

Stepping Up: How Organized Labour Will Help Workers in the Future

Our modern day workplace is being affected by both internal and external influences that are causing our day to day to change, our future workplaces will not be the same as they are today. Some of these influences include job automation, implementation of COVID-19 precautions and new ideas about the ideal work week. As our workplaces change in the face of these influences the work of organized labour through their unions will be paramount in protecting workers and making their voices heard.

A major issue affecting workers today is automation, new technology comes out and replaces many repetitive tasks which in turn can lead to job loss. A study by Statistics Canada predicts that around 35% of office support occupations are at high risk of automation-related job transformation, other job categories at high risk are service supervisors, construction trades and customer service representatives.¹ As more workplaces automate, unions will have an important role to play in protecting workers affected by automation. One example of how unions can do this is they will be able to bargain for employers to put into place retraining programs so that employees can get the training required to fulfill other roles within their organization. Another way unions will help is by ensuring proper severance pay and pay for education is provided to workers who lose their jobs due to automation. I think in the future bargaining for proper severance pay and education pay will greatly help people get back on their feet after losing their jobs by being able to acquire the necessary skills to re-enter the workforce and to have the funds necessary to support themselves while they look for a job.

Though automation will cause much change in the future unions also have in incredibly important role to play right now. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major shift in our workplaces, office based organizations rapidly shifted to work from home models and many businesses were forced to shut down. As our economy reopens and businesses start back up workers will need proper safeguards in place for their protection. For many essential workers such as hospital staff, grocery store clerks and truck drivers going to work means possible

exposure to COVID-19. Being part of a union will ensure that at the very least workers receive a living wage and where applicable, hazard pay. Unions are also concerned with occupational health and safety and I think that in the immediate future they will play an important role in ensuring that workers have the proper safety measures in place such as access to PPE, plexiglass shields, hand sanitizer and other safety measures. Finally unions will need to bargain for proper sick leave so that if an employee were to come into contact with COVID-19 they can stay home, rest and get better without being concerned about losing money.

The current pandemic has given rise to new ideas about what our work week should look like and many people are calling for a four day work week. Although this idea is not new, the current pandemic has shown that workers can adopt new ways of working, this has allowed the idea of a four day work week to gain popularity, in fact a Nova Scotia municipality is trying it out to see how well it works.² If this idea gains popularity within organized labour groups, unions will be able to bargain on behalf of workers and exert pressure on employers to adopt a four day work week. The pressure exerted by unions could then cause non-union employers to adopt the four day work week as well and could lead to it becoming widely used. A four day work week would allow for more time spent with family, pursuing hobbies or educating oneself but adopting this new idea will be difficult if not impossible without the help of unions.

Our world is constantly changing and organized labour through unions has an ever more important role to play in bargaining on behalf of workers who otherwise wouldn't have a voice. Unions can ensure that worker's employment is protected, that they can return to work safely and they can ensure that new ideas about what the workplace are taken seriously so that in the future going to work can be better and safer for everyone.

Works Cited

1.

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2.

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