December 8, 2019

Michael Stokes Dec 1-6, 2019-Collective Bargaining-Elizabeth McGee

I want to thank the members of CUPE 973 for allowing me to attend the weeklong Michael Stokes School in Niagara on the Lake.

After a challenging time to get to the school due to the weather, the first evening was nice. I sat at a table with the facilitators and from that was made aware of where to go for the rest of the school. I also learned who Michael Stokes was and some people who had worked with him got up to speak on why this education course was being presented and who he was as a person.

The first day of the school was an introduction to all in the class in the form of little known facts about you. There were a few from Guelph, Hamilton, Kitchener, Toronto, Kenora, Windsor, Ajax, Woodstock, Kenora, Newmarket and Napanee. Our course facilitators were Steve Smith from Niagara and Jeff Van Pelt from the Ontario office. Some of the course offerings were similar to ones I have taken this year, but it was interesting to hear different points of view on what is in everyone’s collective agreement. For instance, the education workers that were about to strike this year were very well prepared to strike, but what I wasn’t aware of is that they have a 2 part agreement.. one with the province and one with their employer. About half of the room had never been in bargaining before, some were in conciliation, while others weren’t going to bargain for a year or two.

Day 2 of the course was going through our workbooks and learning more about how bargaining works. We watched a video prepared by the Canadian Labour Congress that was in 4 different parts that walked you through 4 stages of bargaining. We covered the first step which was an introduction to the cast members and how even subtleties like eye rolling make a difference. Day 3, we were split into groups, management and union. In my group, we were the management side for Loon Bay. The collective agreement that they had was made up of the best of collective agreements around Canada. On our side, we had to try to get the union to change some language as well as accept lower wages and buy into flexible benefits. We covered all of the language issues on this day, with a lot of back and forth. During this time, had some great discussions with the people in my group about the issues that we were discussing and how they related to our own collective agreements.

Day 4 we focused on wages and benefits. This process was very long, and at the end of it, we called in a conciliator and negotiated a settlement through that process. That process was interesting to learn exactly what a conciliator does. In the other group, the other management/union side, fared just about as well as we did. During the evening, there was a Casino night with poker, euchre and crown and anchor. I did not participate in those, but during the course of the week and that night, the money raised was over $3000, which went to Scouts Canada, which is a program that Michael Stokes supported. The last day started off with a reminder December 6th, and the women who were killed in Montreal. I did not know that one of the women killed was CUPE member. The rest of the morning was spent on what we had learned over the week and how we felt about the process. I felt that I had gained a lot of valuable insight on the collective bargaining process and feel that I would be in a great position to help the local during this process.