

Relevance of Unions

Unions have made a substantial impact on the workforce over the last century, but are they still relevant in today's work place?

If we look at the facts of where we were, and how far we have come it is clear to see that employees are much better off. We can take this one step further, and clearly state that even non unionized workers are better off, because of unions. They have benefited from higher pay standards that unionized workers receive in a particular industry and as a result all wages go up. It is safe to say that unions have set norms and established practices that have become more generalized throughout the economy, thereby improving pay and working conditions for the entire workforce.

Unions have played a prominent role in the enactment of a broad range of labour laws and regulations covering areas such as overtime pay, minimum wage, workers compensation, that were unheard of before the unionization of workers. Life outside of work has also been affected by unions through negotiated benefit packages. Items such as adequate health insurance to protect workers and their families, a secure retirement pension as well as sufficient and flexible paid leave. Before unions working conditions were 12 -14 hrs without breaks, child labour was employed, accidents were common place and wages were low. As history has shown us, there is strength in numbers and if workers stick together they will be heard.

Unions have pushed for better labour relations, collective agreements and have played an important role in enforcing workplace regulations. They have been a voice for workers in identifying where laws and regulations are needed and have been influential in getting these laws enacted. They have provided information to members about workers rights and available programs. Because unionized workers are more informed, they are more likely to benefit from social insurance programs such as unemployment insurance or workers compensation. Another important role that unions play is to ensure that labour protections are not just paper promises in the workplace. Unions have been crucial in this aspect by giving workers the relevant information about their rights and necessary procedures, but also by correcting disinformation as well as providing resources to make a claim and negotiating solutions to disputes on behalf of workers.

It is clear that workers enjoy advantages as a result of union organization and collective bargaining which would not have been possible without them. They receive higher wages, better benefits, more effective enforcement of labour legislation and are more informed of workers' rights. Collective bargaining also fuels innovations in wages, benefits, and work practices that affect all workers regardless of whether or not they belong to a union. However, unions play a much bigger role in workers lives by giving them a stronger voice in the community and in politics. A strong union is essential to a thriving democracy which makes them very relevant in today's society.