

The Value of Unions in our Society



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

Unions are important members of our community for multiple reasons. They insure that all salaried employee work reasonable hours, that the workplace is safe and that there is wage equity. To help you to understand the value of Unions in our society, in the following text I will talk about my father who has been a member of the Union for the last 28 years and who is now a Union representative since 2004.

Additionally, he has been an officer of the executive board of Local 1-2010 for about 3 years. My father is a man who is very attentive, understanding and always ready to help his multiple colleagues. More precisely, there are currently 150 employees who work at the Columbia Forest Products mill in Hearst. Since I was very little I saw many of his colleagues phoning or even come to my house after the work hours for advice on a given subject and I never saw my father refuse to help a Brother, even when he had to stop working for medical reasons. It is with pride that I have myself integrated these qualities in my everyday life and I am presently a psychology student à the Université de Hearst with a dream to, one day, become a mental health worker to help people in need.

From what I have learned from my father throughout the years, being a Union member is an immense responsibility. Their primary role is to defend workers, be it individually or collectively. One of their most important responsibilities is to communicate to workers the information received in meetings and to inform them of their rights. Furthermore, they insure the communication between the state, employer and employees. They can also sign Collective Agreements with the state to settle some workplace conditions for employees. "A collective agreement is an agreement between an employer and a union organization representing salaried employees. It completes the work legislation with its own provisions for a given field. (CCI Parie Île-de-France, 2015).

In the same order of ideas, they must also defend workers against employers when needed and therefore can undertake certain protest actions such as a strike, petitions and even manifestations. For individual conflicts, Unions must defend and support the worker in different ways. For example, for judiciary process the Union will insure that they represent well the employee.

But, where does the importance of Unions for a company come from? This importance must surely be granted to people who stood together to insure that all employees be given the right to a fair wage, reasonable work hours and a safe workplace. Working for a company that includes Unions will give you the chance to have a fairer wage and without a doubt many benefits. "The benefits represent all form of payments, pension plan, medical and dental insurance which are remitted to an employee registered to a benefit plan or his beneficiary, after an eligibility period" (Jobintree, 2008).

Did you know that each year, to honour Labour day, "the Canadian Labour Congress publishes a study showing the economic advantages of having Unions in the workplace - for the workers and the communities in which they live?" (Jobintree, 2008). This same research says that "unionized workers

earn in average \$5.28 per hour more than those who are not Union members" (Jobintree, 2008). This wage difference is an economic advantage in a community since it allows the economy to roll for that community since it is where the workers will spend their pay. Plus, "benefits granted to unionized workers attract dentists, opticians, chiropractors, therapists, health specialists and family law lawyers and ensure them an income" (Jobintree, 2008)

To conclude, being a Union member means that you accept many responsibilities, but without determined people at their workplace like my father, we couldn't benefit of all those advantages. Now, when you encounter a Union member, take a few minutes to thank them for their work and the time they spend to ensure your well-being at work.