

The Role of Unions in the Future (translation)

The economic context is constantly changing, and this forces employees and employers to regularly cope with and adapt to new challenges. At the same time, the balance between the number of jobs and the available workforce is greatly changing.

At the outset, the role of the labour movement was to obtain adequate working conditions and to protect the basic rights of workers.

Until quite recently, a labour surplus gave employers more power than employees, which weakened the bargaining power of unions who had to fight not only to make new gains but also just to maintain past gains for their members.

However, the balance of power is changing since the labour market is now facing a major labour shortage.

Labour organizations must therefore adapt their practices and their strategies to present and future realities. Unions will have more power to get better working conditions for their members while maintaining and improving their previous gains.

However, labour organizations are presently facing major challenges: they must mobilize their members and win the sympathy of the general population. Many young workers are not aware of the power of unions since they have not seen them win any major victories. I believe that a good communication strategy will be necessary to win back the trust of the members and the general public.

It might be interesting to demonstrate to unionized employees the importance of labour's power by using concrete examples such as the fightback on "right to work" legislation in Detroit, Michigan, and elsewhere.

We could make them aware of all the gains obtained by unions by comparing the working conditions provided for in the various collective agreements with the rights of non-unionized workers as set out by the labour standards board.

Many citizens have a negative perception of unions because they generally only hear about them when things go wrong (labour disputes, collective bargaining, etc.). It would be important to make them aware of the fact that the gains made by unionized employees, such as maternity leave, work-life balance, etc., benefit the general population. And we must not forget that demands submitted when renewing public sector collective

agreements are also designed to maintain the quality of services provided to the general public.

The union must also adapt to an increasingly diverse labour force and take into account the challenge that businesses must face when trying to increase their productivity while attracting and retaining employees in a context where the working-age population is decreasing because the general population is ageing.

A partnership could be implemented between employees, unions and employers in order to improve working conditions while increasing the profitability of the business. For the younger generation of workers, it is very important that their employers make sure to develop their businesses while respecting the environment and making ethical purchases. Getting everyone involved could be considered at the start of any organizational change process and employers have everything to gain from promoting consultation with the unions representing their employees.

We should work to implement labour-management relations based on cooperation, transparency and trust. It has been proven that a union presence encourages employee involvement and facilitates

communications while providing labour force stability and access to training.

In my humble opinion, the role of the union in the future will require effective communications enabling it to engage and mobilize its members while making the general public more aware of the importance of the labour movement and developing cooperation with employers in order to reach solutions where everybody wins, while not overlooking the power of political action.

In short, we must communicate, bargain, propose and get involved.