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The Value of Unions in our Society

When brainstorming and conducting research for this essay, I came to realise that I know very little about the concept and the value of having a Union in the workplace. In order to educate myself and to truly find the value of Unions in our society, I decided to reach out to some of my family and friends to try to compare their perspective on Unions. Since Unions aren't restricted to only one field of work, I decided to gather my information from various individuals that have a different lifestyle and come with backgrounds as different as black and white. Whether you are someone crunching numbers, working with inanimate objects or dealing with people every day, Unions will have an impact on your everyday life and especially when things start to go wrong.

The first person I've decided to interview was my long-time friend Mr. Justin Jean. As we both come from the same community, both go to school and work summer jobs, I thought it would be a great way to see first-hand how different someone's perspective may vary even with two people that art at a similar point in their life and share common interests. Mr. Jean is a 19-year-old male who grew up in Kapuskasing and is currently studying accounting at the University of Ottawa and works for BDO, an accounting firm located in Embrun.

As someone who is new to the workforce and is still spreading his wings into his career, Mr. Jean was able to talk to me about how he portrays the effects Unions have in today's society. To start off, Mr. Jean described Unions as an important tool to employers and as something that has an even greater effect on the employees themselves. In order to explain his thought process, he then focuses his attention onto why he felt Unions are a very important and crucial aspect to anyone's career. First of all, he told me that Unions are in place to control the power given to employers and to revoke the said power is necessary. Having restricted powers will make an employer think twice before firing someone due to little inconveniences even on a regular basis. For the person being fired, the Union acts as a strong voice and knowledgeable source. Generally, when someone is dealing with the Union, it serves as a kind of mediator between the employee and the employer. This is extremely helpful to the employee because in the majority of cases, the employees are not sure of their rights or how to exploit them. Mr. Jean later concluded by adding that Unions are extremely helpful and a good source of information and support for people who need them.

In order to get another point of view on the effects of Unions of our society, I turned to Mr. Paul Nolet. Mr. Nolet has been a mechanic employed with the town of Kapuskasing for the past 21 years. The town of Kapuskasing has a Union in place for a good part of their employees depending at what level one currently occupies. If a person is staff, labour or management, it will have a great effect on how much a Union means to them and how they can personally relate to the value of having a Union.

Mr. Nolet started by sharing with me how he sees a Union through his eyes. As a well-rounded and down to earth person, he globally sees it as a united front that defends the right of the employees hence being names a Union. Mr. Nolet also found very important to add that while providing help to both the employers and the employees, a Union is a crucial member of the negotiations for a new contract when time comes. When it comes to a contract, everything must be negotiated. It can go from the hourly wages all the way to time off, sick days and benefits. When negotiating the contract, the union makes sure that both sides of the coin will leave the table happy and satisfied with what they have gained or let go. Sometimes, contract negotiations have the potential to get quite heated and as we all know, once

you squeeze tooth paste out of the tube, you can't put it back. Thankfully, the Union acts like the cap to the toothpaste, keeping everything in check and making sure nothing goes overboard. Additionally, having a good contract in place, thanks to the hard work from the Union, will ensure that the business or institution will run smoothly with both the employers and employees being happy which will make the work experience and the production and quality of product better. Finally, Mr. Nolet says he is happy that Unions exist and that he truly appreciates the services they provide for everyone lucky enough to be unionized.

Finally, in order to have the broadest view and understanding of the value Unions have in our society, I've decided to talk with someone who was in a completely different field than Mr. Justin Jean and Mr. Paul Nolet. Because he field deals with delicate subjects, she preferred to stay anonymous but still felt as her view of Unions could be helpful to my understanding. As someone who deals with people on a daily basis, she sees the mental effects stress and discomfort at work can lead to.

To kick things off, she used to be an employee with a corporation that employed over 60 individuals which she thinks had an effect on how effective and valuable the Union was. She says that during her time there, she saw the Union as a distant partner. For here, it felt like the employees did not have much of a voice. She also adds that this was her first employment and she was still relatively young which caused her to step back a little bit and to not be involved as much as she could have. She remembers that unfortunately there were problems with some troublesome employees and that they were protected too much. She felt that individuals are responsible when they break the rules and that they should be held accountable for their actions.

Since then, she has now transferred to another social agency which also has a Union and her view on the value of Unions drastically changed. The contact between employers and employees was night and day compared to her previous experience. She says that the Union was a valuable asset when injustices came in play in order to support the employee as an individual. A factor might have been that it was a smaller staff which resulted in everyone having a say on what they find should improve. She adds that the Union was essential in keeping a good working environment and having consistency in what is expected.

In conclusion, the value of Unions in our society can vary from individuals, field of work and even from job to job. After talking with these three people, I came to realise the true value of Unions and started to appreciate the work Unions put in for the well-being of an industry, employer and employee. Unions have a crucial role in order to make sure that everyone's rights are respected while maintaining a good working environment. In Canada, we are lucky that Unions have the ability to limit an employer's power and to keep employees in check. I can only imagine how different our workforce would be without the contribution of Unions in our society.