

Protecting Your Contract

Unions fight for written contracts to specify the working conditions, wages and benefits and as the symbol of the acceptance of the union as the bargaining agent for workers.

The contract is a set of rules that says “this is the way things should be”. Like traffic laws, the contract isn’t always followed. The point is that the contract doesn’t enforce itself. It requires people to make sure that it is followed and to take the proper steps when it is not followed.

There are no unimportant clauses in the contract. If there were, unions wouldn’t bother to fight so hard to put them in. If you disregard one clause, let the employer break it at will, you will have a much tougher job trying to enforce the sections you want enforced.

That’s where the steward comes in. It’s your job to watch for violations of the contract and to speak on behalf of workers who are affected by those violations. If you don’t enforce the provisions of the contract, then it is worthless. The means by which you enforce your collective agreement is called the grievance procedure. Enforcing the contract provisions through the grievance procedure is important because the rights and interests of the union members are protected and guaranteed. Grievances grow out of problems, the dissatisfactions, complaints and hopes of the membership. There are going to be grievances you won’t know how to tackle. When this happens, don’t be afraid to ask for advice. Get the facts – then see a steward, councillor or business agent. When they have told you how to handle the case, go back and take it up with the supervisor yourself.