

SPSE-UPTE Bargaining Bulletin from 9/22/2019 Session

Dear Skilled Trades Colleagues—

We began bargaining your next Contract on Sunday September 22nd. Dozens of Unit Members attended over the course of the day. Your team came prepared with proposals for changes to the current Contract: to improve overtime pay rates, to give the Union a role in hiring and new employee orientation, to fix the broken practice of on-call exception, to preserve the integrity of the Contract in case of changes in the law, and to convert current flex-term employees to career-indefinite status. We are preparing proposals to improve your access to training, clarify work hours for the respective shops, recognize the value of state licenses, and rectify wage rates, which have lagged far behind the rates paid for comparable work in the Bay Area.

We read with amusement the message from management sent to you by e-mail last Tuesday. It appears to have been ghost written by the boutique attorney that management has hired at great expense to, among other things, smear the Union and make you question your solidarity. We will have more to say about this in future bargaining bulletins.

For now, let's set some things straight. Your Union Local is composed entirely of LLNL employees that keep the Laboratory running. We have bargained three contracts with management since 2008, and the time it took to get those contracts was limited mainly by management's stubborn resistance to granting your fair employment rights, and decent wages and benefits. The last contract negotiation (2013-14) was drawn out because of several factors. Management's team was replaced mid-stream and the replacement team showed up cold. We had to educate them on the contract and the history of our negotiation. Moreover, they were determined from the start until nearly the end to freeze your wages for six straight years.

Now for the first time, management is demanding "consecutive bargaining dates", harping on this in nearly every exchange. Each time we have responded to them that we schedule dates according to what we believe will be productive, that we want a quality agreement and the schedule should support that. Consecutive bargaining days make sense when the two sides are making progress towards a major compromise, like wages or other important subjects. Bargaining takes preparation. And the fact remains that management's team gets to prepare for bargaining as a day job. OUR day job is to keep the Laboratory running and we prepare for bargaining after work and on weekends, so consecutive bargaining dates will usually give management an unfair advantage. Our past contracts have been ratified with solid margins because we take the time to keep you up to date and listen to your suggestions. That said, your team is dedicated to getting a good agreement as soon as possible, and will seek every opportunity to make progress toward that goal.

Beyond this, we smell a rat. When management acts this strangely, we suspect that they are searching of an excuse to deprive the Union of bargaining rights. You can help prevent that by coming to the sessions to show solidarity for your team, and by wearing your t-shirts and responding to upcoming petitions and surveys. Our next session is this Thursday 10/3 at 4:30 pm.

Steve Balke, SPSE-UPTE Chief Negotiator