

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Unions often imply that if employees vote them in, everything that the union's paid organizers have promised employees will be implemented very quickly in a contract. Is that true?

Negotiating a labor contract, especially the first one, can be very time-consuming, lengthy and a complex process. If the union is voted in, MRS and the union would sit down and negotiate an entirely new contract. There is no time limit to reach an agreement. Recent statistics show that the mean time to negotiate a first contract is over 400 days.

What happens in the negotiations process?

- Both MRS, and the union go to the bargaining table with their own lists of legal demands. Both sides can propose changing existing benefits, shift and pay structures, or adjusting employees' share of benefit premiums.
- Once in negotiations, the law states that both parties "must bargain in good faith." This means that each side is required to discuss, consider and negotiate over the other's proposals in good faith with a sincere desire to reach agreement.
- **It is perfectly legal for either side to say "NO" to any proposal that doesn't fit their legitimate bargaining goals.**
- This is why union promises are not guarantees. MRS would bargain in good faith. MRS will likely have very definite ideas about what it needs in negotiations to continue to afford to pay wages, benefits, etc. under a union contract. And remember that it is MRS, and not the union, that pays for all wages and benefits and makes work available.
- The union usually wants management to agree to certain items that are union issues, not employee issues. Such things like union security, providing dues check-off, contribution to union funds and causes and super-seniority for union stewards. To obtain these things, the union can trade away items that employees currently have for things the union wants. After all, the union doesn't have anything else to offer. Ask yourself what you might be willing to give up for the union to get something for itself in the contract.
- There are no guarantees in bargaining! Your wages and benefits can stay the same, go down or go up- virtually all issues concerning an employee's terms and conditions of employment are on the bargaining table and are subject to the "give and take" process.