievance arbitration; a method under the Public Service Employee Relations Act of providing a settlement of disputes arising out of the terms of any Agreement.

Affiliated union

A union which is a member of a group of unions.

Affirmative action

Affirmative action is a comprehensive strategy whose aim is to establish the same percentage of minority group members and women at all levels of the workplaces and unions as there are in the general population.

Agency shop

A clause in a collective agreement similar to the Rand Formula.

Agreement, collective

A contract (agreement and contract are interchangeable terms) between one or more unions, acting as bargaining agent, and one or more employee 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 either a single arbitrator, or a board consisting of a chairperson and one or more representatives. Arbitration is often used to settle major grievances and for settling contract interpretation disputes. Voluntary arbitration is that agreed to by the parties without statutory compulsion. Compulsory arbitration is that imposed by law. Governments sometimes impose it to avoid a strike or end one.

Assessments

Special charges levied by unions to meet particular financial needs.

Back-pay

Wages due for past services. Often the difference between money already received and a higher amount resulting from a change in wage rates.

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, office, department, plant, firm, industry or occupation, determined by a [labour relations board](#) or 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.

Blue collar workers

Production and maintenance workers as contrasted to office and professional personnel (white collar workers).

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

Canada's national labour body representing over 70 percent of organized labour in the country, 3.3 million workers.

Certification

Official designation by a labour relations board, or similar government agency, that a union is the 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. There are four main types; the first three apply to union members only and the Rand Formula – dues deducted from union and non-union employees.

Classification plan

A job evaluation method based on comparison of jobs against a money scale.

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 agreement

See [Agreement, collective](#).

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-members.

Company union (or boutique 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. By contrast with arbitration, the mediator, conciliator or conciliation board does not bring in a binding award, and the parties are free to accept or to reject its recommendation(s). 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.

Consumer Price Index

Statistics Canada's monthly statistical study which checks retail prices of selected consumer items in a representative group of cities. Strictly, it is not a "cost of living" index, though it is often so described.

Contracting out

Practice of employer having work performed by an outside contractor and not by regular employees in the unit. Not to be confused with subcontracting, which is the practice of a contractor delegating part of his work to a subcontractor.

Contract

See [Agreement, collective](#).

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 sometimes with a stated top limit.

Craft union

Also called horizontal union. A trade union which organizes on the principle of limiting membership to some specific craft or skill, i.e., electricians, plumbers, etc. In practice, many traditional craft unions now also enroll members outside the craft field, thereby resembling industrial unions.

Decertification

Withdrawal by a labour relations board of its certification of a union as exclusive bargaining representative.

Demotion

Transferring an employee to a job involving reduced responsibilities and duties and possibly a reduction in pay.

Discipline clause

A section of a collective bargaining agreement reserving to management the right to penalize employees for disobedience.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the differential treatment of an individual based on race, creed, sex, sexual orientation, physical or mental attributes, or any other personal attribute.

Down time

Period when work is not proceeding for one reason or another – such as a machine not operating due to mechanical failure, or lack of materials, etc. – through no fault of the operator, but with the workers still on the job. Under a union contract, down time is usually paid for.

Dues

Periodic payments by union members for the financial support of their union.

Duty of fair representation

A clause of many labour codes, provincial and federal, which states that all workers, whether members of the union or not, have the right to representation by the union that represents their workplace. It also states that the union must not act in a manner which is arbitrary, discriminatory, or in bad faith towards any employee of their bargaining unit.

Expedited arbitration

A fast track arbitration system where cases are presented within a specified time limit. They also imply that the arbitrator(s) will issue awards in a specified time and that such awards will not be “precedent setting” (or create [jurisprudence](#)).

Federation of labour

A federation, chartered by the Canadian Labour Congress, grouping local unions and labour councils in a given province.

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 of the procedure is usually arbitration.

Harassment

See chapter, [Harassment](#).

Hiring hall

A headquarters from which a union fills requests for workers. A central hiring hall is a place where union workers gather for referral to seasonal or casual jobs. A joint hiring hall is sponsored by employers as well as a union. A preferential hiring hall is one in which union members get first referral to jobs.

Incentive pay

Method of pay which varies according to production. Pay may depend upon number of pieces of work completed by individual or groups of workers. Wages may be paid on a piece, bonus or premium basis. Contracts guarantee incentive workers a minimum hourly rate.

Industrial union

Also called “vertical union.” A trade union which organizes on the principle of including all workers from one industry, regardless of their craft or whether they are skilled or unskilled. See [craft union](#).

Injunction

A court order restraining an employer or union from committing or engaging in certain acts.

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

An international trade union body formed in 1949, composed of a large number of national central labour bodies, such as the Canadian Labour Congress. The ITUC represents millions of workers around the world.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Tripartite world body representative of labour, management and government; an agency of the United Nations. It disseminates labour information and sets minimum international labour standards, called "conventions", offered to member nations for adoption. Its headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland.

International union

A union which has members in both Canada and the United States.

Job analysis

Investigation of duties and operations of a job to determine its requirements in terms of human abilities and relationships.

Job classification

Job rating based on an analysis of the requirements of the work.

Job content

The actual duties which make up a job.

Job description

A part of job evaluation involving a review of the nature of the work, its relation to other jobs, the working conditions, the degree of responsibility and the other qualifications called for by the work.

Job evaluation

A system designed to create a hierarchy of jobs based on factors such as skill, responsibility or experience, time and effort. Often used for the purpose of arriving at a rational system of wage differential between jobs or classes of jobs.

Job security

A provision in a collective agreement protecting a worker's job during times of change, such as the introduction of new methods or machines.

Jurisdictional dispute

A dispute between two or more unions as to which one shall represent a group of employees in collective bargaining or as to whose members shall perform a certain kind of work.

Jurisprudence

The decisions of arbitrators or arbitration boards which make up case law in labour court.

Labour College of Canada

Institution of higher education for trade union members operated by the Canadian Labour Congress for the purpose of providing a training ground for future trade union leaders.

Labour council

Organization composed of locals of CLC-affiliated unions in a given community or district.

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.

Layoff

Temporary, prolonged, or final separation from employment due to lack of work.

Leave of absence

Permitted absence for an employee for a limited period ordinarily without pay.

Local (union)

Also known as a lodge or a branch, locals are the basic unit of union organization. Trade unions are usually divided into a number of locals for the purpose of local administration. These locals have their own by-laws 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

A labour dispute in which management refuses work to employees or closes its establishment in order to force a settlement on its terms.

Management rights

Also called employer rights, management generally contends that this body of rights – including hiring, scheduling of hours of operation and contracting – are not proper subjects for collective bargaining.

Master agreement

A union contract executed by the leading employer in an industry which sets the general pattern that will be followed by the industry. Can also refer to a union contract that sets basic standards for employers and unions covered by the agreement who will negotiate further on local subjects; also known as a “model agreement”.

Mediation

A means of settling labour disputes whereby the contending parties engage a third person as a neutral go-between.

Modified union shop

A place of work in which non-union workers already employed need not join the union, but all new employees must join, and those already members must remain in the union. See [union security](#) and [union shop](#).

Moonlighting

The holding by a single individual of more than one paid job at the same time.

New Democratic Party (NDP)

The NDP was co-founded by the labour movement and is supported by many unions today. Since its creation in 1932, it has fought on behalf of workers for better pensions, labour laws, working conditions, Medicare, unemployment insurance, human rights and other progressive ideas in legislatures across Canada. Many of the benefits working people enjoy today can be credited to the policies, actions and dedication of the NDP.

National union

A union whose membership is confined to Canada only.

No-strike clause

A contract clause limiting the freedom of workers to strike during the life of the agreement. Used when the contract provides for final settlement of grievances through arbitration. Compulsory in all provincial labour acts.

Open shop

A shop or workplace in which union membership is not required as a condition of securing or retaining employment.

Overtime

Hours worked in excess of a maximum regular number of hours fixed by statute, union contract, or custom. Clock overtime is a premium, paid for work during specified regular working hours, required by collective bargaining agreement.

Overtime rate

Higher rate of pay fixed by statute, union contract or custom for hours worked in excess of a specified straight-time maximum.

Paid education leave

A negotiated benefit whereby the employer contributes a percentage per member to a union education fund, and which also guarantees the right of members to “leave” from work to attend courses.

Pay equity

The principle that there should be equal levels of pay/remuneration for all workers who perform equal functions.

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.

Picketing

A tactic employed by union members – called picketers in this case – when they walk holding signs near employer's place of business to publicize the existence of a labour dispute, persuade workers to join a strike or join the union, discouraging customers from buying or using employer's goods or service, etc.

Piece rate (piece work)

A form of incentive pay under which wages are paid according to the number of pieces produced. Pay may be related to individual or group production. Unlike an hourly rate of pay under which the worker receives a fixed rate which does not vary with output. Most contracts guarantee piece rate workers a minimum hourly rate.

Posting

Required display of the vacancies available for competition within the bargaining unit.

Preferential hiring

A system under which employers agree to hire only union workers so long as the union is able to fill demands for workers.

Premium pay

A wage rate higher than straight time. Payable for overtime work, work on holidays or scheduled days off, for example, or for work under extraordinary conditions such as dangerous, dirty or unpleasant work.

Probationary period (trial period)

Time during which a new employee is on trial by the company and usually subject to discharge without union challenge, except where the discharge is discriminatory.

Promotion

Advancing an employee to a position paying a higher salary.

Raiding

An attempt by one union to induce members of another union to defect and join its ranks.

Rand Formula

Also called agency shop. A union security clause in a collective agreement stating that the employer agrees to deduct an amount equal to the union dues from all workers of the bargaining unit, whether or not they are members of the union, for the duration of the collective agreement. See [Checkoff](#).

Recognition

Employer acceptance of a union as the exclusive bargaining representative for the employees in the bargaining unit.

Red circle rate

A rate of pay for a particular employee which is higher than the maximum of the rate range of the rate for the work that the employee is doing. For example, because of old age, disability, or the like, an employee is demoted to easier, lower-paying work with no reduction in pay.

Reinstatement

The restoration of a discriminatorily discharged employee to that employee's former job.

Re-opener

A provision calling for reopening a collective agreement at a specified time prior to its expiration for bargaining on stated subjects such as a wage increase, pension, health and welfare, etc.

Seniority

Term used to designate an employee's status relative to other employees, as in determining the order of lay-offs, 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.

Severance pay

Lump sum payment by the employer to a worker laid off permanently through no fault of the worker.

Shift

The stated daily working period for a group of employees, for example, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm or 4:00 pm to midnight, or midnight to 8:00 am. See also [split shift](#).

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 workforce they represent.

Slowdown

A deliberate lessening of work effort without an actual strike, in order to force concessions from the employer. A variation of this is called a work-to-rule strike – a concerted slowdown in which workers, tongue-in-cheek, simply obey all laws and rules applying to their work.

Split shift

Division of an employee's daily working time into two or more working periods to meet peak needs.

Stretch-out (speed-up)

An unbearable increase in the worker's pace.

Strike

A cessation of work or a refusal to work or to continue work by employees in combination or in accordance 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 or hit-and-run strike is a strike organized in such a way that only part 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 to put pressure on an employer in a labour dispute. A wildcat strike is a strike violating the collective agreement and 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, they may weaken or break the strike. Jack London, an American author in the early 1900's, sympathetic to the dock workers of San Francisco where he lived, wrote, "After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful stuff left with which he made a scab. A scab is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a water-logged brain, and a backbone of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts, he carries a tumor of rotten principles...No man has the right to scab as long as there is a pool of water to drown his carcass in, or a rope long enough to hang his body with."

Strike vote

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

Suspension

A [layoff](#) from work or from union membership as a disciplinary measure.

Technological change

Technical changes to the work process, such as the introduction of "labour saving" machinery or new production techniques. These often result in workforce reduction or speed-up.

Trade union

Workers organized into a voluntary association to further their mutual interests with respect to wages, hours of work, working conditions and other matters of interest to the workers.

Transnational corporation

Any company that operates in more than one country.

Trusteeship

The taking over of the administration of a local union's affairs, including its treasury, by the parent body.

Unfair labour practices

Those employer or union activities that are classed as "unfair" by labour relations acts.

Union label (or union bug)

A tag, imprint or design affixed to a product to show it was made by union labour.

Union security

Provisions in collective agreements designed to protect the institutional life of the union. See also: [checkoff](#), [closed shop](#), [Rand Formula](#), [union shop](#), [modified union shop](#).

Union shop

A place of work where every worker covered by the collective agreement must become and remain a member of the union. New workers need not be union members to be hired but must join after a certain number of days. See also [union security](#), [modified union shop](#).

Voluntary recognition

An employer and a trade union may agree that the employer shall recognize the trade union as the exclusive bargaining agent of the employees in a defined bargaining unit.

Walkout

Loose term for a strike.

White collar workers

Workers in offices and other non-production kinds of industry, business or work.

Work-to-rule

A practice where workers obey all laws and rules pertaining to their work, thereby effecting a slow-down, a refusal to perform duties which, though related, are not explicitly included in the job description.

Working conditions

Conditions pertaining to the 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.

nb:cope225