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Nations Logging

Note: This essay was submitted in French. This is a translation of the original.

The Value of Unions in our Society

In Canada, Unionism started at the beginning of the 19th century. A union is an association that has for goal the defense of common interests. The union's goal is to negotiate fair rules so that employees are protected and avoid abuse towards them. Unions were not common and a lot of people were not in agreement with the rights that unionized workers had and those that were unionized had to fight to keep those rights and a lot of companies still have unions in place to this day.

A big number of workers had working days of at least 10 hours or more. That is how workers from a Toronto printing house in 1872 were living when the union of typographers demanded nine hour working days. Since the employers refused, the workers stopped working on March 25, 1872. The editors hired replacement workers but the strikers obtained the support of other workers in Toronto. At that time, union activity was a crime and the Toronto Globe editor, George Brown, stopped the group of strikers with criminal conspiracy one day after the rally of 10,000 people who were at Queen's Park on April 15, 2018.

But, on April 18, 1872, the Prime Minister John A. MacDonald had a law on unions approved and it legalized and protected unions. The printers' strike in Toronto started a movement for the nine hour workday. This gave rise to annual celebration of Labour Day that is still going on today throughout Canada. The workers' movement took place in the 1850's, but it's the necessity to shorten the work week that unleashed a bigger number of workers to join a union to change their lives for the better.

In 1919, the World War 1 soldiers came back to Canada and had trouble restarting their jobs. Also, workers of different trades were fighting for fair wages because they wanted to earn sufficient wages to support their family in a changing economy. On May 15, 1919, workers stopped working and filled the streets of Winnipeg to fight for these rights. But, on June 21st, members of the North West Royal Gendarmerie and hired strong-arms attacked with horses and opened fire on the rally of workers, killing two people and injuring others. This day is known as Bloody Saturday.

These two events show the importance of unions for workers. There are a lot of other events like these that changed the unions for the better. With a big number of people, their voices are heard and companies change their rules to accommodate the employees but sometimes they have to negotiate to decide something that's appropriate for each side, the employees and employer. The benefits given to unionized workers (dental insurance, health insurance, legal fees insurance, amongst others) attract dentists, opticians, chiropractors, therapist, health specialists and family law lawyers and assure them revenue. When unions defend what is just, life gets better for all of us. All workers benefit today from the union's successes from yesterday: minimum wages, overtime remuneration, health and safety standards, maternity and parental leaves, paid holidays and protection against discrimination and harassment.

Finally, unions bring big changes in a company. They contribute to the health and safety of employees by ensuring their well-being. It is also what gives people better wages and a better quality of life at work. I think it is important to have a union in a big society to monitor the abuse and discrimination against women, young workers and people of different sexual orientation and ethnicities.