

The Solidarity Strike Fund

The law dictionary defines a strike fund as an amount of money that can be used to pay workers who are members of a trade union, if and when they go on strike. This is a legitimate fund which trade unions are expected to establish and maintain. The purpose of the fund is to provide financial support to trade union members who take strike action for reason such as protesting unfair labour practice (s) committed by the employer, where there is a breach of the collective bargaining agreement, where there is an infringement of the rights of workers, and the implementation of policy changes and actions that are not in the best interest and well-being of employees.

It is to be underscored that the beneficiaries of the fund are those who are unionized financial members, and employees who have actively participate in strike action that was sanctioned or approved by the trade union leadership. Following on this, it is to be emphasized that workers have a legitimate right to take strike action, where they effectively withdraw their labour. On the other hand, it must be understood that the employer is under no obligation to pay striking employees. From the employers point out view, striking employees would have broken their agreement with the employer, by not providing service for the period of time that they were away from the job.

It is reasonable to conclude that trade unions have an obligation to their members to ensure that they do not suffer financial hardship through the loss of wages and salaries when strike action is taken. The establishment of the solidarity and strike fund can be a huge undertaking for trade unions. They face the major challenge of sustaining the fund. This fund is generally dependent on special contributions paid by the membership and other donations which acquired. To support this fund utilizing the monthly dues paid by members, could prove to a significant challenge for trade unions, particularly those with a relative small membership base.

This importance of establishing and maintaining this fund ought to be seen as essential and critical, given the fact that the striking employees would receive pay for the days that they didn't work. Depending on the length of the strike action, this could eventuate in the full loss of a wage or salary. It gets more disconcerting, when it is considered that striking employees are not entitled to unemployment benefits.

The Solidarity Strike Fund: Dennis dePeiza, Labour & Employment Relations Consultant, Regional Management Services Inc., 01 September, 2023

Unionized members should demonstrate that they have a vested interest in the setting up of the strike fund. It ought to be viewed as a **tool to enable them to strike**. The fact that the fund exists, provides some guarantee to unionized members that there would suffer no loss of income. It tends to motivate them to participate in any sanctioned strike action.

Employees and trade unions leaders, being conscious of the fact that if you don't work, you don't get paid, should in the absence of a strike fund, adopt a sense of caution in moving to take strike action. Strike action should always be a last resort, and only contemplated it, if and when all other forms of protest actions have been exhausted. There shouldn't be an overnight rush to take strike action. Adopting a callous approach and operating in a manner where there is no planning, mobilizing and organizing, is not reasonable and fair to the employees, whose interest is being said to be at the centre. It is expected that trade unions would want to consider what would be the impact on employees, if the strike action was prolonged.

While there isn't available data to give an indication of the number of trade unions in any jurisdiction that have established a strike fund, it is left to speculate on the extent to which the setting up of a fund, has been taken seriously. It is therefore recommended that trade unions undertake to calculate what would constitute a minimum strike fund to meet the demands of the membership. In arriving at this, the calculation should be based on the total membership and on strike action which extends beyond a period of one work week.