

# Cost of living increase benefits us all

As I am sure you are all aware, collective bargaining negotiations between the GNWT and the UNW failed in late January after years of effort to reach a deal.

This round of bargaining is about more than just wages. Just as importantly, we are fighting for stable, full-time indeterminate work as the government tries to erode these jobs into relief and casual.



## LABOUR Views

Todd Parsons is president of the Union of Northern Workers.

However, in this article, I would like to talk to you about the cost of living.

Annual increases are not a new phenomenon -- even private companies often provide their employees with small monetary increases year to year, not tied to employee performance, at the employer's discretion. This allows the company to keep wages more competitive and incrementally increase wages to fit the times. Obviously, you can't offer wages from 1990 in 2018.

The difference is, with a union, employees have the ability to negotiate their cost of living increases with their employer with the support of their union, instead of it being a unilateral employer decision. Unions measure success in bargaining on keeping

ahead of the cost of living.

Now, MLAs have their salary increases directly tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which measures rises in the cost of living. On top of that, MLA compensation and benefits are reviewed and adjusted every four years.

As a union, we take no issue with this. We believe ALL



Members of the Union of Northern Workers staged a lunchtime demonstration outside of the legislative assembly on Friday. The union representing GNWT employees is demanding wage increases and enhanced job security for its members.

workers deserve to be paid fairly, including MLAs. However, when the Legislative Assembly decided to "freeze" their salary increases for two years, it was not really a cost saving measure (only \$30,000 per year), but instead undermined bargaining with the employees.

We all have seen increases in cost of living, every year -- food, rent (which increased 1.6 per cent in 2017 alone), general household items, childcare expenses, and of course, most dramatically, fuel and power. Power rates have increased by over 30 per cent in the last couple of years.

And while we know what the CPI increase was for Yellowknife, that number is not tracked for the isolated communities.

Our friends and colleagues who live outside the major centres pay more for almost everything. Did you know that two litres of milk that costs \$3.69 in Yellowknife is \$4.29 in Fort Smith, \$5.39 in Fort Simpson, and a whopping \$7.75 in Ulukhaktok? Or even more staggering is the price of a five-kilogram bag of flour. It's \$9.99 in Yellowknife, \$19.79 in Inuvik and \$29.99 in Collville Lake.

Cost-of-living increases for public servants do not just benefit the employee. They also benefit the government, as they try to attract quality workers. They also benefit the communities and the territory as a whole, as government workers contribute to the economy with their spreading power.



Todd Parsons, president of the Union of Northern Workers, speaks to protesters outside the legislative assembly on Friday. The union representing GNWT employees is demanding wage increases and enhanced job security for its members.

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