

Trade Unionism in Canada: A Struggle and an Inspiration

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Over 25,000 workers gather for weeks to strike and vocalize their labour demands for higher wages and union recognition, in response, on June 21, 1919, the mayor reads the *Riot Act* to curb the workers' demonstration. What follows would become known as "Bloody Saturday," as RCMP officers charged towards the strikers and shot into the crowd, killing and injuring workers (Dupuis). This scene derives from the well-known Winnipeg general strike and demonstrates the struggle and fierce opposition historically faced by the labour movement in Canada. Even in the face of adversity, over the years, trade unionism has succeeded in securing fundamental workers' rights and continues to do so today. The importance of trade unionism in Canada is demonstrated through analyzing the history, achievements, and inspiration made by the labour movement.

The labour movement has an illustrious history in many societies around the world, including in Canada. The early years of the labour movement were filled with a struggle for recognition. In the 1800's, workers gathered to strike and fight for issues such as a shorter work-week, in a time when union activity was outlawed ("History of Labour"). When the labour movement progressed into the early 1900's, general strikes become an effective method for workers to advocate their demands. However, these strikes were not always easy as demonstrations such as the Winnipeg general strike and Vancouver general strike of 1918 both ended in strikers being attacked and even killed. Even though the fight for workers' rights was tough, the labour movement continued on and it was not long that significant milestones were achieved such as the founding of the Canadian Labour Congress in 1956 and the formation of CUPE in 1963. The labour movement also led to more union achievements that are still being enjoyed by workers today.

While there are those who maintain a negative perception of unions, the achievements made by unions to protect workers' safety and rights cannot be disregarded. The 8-hour work day, overtime pay, a 40-hour work week is often taken for granted, but stem from the hard work taken on by unions ("What Have Unions Done"). Further union achievements include pensions, parental leave and even anti-sexual harassment laws. Unions have had a positive impact on workers, and their achievements have made them inspiring,

As a unionized worker, I have seen the benefits of working in a unionized workplace and have been positively influenced by my membership in CUPE Local 1004. As an employee of the Capilano Students' Union, I feel protected in my workplace through my collective agreement and membership in Local 1004. I know the rights that I have and I know how I can protect those rights. My time as a unionized worker has also influenced my future goals. I have always aspired to go to law school and seeing the positive work taken by my union to protect workers, I now aspire to study and work in labour and employment law. The way in which I have seen my union protect workers has inspired me to one-day defend workers whose rights have been violated.

Unions are necessary to defend and advocate the rights of workers. While unions have made great achievements, there is still more to be done. We still live in a time where every year more than 1000 workers die due to unsafe workplaces, young people are finding it harder to find full-time work and workplace pensions are non-existent for many workers in Canada (Union Advantage). As long as workers' rights must be protected and further rights must be secured, unions will be there to fight for fairness, equality, and dignity.

Work Cited

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