**Bob Haywood Bursary 2021**

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***What more can union membership fight for? What do you think is the next big fight?***

Over the past two decades, technological innovation has brought on immense changes in the Government of Canada’s business practices. Ruthless applications of technologies have the ability to displace members of the workforce through automation, and without regulation, could infringe on worker’s rights. However, workers with the right skills are needed to help Canada stay competitive and deliver value to Canadians in this new technological era. The next big fight for union membership will be to update collective agreements to ensure that technological innovation continues to positively impact GSU’s members while attracting and retaining skilled workers. This will include negotiation with employers and updates to many categories of our collective agreements, and the realignment of occupational structure and classifications to reflect the flexible nature and diverse educational backgrounds of high-tech positions.

Taking a proactive stance to keep collective agreements abreast of technological advances will help protect GSU’s members from potential negative outcomes. In their 2021 report entitled *Bargaining tech: Strategies for shaping technological change to benefit workers,* Stanford and Bennett suggest that technological change should first be defined by bargaining units in order to ensure shared understanding. These definitions often “include references to the need to consider, avoid, or ameliorate job displacement or job loss, and other adverse effects on the employees” (Stanford and Bennett, 2021). Once the definitions of technological change are agreed upon, processes involving the provision of advance notice of technological changes must be created by the employer that state the effects of terms of employment that may be brought on. Technology committees can help unions navigate this change when bargaining with employers.

Two specific areas of interest that can particularly impact GSU’s members and their collective agreements while navigating technological change are the increased need for training and emerging circumstances regarding surveillance of employees. As discussed in their 2013 article titled *Why do firms train? Empirical evidence on the relationship between training and technological and organizational change,* Neirotti and Paolucci discuss circumstances around when organizations are forced to undergo large scale technological changes, that “they may prefer to acquire [resources] from the strategic factors market than to develop them internally through training and other modes” (pp96). GSU’s members can be protected from job obsolescence and hiring outside of the organization for resources by negotiating that employers invest in training for technological change for existing employees.

Technological advances have made it possible for employees to work from home, which was recently necessitated by the COVID 19 pandemic. Work from home arrangements are also convenient for employees, allowing a better work life balance and increased productivity.

However, the employer’s rights regarding the surveillance and monitoring of their employees while working from home has not been defined in collective agreements. According to the Harvard Business Review (2020), live video feeds, keyboard tracking and location tracking tools are available for employee monitoring. Employees have the right to know what is being monitored, and why. A balance between accountability and privacy must be struck between bargaining units and employers and communicated to members so all are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

In addition to comprehensive reviews to collective agreements to ensure that union members are protected through technological change, it is important to realign organizational structure and job classifications to attract and retain skilled high-tech workers. Digital and high-tech occupations require advanced technical skills, and tech workers are becoming critical to the success of most industries as the lines between technology and economy begin to blur (Brookfield Institute, 2019). However, compensation and opportunities for progression in tech jobs are often irregular (Brookfield Institute, 2019). GSU can protect its members by ensuring that high-tech and digital occupations are compensating employees according to skills and experience, performance, and at rates equal to those achieved in the private sector. Currently, some classifications within GSU’s unions require educational credentials to advance that high-tech workers may not have, despite being capable of performing the work. GSU can promote the re-evaluation of tech worker’s classifications to ensure they are being compensated fairly and have the opportunity to advance within their organizations.

Ensuring that union members are positively impacted by changes brought on by technological advances will be the next big fight for GSU. GSU can protect its members by promoting the updating of collective agreements to withstand future technological change and advocating for the realignment of job classifications for high-tech workers. Taking proactive action when facing technological changes will ensure that members are able to continue to provide quality public services to Canadians in the future.

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