

## **GSO Update for Members Employed at Coast Guard and DND - Sept 2023**

As you know, the Guild previously communicated by email to all Members employed at Coast Guard and the Defence Dept that the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board had determined that our impasse in bargaining a new collective agreement will be settled by "Binding Arbitration" and a hearing will be held in Ottawa on November 8th, 2023 in front of an arbitration panel chaired by William Kaplan.

This follows after the Guild engaged in earnest, and at length, to obtain an improved collective agreement during a number of rounds of direct bargaining with the employer. The assistance of a mediator appointed by the Labour Board, also failed to break the impasse. The employer then attempted to prevent the matter from being heard by an Arbitration Panel by filing a Complaint to the Labour Board in an effort to have the Guild continue to engage in the negotiations which had not been fruitful. This extremely irksome development for the Guild and our Members introduced yet another significant delay in a long drawn-out process.

The Labour Board eventually dismissed the employer's complaint that the Guild had engaged in any unfair labour practices. The problem is that such a complaint usually takes months for the union to attempt to get the complaint dismissed without a hearing. Then, when we were unsuccessful with that approach, the problem is that it takes months to get a hearing on the matter scheduled before the Labour Board. Then after a hearing takes place, it takes months to get a decision which, based on the submissions of the Guild's legal counsel and on the testimony of the Guild negotiation experts, resulted in the employer's bogus complaint being dismissed entirely. And then after that, it takes months to get a date scheduled for the Arbitration Hearing that was originally requested by the Guild. The frustration is boundless. Meanwhile, record increases in the cost-of-living index continue to erode the wage level of our Members. Despite these high inflation levels the Guild made a decision to impose a freeze on the level of monthly union dues and tightened belts all around with a focus on being thoroughly prepared for the upcoming arbitration hearing. We recognize that a wage increase for Government Ships' Officers is long overdue. At every step in this process, everything that can be done to expedite a new contract has been done, and will continue to be done.

At the upcoming Arbitration hearing, the Guild will introduce significant evidence and data proving that our Members employed at Coast Guard and DND are underpaid by comparison to the private sector, and that this has resulted in too many vacant positions, too much leave being denied due to no reliefs available, and an inability to recruit and retain ships officers. Shortages of 4th class engineers have even resulted in the employer utilizing Small Vessel Machinery Operators to fill a number of positions. The Guild has filed a complaint to the Labour Board regarding this matter as well as a Policy Grievance.

The Guild has a strong track record in Binding Arbitration. The past practice of the employer has been to contradict the positions taken by the Guild in our efforts to improve compensation levels, but we are once again well-prepared in the event that the employer adopts the same tactic at the hearing in November. The Guild is represented by the same law firm that assisted in obtaining significant wage increases for Government Ships Officers in the last round of arbitration. Our Committee, chaired by Tom Spindler our Chief Negotiator, is also comprised of all the Guild's labour relations professionals who have the most significant bargaining experience, as well as the elected Guild representatives who work as Officers in the fleet in the various work systems across the country. The entire committee, including the elected Officer representatives will be participating at the hearing in Ottawa.

At this upcoming arbitration, our demands on behalf of our members, will once again be ambitious and significant. Our arguments and data to convince the arbitration panel to award wage increases to reflect rising inflation and to address the recruitment and retention issues will once again be presented aggressively and convincingly. The final ruling will be in the hands of a very experienced Arbitration Panel who are required to consider all arguments, data and case law that will be presented. We will continue to keep Members informed of developments.

\* *This notice was originally distributed in early September 2023 to GSO members by email using the Guild e-info system. Members who are not receiving these bulletins by email should update their contact information with their Branch office.*