

ATT Bargaining Process

CWA leaders developed a joint strategy to bargain with ATT in 2009, and this strategy has led, so far, to Agreements in Districts 4 and 9. All parts of the union helped push the boundaries of this bargaining, which led to these tentative agreements. Each of the Agreements reflect unique characteristics and problems that had to be addressed by the elected bargaining committees. Now, we're continuing to work together for other successful agreements at all bargaining tables.

CWA worked hard—well in advance of bargaining and over many months—to have a national table for ATT negotiations, but ATT placed numerous conditions that would have restricted our ability to successfully negotiate nationally. Once it was clear that ATT was rejecting CWA's position on national bargaining, we developed and pursued a strategy of resolving our common and coordinated issues. That is why we put together the strategy for coordination and communication, with tables addressing the common and coordinated issues.

Common issues

CWA Vice Presidents and Bargaining Chairs met to discuss CWA Bargaining Strategy and common issues for two days in Washington DC. These conversations led us to a fuller understanding of the many regional variations of our contracts and defined our ability to pursue a common, coordinated agenda. We did this recognizing the differences in each regional contract. We established coordination mechanisms and communication among the bargaining tables as part of this strategy.

The officers also discussed the goal of reaching agreements at the same time. However, without a National Table, they recognized that achieving that goal might not be practical or likely. As a result they concurred that each unit, if necessary, could reach their own agreement independent from others if they believed it was in the best interest of their members. Districts were fully authorized—by the full group of Vice Presidents and the President and Executive Vice President—to reach a tentative agreement on an individual basis with the President's approval.

The plan established a framework for coordinated issues and strategic watch issues. Many of the most important issues—employment security, prem tech, leverage titles, even health care—were placed on the "watch" list because of the many variations and differences in contract provisions among districts, and the many different potential acceptable solutions. Several of the most contentious issues during this round of bargaining were exactly these issues. Each of the bargaining teams kept the other teams informed about its direction and strategy on these coordinated issues, but was free to pursue its own agreement, one that would serve its members best.

The issues identified as coordinated were dealt with together with the teams working collectively on the proposals. The issues included a National Transfer Plan, the President's Council, a letter on evolving technologies, card check, movement of work, and wages.

Communication took place through regular conference calls led by Executive Vice President Annie Hill and the Vice Presidents who lead each unit, and regular calls between the Bargaining Chairs at each table. As bargaining continued especially after expiration, it became apparent that ATT, even with consistent urgings and mobilizations, was unwilling to seriously engage at more than one table at a time. The Midwest table was the table where the most serious bargaining was taking place.

It also became apparent that our initial goal of reaching agreements everywhere at once was going to be as, if not more, challenging than we initially discussed. Faced with that reality, we stepped up the communication and District 4 maintained close communication with all Districts as it pushed to an agreement. District 4 honored the common issues which were adopted and maintained open communication on the coordinated issues. The District 4 bargaining team reached a tentative agreement with ATT Midwest on July 15 and we intend to keep pushing until all units have successfully completed agreements.

Several weeks later, the District 9 bargaining committee reached an Agreement which they felt they could recommend. This Agreement mirrored the wage gains of the District 4 Agreement, but differed significantly in several respects. First, there was a major emphasis on using Kaiser Health Care as a cost effective health care delivery mechanism. Second, the Premise Technician job duties are defined significantly differently than the Midwest and the wage upgrades for this title are different.

The CWA/ATT Agreements made economic gains.

With the collapse of the stock market and unemployment in double digits, the CWA agreements with ATT are proud accomplishments. The agreements improve the standard of living for CWA members at a difficult time while responding to the company's demands to shift health care spending.

The full power of the membership helped expand the economic settlements that District 4 and District 9 have achieved. The overall economic framework is better because we operated with a coordinated plan. A comparison with other contracts negotiated at the same time shows that the settlements are among the top settlements in the country.

The wage settlement of 9 percent over the contract term, plus Health Care Reimbursement Accounts, will keep members ahead of inflation and will result in increased purchasing power for members and families. The tentative settlement also includes new job transfer opportunities and other employment security gains, safeguards retiree health care, and expands earnings and job opportunities for some sales workers and prem techs.