GNWT STRIKE VOTE Q&A

This Question and Answer document is meant to give UNW members who work for the GNWT some general information on what the strike vote is about and more info if strike action becomes necessary.

We must stress that we are not yet in a strike position.

What is a strike?

A strike is any form of job action when collective bargaining fails. It includes, but is not limited to, full scale walk out (general strike), rotating strikes, strategic strike action, information pickets, work to rule campaigns, etc.

When would we go on strike?

The Bargaining Team is meeting with the Employer for **mediation** the first two weeks of January and nothing will happen before that. The team will focus solely on trying to get a good deal and avoiding job action.

The Public Service Act of the NWT outlines the timelines and conditions that must be met before strike or lock out can occur.

Why are you taking a strike vote before mediation?

A strong strike mandate (ie, a majority of voting members vote in favour of possible strike) is a tool for the Bargaining Team. It is proof to tell the Employer and the Mediator that the UNW members support the work and decisions of the bargaining team.

Your Bargaining Team intends to do whatever it can to negotiate a good deal for YOU, in good faith, now through mediation. They need this show of strength.

If a majority vote YES, does it mean we are going on strike?

Not necessarily.

It means that you are WILLING to go on strike if it becomes necessary because the Employer is unwilling to give you (through the Bargaining Team) a FAIR DEAL.

Will there be another strike vote if mediation fails?

No. It is a show of strength as mentioned above in hopes of avoiding a strike, but it is also a real and actionable strike vote.

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Can the GNWT lock us out?

Yes. But they must also follow the requirements and timelines laid out in the Public Service Act of the NWT.

What type of strike action would we take?

The strike must be effective. The Strike Committee will make these decisions. The Union would not want to tip our hand and let the GNWT know what strike action we would take. The Strike Committee would assess effective targets, timing, and impact. Strike plans and actions are reviewed constantly, and may change as required to be the most effective.

What do I receive for pay if we go on strike?

Strike pay is administered by the PSAC. For full time workers, strike pay is $156.50/day for a minimum 4 hours of strike action, in a 5 day a week strike. For those who normally work less than 20 hours a week, strike pay is $109.53. Locals may also set up hardship funds and protocols, and may do fundraising.

Strike pay is tax-free.

You must participate in job action to receive strike pay.

Can I take leave during a strike?

There is no collective agreement in force during a strike and the employer sets the terms and conditions of work. If you are already on vacation or sick leave (for example) the GNWT may choose to cut off any benefits such as vacation pay, sick leave pay. This leave would remain in your leave bank.

Maternity/Parental Leave

Your entitlement to maternity or parental leave is established by legislation and therefore continues during a strike. The GNWT may choose to withhold your top up during a strike. The GNWT's Q&A for managers currently addresses maternity/parental leave.

What if I am on duty travel status within the territory during a strike?

As a member of the bargaining unit, you should join the picket line where you happen to be. There is the possibility the GNWT may refuse to reimburse your expenses (meals/accommodation/per diems etc). As strikes can last a varying amount of time, those in travel status who wish to return home early should contact their local strike committee for assistance.

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What about my pension?

Your time on strike is not considered a break in pensionable service. Short periods of strike participation would have minimal negative impact on your overall pension.

What happens to my Benefits during a strike?

The Union will send a **request** the GNWT to continue your medical and dental and invoice the UNW for the cost of continuing your benefit eligibility during a strike.

What if I don't believe in strikes?

For almost everyone, the decision to take strike action is a difficult one and can be justified only after everything else has failed. Most people will support strike action if they believe that the cause is worthwhile and no other actions have worked. People who cannot bring themselves to picket can support the strike simply by staying away from work. However, you will not receive strike pay.

Do I have to picket?

Legally, you are not required to picket. However, the strength of the picket line can determine the outcome of the strike so more people on the line can lead to shorter strikes. As well, you only collect strike pay if you perform picket or strike related duties.

What happens if I cross the picket line?

Legally any individual can choose to cross a picket line and go to work. However, this is very divisive and causes a lot of stress between coworkers. You would also be in violation of the PSAC Constitution and UNW By Laws, and subject to discipline.

What are strike related duties?

Walking the picket line is the most important. Some examples of other strike related duties include: making picket signs, making phone calls, handing out flyers, childcare, manning phone lines for question calls, bringing/arranging food and beverages for picket lines, running errands, etc. The Strike Committee will determine what duties are required, depending on the type of job action.

How often and how long do people have to picket?

Picket shifts are four hours, or as decided by the Bargaining Team strike committee, per day. Shift selection is on first come – first serve basis. Members on the Bargaining Team, strike committee, and Executive are working much longer days for the same strike pay.

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What if I am not able to picket because I am sick?

The GNWT will most likely discontinue your sick leave benefits. You are still eligible for strike pay. You would need to contact the Strike Captain – there may be other duties that you can perform, like administrative work, phone calls, etc.

Can workers who have not completed their probationary period be fired?

NO. The probationary period may be extended by the length of the strike.

Can I be punished by the Employer for participating in a strike?

Participation in a lawful strike is your right. Any action by the employer/GNWT to intimidate or punish members should be immediately brought to the attention of the union; it is illegal and will not be tolerated.

Picket line protocol for Essential Services workers?

If you receive a letter from the GNWT stating that you have been designated Essential Services, keep this letter on you at all times. When you go into work, show your ESA letter to picket captain. Show support to your colleagues on the picket line by shaking hands, stopping to talk, bring coffees, wear an "I Support My Bargaining Team" button, wearing BLUE, etc.

If I am Essential Services, can I participate in strike activities when I am not working?

Absolutely, and your support would be greatly appreciated by your colleagues.

What should I do if approached by the media?

It is best if you refer media to your Local President, Strike Captain, or UNW Executive member. However, your Strike Committee may assist you with common messaging. Be very careful what you say, as it may be taken out of context, accidentally or on purpose.