

# Coordinated Bargaining

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- Kim will discuss strategies, challenges, and what worked to bring five CUPE units together alongside other unions on campus in bargaining.

## Background at Queen's

- There are three CUPE locals consisting of five units: library technicians, lab technicians, trades, maintenance, grounds and custodial, Food Services (Aramark), and the Donald Gordon center (Aramark).
- There are six unions and associations on campus: CUPE, PSAC, ONA, OPSU, USW, and CUFA (faculty association).
- Unity Council brings these groups together with regular participation from CUPE, USW, PSAC, and QFAC.
- Unity Council serves as a forum for sharing information, strategizing, and supporting each other on workplace issues.

## Coordinated Bargaining

- The Sunflower Committee was created in January 2024 as a dedicated section of Unity Council focused on aligning bargaining timelines and strategies.
  - It brought together all CUPE locals as well as USW, PSAC and CUFA.
  - CUFA's participation and support was critical, even though their collective agreement doesn't expire until June.
- A campus-wide rally was held in April to communicate the coordinated bargaining plan.
- Joint training sessions led by CUPE staff Preeti and Mark were held to prepare members.
- A structure test was conducted in the form of a majority petition.

## 1302 Petition

- Each unit had a petition with wording unique to that group and a unity council statement that appeared on each petition.

- The signed petitions were printed out on large banners which the presidents presented to a representative from the principal's office.
- Each bargaining team presented the employer with paper copies of the petitions at the bargaining tables.

## Common Table

- 1302, 254 and 2290 have a long history of bargaining together.
  - They discuss common issues when putting proposals together and establish a shared strategy before bargaining begins.
  - Each local deals with its proposals independently and then they negotiate the shared concerns together.
- The employer initially refused a common table, but agreed as the strike deadline approached.
- The inclusion of the two Aramark units at the common table strengthened their position.
- Additional CUPE national staff were present at the bargaining tables.

## Communication

- The CUPE units are just over a thousand members, and with USW and PSAC, it's around 5,000.
- Committee members had regular updates through email and WhatsApp.
- Email, social media, web pages, and in-person visits were used to keep members informed.
- Consistent messaging between unions was used.
- The CUPE groups also engaged in transparent bargaining.
  - "The employer said if we were transparent, it would force them to bargain differently and to be more careful in what they said."

## Challenges

- Timelines could not be totally aligned with USW and PSAC, but they were able to share strike headquarters and create shared strike committees.

- It was challenging to balance different priorities among the unions.
- Management tried to get one local to sign ahead of the others.
- The biggest challenge was coordinating everything, which was done by the national rep, Mark Sheriff.

## **Foundation and Support**

- Strong foundation through Unity Council.
- Support of the faculty association.
- Strong strike mandates.
- Critical role of oversight was key in keeping everyone together.

## **Preparation and Member Engagement**

- "Preparation is everything. The more research and groundwork you do before bargaining, the stronger your position will be."
- "Member engagement is key. A mobilized membership is the most powerful bargaining tool we have."

## **Ongoing Support and Coordination**

- Continuing to support USW and PSAC as they move towards their strike deadline.
- Continuing to build and strengthen the coordination between the unions on campus.
- Strong relationships were key and are even stronger now.
- Coordination works, even informal collaboration among unions enhances ability to push back against the employer.

## **Involved Locals**

- Local 3261: Support workers at the University of Toronto (full time, part time, casuals, and 89 Chestnut).
- Local 1230: Library technicians (about 400).

- Local 3902: About 6000 workers from two units.
  - Unit one: Teaching assistants and course instructors.
  - Unit five: Postdocs.

## **Initial Coordination**

- Initial coordination wasn't planned from the start.
- Discussions of coordination always swirled around OUWCC and with these other locals.
- Summer of 2023: 3261 was going to negotiations, Unit one was also going into negotiations, and Unit five's contract was already expired.
- August: Motion to coordinate within units.

## **Regular Check-ins and Common Issues**

- Regular check-ins with presidents and other leadership in September and October.
- Bargaining surveys revealed common issues and the university's position was the same.
- University's position: Crying poor, that they have no money, that we should be grateful to have these jobs.

## **December Bargaining Conference**

- All five bargaining teams in one room for a conference.
- Shared each locals and units, kind of state of the field, right? Where are workers at, how much participation we have or don't have?
- Key issues: Respect, dignity, and a living wage.
- Determined timelines: Late February, early March is when we have the most power.

## **January and February Meetings**

- Met again as a group of bargaining teams.
- Agreed on the strike deadline and detailed steps.
- Some units haven't had strike votes in decades.

## Strike Votes and Formees

- Series of majority structure tests.
- Strike votes had record turnout and record yes votes.
- Started doing formees right after the strike votes.
- Strike vote held during the no board.

## March 4th Strike Deadline

- Employer wants to control the timelines by having different expiry dates for contracts.
- All strike deadlines being displayed same.
- In early March, they were able to get not just all the bargaining teams together with the employer.

## Bargaining Teams Together

- Employer frustrated with dealing with five teams at the same time.
- Employer offered all teams to come into one room.

## Seeing Workers as Workers

- For 3261, full time employees don't really see casual employees as equals.
- Issues that casuals were experiencing was the same as full time, part time.
- Difficult to have unit one who are students see themselves as workers as well.
- Shift conversation to workers issues: Problems of pay, benefits and respect.

## Voluntary Coalition

- Trying to keep everyone together.
- Groups were also trying to like figure out what's the decision making process.

## Coordination Importance

- Coordination was important because the union probably would have had to go on strike to get what they got.
- Coordination means everyone gets more by working together, not a transactional thing where one gets more at the expense of another.
- Coordinated bargaining led to significant gains:
  - Casuals: equal pay for equal work.
  - Full-time/part-time: Most units got \$25/hour upon ratification, by the end of the contract.
  - 3261: Earlier evening work premiums.
  - Sick days for casuals at 89 Chestnut went from 3 days to 15 weeks.
  - Unit 5 (postdocs): Minimum salary went from \$34k to \$50k upon ratification.
  - ATVs across the board were 9%, 2%, 1.8%.

## Impact of Coordination

- Unit 5 would have settled earlier without coordination because they have less power due to short-term contracts.
- 3261 could have settled early with the 9, 2, 1.8 ATVs in November, but they continued to push for more, like increased sick days and equal pay.
- The union assessed their power by consulting with stewards and members to determine if they could go on strike, ultimately agreeing to sign when they felt they had the most power.

## Introduction to Chloe's Perspective

- The first two presenters achieved true coordinated bargaining between different locals within the same campus structure.
- Chloe's experience at the University of Western was different.
- Chloe's presentation will blend into a discussion of coordinated bargaining and what it takes to win fair contracts.

## Chloe's Experience

- Chloe's introduction to coordinated bargaining was unstructured, uninformed, fragmented, and biased, which is the experience of many members.
- It's important to consider each perspective and level of participation to formulate what the membership is fighting for.
- Coordinating bargaining and winning a fair contract is not linear but an ever-developing commitment requiring constant assessment and accountability.
- QP local 2361 went from campaigning to decertify in 2021 to a 99% strike vote in 2024 through intentional coordinated bargaining.

## Three Components

- Structure, participation, and coordination are utilized simultaneously for effectiveness.
- Mobilizing and engaging with the membership is important to reach unity in action.
- It's important to consider the planning phase and how it will lead to a fair contract.
- If the network for these three pieces isn't utilized in the executive, membership, and community, it can be counterproductive.
- Overemphasizing one aspect can lead to instability.
- In the beginning, the local was mobilizing and engaging with members and committees, but not connecting with the community, making it hard to backtrack later.

## Structure

- Structure begins with the executive, who must commit to strategic planning and facilitate it through the local.
- Organizing moves beyond the executive, involving committees and training facilitated through QB, focusing on long-term priorities.
- Mobilizing tests the organization.
- A campaign with the Mobilization Engagement Committee led to structure tests.
- Structure tests bridged structure to participation, beginning in October 2023 with a majority petition using hand signatures.
- This was a unique opportunity due to a wage reopener with Bill 124, showing the employer and members what they could achieve together.

## **Acting at Work & Bargaining Surveys**

- Showed what acting at work may look like with structure tests.
- Showed how results are obtained when bargaining surveys are used.
- Assessed where the employer and the union were not reaching members.
- Required training is often completed online, but members may not be truly engaging.

## **Structured Tests & Member Engagement**

- Structured tests were developed based on previous training and organizing to ensure meaningful member participation.
- Barriers of accessibility, language, and understanding were minimized by connecting with members directly through hallway, lunchroom, and supply room conversations.
- The six-step process learned allowed for gathering necessary information and building a network.
- Participation was a crucial aspect of coordinated bargaining.

## **Mobilization & Communication**

- Mobilizing was difficult due to separate working conditions and physical separation from the rest of campus.
- Engaging with members where they are at and having honest conversations was necessary to discover a shared platform.
- Starting social media helped members connect with the local and have consistent, reliable, and accessible communication.
- Unity on campus was the only communication inside the barriers of the gates.

## **Structure Tests & Momentum**

- Participation through social media related back to structure tests, such as members wearing buttons or stickers.
- Asked students, staff, and members to sign an e-petition and follow social media to maintain momentum.



- "The employer is not going to take us seriously if we're not taking our ourselves and each other seriously."
- Hesitation was present initially, but multiple unions striking at Western in 2024 helped draw attention to labor issues.

## Unity & Community Engagement

- Unity was emphasized due to the small local size (330 members) at a large university (over 40,000 students and staff).
- Unity connections started a year and a half prior by attending other allied events and picket lines.
- Showed up for CMHA and OPSU events and connected with other locals on campus.
- "It does take not only doing the work for yourselves, but for others."

## Communications & Messaging

- Strike pillars and committees were designated for communications, focusing on working with QP staff, NDP representatives, local council, and the unity group.
- The employer (Western) does not like to look bad, so their own messaging was used against them.
- "It takes using your experience, the collective experience and the employer's experience to highlight that we're all fighting for the same thing." - Trevor Shearing
- Consistency in language and information presentation was crucial to focus on the contract and not fighting the employer.

## Key Takeaways

- Structured development through planning and organizing is important.
- Mobilizing was a year-long process and is contextual.
- Effective, realistic, and consistent communication with members is essential.
- High visibility structure tests were critical for membership to take the situation seriously.
- Coordination and participation of members and community is necessary.

- Prioritizing transparency is important.