

GSO Update for Members Employed at Coast Guard and DND **December 2024**

GSO's have likely seen disturbing news regarding the federal government once again removing from the federal pension plan, a portion of the surplus funds. The Guild National President immediately met with the presidents of all other federal unions, followed by a meeting with senior Treasury Board officials this week. The previous time this happened was in 1998 and we fought this all the way to the Supreme Court but were not successful. The Guild is currently working with all the other unions on this important matter and further information will follow.

The Kaplan "binding arbitration award" for Government Ships' Officers in the SO-group (GSO's) was issued by the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board late last year and was implemented in early 2024. The Award is posted on the Guild website with an explanation of the improvements and changes made to the new Collective Agreement. The Guild provided assistance promptly to any Members who contacted us regarding problems with the new pay rates awarded, or the lump sum payment of \$2500.00 payable to Officers who were incumbents of positions within the SO-group on December 21st, 2023.

The Guild is also assisting a number of Members who are encountering ongoing difficulties with the phoenix payroll system. Grievances have been advanced to adjudication, but hearings have not been scheduled yet by the Labour Board concerning employer allegations that some Members were overpaid a number of years ago. The Guild continues to apply tremendous resources to all Grievance matters and has received positive feedback from Members.

Meanwhile, the Treasury Board has commenced discussions with all the various public sector unions, including the Guild regarding eventually replacing the phoenix payroll system with a new pay system which would require less employees to operate, but would not be capable of processing some of the pay provisions that are required by the collective agreements that the Treasury Board has signed. Rather than paying for a pay system that can meet current obligations, the federal government has an appetite instead to eventually obtain a less-capable and less expensive pay system, and tailor all the various collective agreements to be more uniform. However, those revisions to simplify contracts would need to be proposed by the employer at the bargaining table and would need to be considered along with the proposals that are priorities for the Guild-side, based on the demands of our members. So far, unions are not aware of gains that workers would see as a result of this ambitious initiative, however this is early-days as the Collective Agreement does not expire until the end of March 2026. The project is proceeding slowly and cautiously, as unions are extremely wary of another phoenix debacle.

Prior to that though, the Guild is keenly aware that the arbitration panel assigned to the parties (the Guild and the Treasury Board), the responsibility of negotiating one additional wage increase to become effective in April 2025, but the panel indicated a willingness to intervene if we reach an impasse on that matter. The arbitration panel also noted the absence of a "wage pattern" for the year 2025, which influenced their decision. The Guild has been closely monitoring comparable compensation levels and recent wage increases and has engaged in communications with GSO elected representatives on this topic. We will keep you informed once there are developments on this matter.

Other than the wage increases and the "Lump-Sum" payment, the Guild argued for, and was successful in obtaining a number of other improvements in the Arbitral Award that now form part of the Collective Agreement. These included a 37% increase in the Cadet Sea Training Allowance and a 25% increase in the Extra Responsibility Allowance.

The Extra Responsibility Allowance (ERA) is found in "Appendix G" of the Collective Agreement and is an annual amount paid in recognition of the additional responsibilities of the performance of duties of certain Commanding Officers, Chief Engineers and Dockyard Pilots. An extra allowance for senior officers has existed in one form or another in the Guild Collective Agreement since 1972.

Officers who are subject to this extra allowance are not eligible for many of the overtime provisions that are applicable to other Officers. However in 1983, as a result of input from Members subject to Appendix G, the Guild successfully negotiated that for the first time, these payments (previously referred to as the "Extra Duties Allowance") would be included as part of pay for pension and other purposes.

Recently, some Members who are subject to the provisions of Appendix G have stated that the scope of their duties has evolved significantly and they are now expected to perform an unreasonable number of overtime hours which would otherwise attract a higher level of compensation were they not in receipt of the ERA. The Guild committed to send out a bulletin to the entire bargaining unit, as this is a matter that could be a possible proposal for the GSO Bargaining Committee to consider raising at the negotiation table in a future round of bargaining with the Treasury Board, but only in the event that:

- A) there are arguments that can be made to support a proposed change,
- B) accurate and relevant data is available; and
- C) affected Members want the Guild to attempt to make changes to Appendix G

In the event that you are an Officer who is subject to Appendix G, and you have records of significant or unreasonable amounts of overtime requirements over a period of 12 months or more (the ERA is an annual allowance), please contact your nearest Guild office to have a discussion with one of our Labour Relations representatives prior to the end of the Summer in 2025. Based on more widespread feedback from all Officers who are subject to Appendix G, the elected representatives on the GSO Bargaining Committee will eventually be able to determine the way ahead on this important matter.

The National Board of the Guild has announced that the next round of GSO Bargaining will be led by Bernard Talbot, the National Secretary-Treasurer; and following the recent retirement of Joy Thomson, the Bargaining Committee Co-Chair will be Sarah Lewis, the Guild's Labour Relations Officer for the Maritime Provinces. Both Joy Thomson as well as the former Chairman of the Bargaining Committee, Eastern Branch Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Spindler were recognized for their invaluable efforts in obtaining many important improvements in the Collective Agreement.

Guild officials continue to meet regularly with senior bureaucrats, Deputy Ministers, the Commissioner of the Coast Guard and the Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy to ensure that the important role of the Ships' Officers Group in ensuring safety moving forward is understood and emphasized.

GSO Members will be kept informed regarding further developments. In the event that you become aware of Officers who are not receiving these updates from the *Guldeinfo* email system, please encourage them to reach out to their Guild Branch office to update their contact information.