

## **Contract Campaign Research: What Problems Have Members Had on the Job?**

Preparation for a contract campaign should include a systematic review of past grievances and workers' problems on the job. Through this investigation you may discover major problems that you didn't know about at all or didn't realize were so widespread or of such deep concern. As time approaches to establish bargaining goals you should...

**1. Ask the workers.** You may find out about problems they have never raised because they didn't think the union could help them.

**2. Check how each contract clause has been working.** Meet with stewards and committees to go through every provision of the contract and see what problems there have been in applying it.

- Have situations come up which that provision failed to adequately cover?
- Did you lose grievances or arbitrations under that provision? Why?
- How could you expand rights or benefits in that part of the contract?

To make this job easier, many locals keep computer records or special notebooks throughout the life of the contract for information on improvements needed in each section.

**3. Consider the impact of changes in working conditions and the work process.** Changes in workloads, schedules, assignments, work organization, or technology may require new language to protect workers' rights, provide new opportunities, or restrict management abuses.

**4. Review the impact of new management practices or tactics.** For example, has management started to subcontract work, reorganize job titles, or use more part-time or casual workers in ways that were not prohibited by the existing contract?

**5. Identify inequities under the current contract.** Are some parts of the contract resulting in unfair treatment for women, people of color, or workers in certain job categories or departments, etc.? Asking workers, reviewing personnel department records, and researching past grievances, lawsuits, and discrimination complaints are some good ways to investigate this.

**6. Calculate how particular cost items have worked out.** For instance, if in the last negotiations management claimed that a provision for expanded health care benefits would cost a certain amount and in fact those benefits have cost less, then you might want to consider trying to expand those benefits further. On the other hand, you should know if benefits have cost more than expected so you can decide whether to try to hold on to the existing language or accept changes that would reduce costs.

**7. Examine problems in particular departments.** Do management policies, staffing levels, working conditions, or harassment in those areas need to be addressed in negotiations?

**8. Determine whether union rights at the worksite need to be strengthened.** Do organizers have adequate access to the workplace? Are union reps provided leave time to fulfill their representation duties? Is there a bulletin board for posting information?