



“CWA Canada? I Thought the CMG is my Union”

By Martin O’Hanlon
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Without a doubt, that’s the most common response I get when I talk to CMGers about our national parent union.

The answer is simple: the CMG is your union, but so is CWA/SCA Canada. That’s because the CMG is a Local of CWA/SCA Canada, which is, in turn, an autonomous part of the Communications Workers of America, our international union.

The explanation of why we have three layers of union is a bit more complicated, but it makes sense. It breaks down like this:

HISTORY

CMG members voted in 1995 to join CWA when our former parent union, The Newspaper Guild, merged with CWA. There were a few key reasons why we joined CWA rather than a big Canadian union:

- CWA has low dues and high strike pay backed by a huge strike fund.
- CWA offered us nearly full autonomy in Canada, meaning we run our own affairs and make our own decisions on almost everything.
- We share the same goals of preserving quality media jobs, fighting for a strong and vibrant media industry, and growing the union to offer the benefits of unionism to more workers.

STRUCTURE

CWA/SCA Canada represents about two dozen locals and nearly 7,000 members across the country in the media industry, including news services, radio, television, internet, newspapers, print shops and mailing operations.

Our employers include the CBC, The Canadian Press and newspapers from coast to coast, such as the Halifax Chronicle Herald, Ottawa Citizen, Montreal Gazette, and Victoria Times Colonist.

Before being elected as president of CWA/SCA Canada in 2011, I served as a longtime CMG leader and I’m currently on leave from my job as parliamentary editor at The Canadian Press. Based at our head office in Ottawa, I lead a team of six full- and part-time staff, working closely with the CMG and other locals on a range of issues, projects and campaigns.

CWA/SCA Canada is a truly democratic organization. Our members elect Local and national leaders who decide how the union is run. Locals run their own affairs and negotiate collective agreements, sometimes assisted by national staff representatives.

MONEY

The CMG keeps the vast majority of member dues at the local and pays what are known as “per caps” to CWA/SCA Canada in Ottawa. As an example, for a CMG member paying \$1,000 a year in dues, the CMG would pass about \$240 (less than 25%) to CWA/SCA Canada, which would then pass on just over \$100 of that money to CWA in Washington.

And here’s what CMG gets in return:

CWA/SCA Canada:

- Access to the CWA/SCA Canada Defence & Mobilization Fund, which offers financial support for a range of activities related to bargaining and mobilization. In 2012-13, the CMG was approved for almost \$50,000 from this fund for a special mobilizing project and for costs (ads, rent etc) related to the strike at MBS Radio.
- Access to the CWA/SCA Canada Labour Fund, which provides money for a range of projects. This fund paid for the CMG organizing video, as well as thousands of dollars each year for CMG shirts and other items.
- Access to the CWA/SCA Canada Organizing Fund, which helps pay for organizing drives.
- CWA/SCA Canada pays laid-off members \$500 for education/training. Over the last few years, CMG members received tens of thousands of dollars in benefits.
- Support from CWA/SCA Canada staff in bargaining, organizing, mobilizing, communication, research, etc.

CWA:

- Access to a huge Member Relief Fund which provides strike benefits. During the CBC lockout, CWA paid out millions of dollars in strike benefits to CMG members (The CMG could not have afforded to pay strike/lockout benefits on its own.)
- Access to Strategic Industry Funds (SIF) and Growth Funds which provide money for special projects. The CMG received \$150,000 in 2012 for a grassroots PR campaign to fight cuts to the CBC and is now applying for another grant to launch another campaign to save the CBC. The CMG has also received tens of thousands in SIF money for organizing, mobilizing and outreach, including full funding of the current CMG Freelance organizing project.

Being part of CWA/SCA Canada and CWA gives CMG members many other benefits, including access to the latest information and statistics on issues affecting the media, expert advice and assistance on critical issues, such as education, lobbying government or running supportive campaigns on issues affecting our members. It also allows us access to research and educational material we use in our daily work.

The CMG gains muscle, support, and the strength that comes with having powerful and influential partners.

Our goal is to build CWA/SCA Canada into a dynamic force for good in this country and we hope you will help make that happen. You can find out more by visiting our website: www.cwa-scacanada.ca. While you’re on the website, please sign up for our quarterly eNewsletter, CWeh! Canada.

And please don’t hesitate to call or email if you have any questions or just want to chat. You can reach me at: mohanlon@cwa-scacanada.ca or 613-820-8460.