

Why Unions?

By: Sasha Eccleston

Honestly, it was difficult to choose a topic for this essay. The topic choice is "Why unions?" and can have a very broad spectrum of possibilities to write on. My choice for this topic not only allows me to elaborate on the aspects that I believe to be the most important. In the recent past, the media and government have shed a dark cloud over unions and as a result, have given them a bad reputation. This essay focuses on their benefits, to help educate and hopefully, show the importance of remaining and supporting unions.

Since the 1800's, unions have supported workers in Canada. The purpose of unions was and still is to protect and support employees from the tyranny of capitalistic corporate management in the growing age of industry. Many things have changed since the formation of the first union, during the industrial revolution, but the necessity and benefits that unions provide remain. As long as employees are members of unions, they have protection for their rights as workers. Higher wages, wage protection, safe working conditions, and job security for employees are the main things unions are known for. There is no doubt that unions benefit employees, but these benefits are also felt in communities in which their members live. The following are some of the main arguments for the need of unions and to keep them around.

The fair treatment of workers and the safe conditions created by labour unions doesn't only benefit the members of said union. These conditions are used to set government and industry standards. These standards set the bar for all workers, union and non-union, for that industry. Protection for these workers helps other workers in the local community and the national community of workers in that industry receive the same safe work environment and treatment. To maintain and to ensure the continuation of these standards, exceed of the standards and to protect workers, unions are necessary.

Wages the union workers receive are generally higher than other non-union workers. With increasing real estate prices and cost of living, these higher wages allow workers to be able to maintain or gain financial stability. Along with higher wages, unions help provide job security for their members, being able to sustain finances are one of the top causes for stress and to be able to plan and maintain a constant stable income can be very beneficial for the health of the worker and their families. In times of economic uncertainty like those of today, unionized workers are in a much better position than those that aren't.

Higher income can also lead to more spending, and spending done in the local community. Increase input of capital in the community boosts the local economy. More local job can be created due to the growth of local business and businesses. Higher wages associated with unionised employment also increases the amount of tax union employees pay. Most people think that paying more in tax is a negative thing. What they might not realize is that that tax money is extremely beneficial? Tax money is used to maintain and create more infrastructures such as roads, parks and community recreation centers like pools, arenas, gyms and ball courts. The income tax people pay also provides better health

care and pays for emergency services, services people sometimes take for granted until they are really needed.

Communities that are made up of predominantly of union workers living in them are at an advantage to communities that do not. These communities reap the benefits of more capital circulating throughout the local economy. Workers in mostly unionized industries can also be thanked for providing minimum levels of safety and worker rights. The truth is that it doesn't matter who you are or where you work, the positive influence and affects that unions bring are felt by everyone in the community, directly or indirectly.

Other benefits of unions also include the benefits and retirement packages that are negotiated with the employer when negotiating the contract. These packages are important as they create set rules the employer must follow when it comes to hiring new employees, overtime distribution just to name a few. Packages that are negotiated are the health care plans that the employer provides their employees and retirement plans and strategies. Surprisingly, these also help out the employer because employees may be more inclined to stay with that employer and even attract more workers and make that employer more desirable.

With all these benefits, why are unions losing members or not having engaged members? This is due to the negative image of unions and/or the lack of education about unions. My personal experience with unions isn't a negative one; however, the union itself and unions in general need to take a stronger initiative to help educate, inform and engage their members. The survival of unions depends on continued membership and member engagement. The greatest tool to battle any problem is education. More programs and union involvement must be done in the communities for this to happen.

From the beginning unions have been for the workers, the difficult part is for the workers to be for the union as well. Job stability, higher wages, safety programs and retirement and benefits packages are just some of the opportunities unionized workers have. Paired with the benefits to the local communities the only explanation for the decline of union membership and support is the lack of education. This is where some more efforts should be focused. Otherwise unions will slowly fade away. Their purpose has not been yet outlived and nor will it be within the near future. With the great number of benefits that unions provide and with the amount of people that they effect the real question should be, why not unions?