

Labour's Contribution to Our Community's Wellbeing

By fighting for the rights of worker's in our community, unions are contributing positively to the wellbeing of these people who can thus, live easier and less stressful lives. In Canada, there has been a long history of organized labour, in which the first organizations paved the way for today's unions and their lobbying power.

Some of the first organized labour movements in Canada were illegal. For example, in the 19th century, ³Nova Scotia government prohibited worker from bargaining for better hours or wages and provided prison terms as a penalty' (Rouillard, Frank, Palmer, & McCallum, 2006). Slowly, worker's rights have become more recognized, with one symbol of this being Labour Day, created in 1894 by the Federal government and celebrated the first Monday of September (Rouillard, Frank, Palmer, & McCallum, 2006). The impacts of organized labour on our community are numerous. Some of the positive effects of organized labour include safe working conditions, job and wage security, and protection from discrimination or harassment.

The guarantee of safe working conditions for Canadian employees has not always been an important consideration for employers. Historically, work performed by working class people has caused adverse acute and chronic health consequences for numerous people. The 1960's presented many cases of worker's exploitation, many of which were immigrant workers, unaware of their legal rights (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015). Various injuries and deaths which could have been easily prevented if health and safety measures were implemented sooner.

Today, every Canadian province has legislation regarding health and safety in the workplace, which unions have helped shape and influence, such as Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act (1990). This act guarantees workers, for example, the right to refuse unsafe work and the right to compensation for injuries at work, among other rights (Workers United Canada Council, 2018).

The security of minimum wages and job security is another area in which unions have improved the wellbeing of workers. In 1919, soldiers who returned from World War I were struggling to

provide enough support for their families leading them to organize the Winnipeg General Strike where they walked off of their jobs on a set date (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015). This event unfortunately, ended in violence and tragedies inflicted between "Royal North-West Mounted Police and hired union busters" (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015).

Years of pushback from organized labour unions have led to the creation of governmental institutions that protect the minimum wage rights of Canadians every day. Currently, the Employment Standards Act (2000) is regulated in Ontario by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. Under this act, the minimum wage, overtime wages, work hours and other pay requirements are outlined according to specific work scenarios (Government of Ontario, 2020). Unions are constantly working improve the wage and job security of their members. For example, this past year, teachers' unions in Ontario organized multiple collective bargaining meetings with the Minister of Education and asked for changes including smaller class sizes and increased salaries (Jones, 2020).

Workers should never have to be subjected to discrimination or harassment in the workplace and the progress made in this area since the start of unionization has been huge. Harassment in the workplace is defined as "engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome, or sexual harassment" (Government of Ontario, 1990).

Most unions today have policies concerning workplace harassment and discrimination. These help to ensure a comfortable environment where workers are not being verbally or physically harassed by their coworkers. For example, the Canadian Immigration and Employment Union (CEIU) has various policies related to safe work environments, such as the right to a union representative for any allegations of workplace harassment (Canadian Immigration and Employment Union, 2020).

The importance of having a safe work environment and a livable salary will always be important in my opinion and as a community we must recognize the value of these rights. The work done in the past by labour unions contributed to the dramatic evolution of employee's basic rights,

which were often taken advantage of in the past. It is my hope that Canada's legislative policies on organized labour and human rights can be implemented in all countries so that the exploitation of workers can end.

Works Cited

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