

## The Value of Unions in our Society



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Although unions and the labour movement are said to have become irrelevant in recent years, they still hold a great deal of value in today's society. Unionism began in the 1800s to provide a way for workers to fight for proper treatment from their employers. It has progressed substantially since then and has provided the Canadian system with things we now take for granted such as the 40-hour week, paid holidays and pay equality. Despite the fact that unions create a better economy and work environment for non-unionized and unionized workers alike, the number of unions is constantly dwindling. Due to the popular opinion that unions no longer hold any power in the workplace, workers are far less likely to vote to unionize or to continue contributing to their union.

These unions exist to provide a means to counteract the abuse of power of employers. Unions use collective bargaining to reach decisions on workers' compensation, health benefits, working conditions and job security, amongst other things. Unions fought for benefits such as paid vacation time, pensions and sick leave, which benefited not only those in the unions at that time, but created a long-lived effect that continues today. It is because of the pursuits of unions that we have social security, overtime pay, minimum wage, maternity leave and child labour bans.

Unions have not only given at work benefits to the community. Union-based apprenticeship programs offer the largest career training paths outside of the military. Since the unions are so closely intertwined with the industry they represent and have access to companies and professional experience, they provide an opportune entrance for education for apprentices. At a time when the global economy is so low and unemployment is skyrocketing nearly everywhere, these programs are essential in creating steady jobs for those in need. The wage increases that unions receive allow for an increase of cash flow in our economy as well. Since unionized workers receive higher wages for their work, that extra money gets redistributed into the national economy, providing benefits once more for all those involved, not simply unionized workers.

Unions fight for the rights of all workers, no matter their gender, race, religious beliefs or sexual orientation. One of the core tenets of unionism is that all work has dignity and deserves respect and all those who perform it deserve respect. They increase the quality of living for the entire middle class when union membership rates are high. Currently, membership rates are extremely low and as a result, the inequality in wages between the middle class and the "1%" upper class is higher than ever. My own father is a union representative at his job and I personally have seen the benefits that standing up for the rights of workers has. Those who take a stand for the collective benefit of others play and have played an important role in society for many years past and many more to come.

Overall, I believe the benefit of unions in our society can still be seen, be it in increases to minimum wage or a consistency in health benefits within industries. Every worker in Canada benefits from the work of union members in changing workplace policies. Through talking to my parents, who are both members of union, and researching unions themselves, I have learned a great deal on the importance of the work that unions do and have done in the past and how they continue to have a large impact on society today.

In conclusion, Unions hold great value in our society, benefiting not only those who belong to Unions but non-unionized workers as well. They achieve this by implementing a democratic setting in

the workplace by giving workers a collective voice. As well as fighting for better wages, benefits and pensions through the labour movement. Lastly, by promoting economic growth. It's important for many sorts of people to vote for a Union for their protection and rights and for a better future for them and their families.