



Unions

People are feeling a lot of pressure and insecurity about keeping their jobs. Their friends and neighbours are struggling to get by. Many small businesses have closed and people are having a harder time providing the basics for their families. Where do you as a worker and as a citizen fit in this world? Is there a place for unions in this world?

We need unions because they are one of the few ways that workers can have a say on the job and influence society. Our society is democratic to a degree, but it is not set up to respond to the average worker's concerns and daily life. When people come together with a common goal in mind, they are far more powerful than when they try to reach goals by themselves. When working people act together they have a better chance of getting what they need at work, from government and in their communities.

UNIONS AND GOVERNMENT

Some of the minimum benefits that we now receive from employers have come from the fights unions have made for their members' wages, benefits and working conditions over the last 100 years. Unions became more widespread after the 1930's and began to have a positive and lasting effect on how the economy treated workers. Unions were successful at bargaining against poor wages and working conditions and able to create a better standard of living for workers. Better pay, shorter hours and safer working conditions became the standards adopted by non-union employers in order to compete for workers in the labour market. Eventually through their work at the bargaining table and by lobbying governments

with other members of the community, unions were able to force governments to set minimum standards of pay, hours of work, overtime, holiday pay and health and safety regulations. This resulted in minimum standards' legislation in every provincial, territorial and federal area of work. Unions were also involved in developing human rights gains and legislation. These gains are now under attack by right wing governments across the country. We all have benefited from minimum standards legislation. The following standards have become the basic minimum rights within many workplaces and are now required by law in most provinces.

These standards exist because of the bargaining gains that unions achieved over the years and because unions have lobbied for employment standards laws. These standards include:

- minimum wage laws
- hours of work (daily and weekly)
- overtime pay
- vacation pay
- basic health and safety rules
- workers' compensation
- basic anti-discrimination laws in human rights legislation
- severance pay
- unemployment insurance benefit
- maternity leave benefits
- pension benefits

The above rights are just very basic standards of wages and benefits. Unions have always pushes beyond these basic rights provided by law. Unions fight for living wages, benefits and reasonable working conditions for their members all above what the law provides for workers.

Unions take this action because the law is just a minimum standard. Workers need more than the minimum wage to live; they also need medical, dental and extended health benefits for their families. Workers need better levels of sick leave and vacation leave than minimum laws provide. Unions also fight for a decent standard of living and some control for workers of their work lives that laws do not provide.

UNIONS IN THE COMMUNITY

Unions primarily represent workers' interests in the workplace, but they have had a broader effect on our communities and the larger fabric of our society as a whole. Unions are an important part of a democratic society and are one way to organize people to represent their own interests.

Being a member of a church group, neighbourhood association, parent/teacher advisory group, and ethnic community group are examples of some of the different identities workers can also have as citizens in their communities.

Union members as community citizens care about a wide variety of interests. So their unions also speak out on all kind of issues. Issues like:

- working to make childcare available and affordable for all working people
- ensuring education is affordable and accessible for everyone
- maintaining our high quality, publicly funded healthcare and social services systems
- making sure that all workers have a reasonable level of unemployment insurance and pension benefits
- protecting our environment for future generations
- using our pension funds for affordable housing and other grassroots community economic development

Please note:

If and when a lock out should occur at your placement, please follow the same procedures as the employees who have been locked out. Your Co-op hours are guaranteed for one week. If at that time, the lock out continues, your Co-op teacher will endeavour to find another placement for you in your area of interest.