

2023 Forest Industry Bargaining USW LOCAL 1-417 UPDATE

Update #13 – April 12, 2024

USW-Conifer Bargaining Resumes but Produces Few Results

After the USW Bargaining Committee forced the employer back to the table through the BC Labour Relations Board for CONIFER to table a wage offer, the threat of an unfair labour practice order from the BCLRB looming through Mediator Dave Schaub, the USW Bargaining Committee for BC's Interior returned to the table April 8, 9, and 10, 2024, in Prince George.

While some progress was made, bargaining bogged down when CONIFER's proposals still contained concessions. CONIFER offered an embarrassingly low initial wage offer of 2%, 2%, and 2% over three years. However, after the Union gave a counter proposal to that offer, the following proposal from the Employer group jumped to a 5-year offer with a dismal 11 % wage offer over a 5-year term, with a 2.5% offer in the first year. The bargaining committee finds this very frustrating as we are there to achieve a reasonable outcome for the members.

While the employer withdrew the concession of removing our floater from the collective agreement, issues that present significant stumbling blocks to achieving a fair collective agreement remain. They are:

1. Increasing the term from 3 to 5 years, insisting on a five-year term.
2. An insufficient wage and premium package that doesn't meet our membership's needs to address rising inflation and the cost of living. CONIFER refuses to fully meet the wage level and parity with BC's Coastal Forest industry, an essential item to achieving a fair deal for our members.
3. Health and Welfare improvements that are conditional on members paying a higher deductible.
4. Insistence on adding a controversial shift configuration to the agreement
5. Refusal to add sick days and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation as a stat in our collective agreements.

CONIFER left the table Wednesday afternoon, stating their committee needed to discuss the situation with their principals before moving forward. Your bargaining committee awaits their response and is ready to get back to the table with them to negotiate a fair agreement for our members.

While this bargaining session resolves the BCLRB complaint with Conifer, the IFLRA in the South must offer a wage proposal or face a BCLRB decision of bad faith bargaining. The USW Committee is awaiting word from the BCLRB on the decision and will schedule accordingly if the IFLRA decides to offer a wage package. If the IFLRA does not return to the table in a timely manner to continue bargaining, the committee will seek a mandate in the form of a strike vote from the membership.

Similarly, we await CONIFER's next move and will go to the membership for a mandate. West Fraser's independent operations of Quesnel Plywood, Williams Lake Plywood, and 100 Mile House Lumber have still not given the committee meeting dates. BC's Forest Industry runs on the hard work of USW members. It's time the industry stepped up and rewarded USW members to not only retain and attract workers to our industry but also reward the work of our membership.

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