

## **The Labour Movement's Relevance in Globalization**

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Humans have toiled since the advent of time, our efforts giving us technology that ranges from fire to the iPhone. At the helm of all progress is the worker: their hands cradling the earth, spinning it about its axis, responsible for all motion— every spoke and circuit, every ore and iron, molded to precision, in a world made mechanic.

Globalization brings us closer together as our labour moves from the intimate embrace of our own shores. Consider the miner, deep in the belly of a mountain, the air thick with coal dust. The barechested farmhand, solitary in a sun soaked field, coaxing the soil's root to bare blossom. Vessels from far-flung shores, large as sentinels and smooth like swans, slip into the rusted dock of the shipyard in the slow pink of dawn. The factory air, ripe with the fermented sweat of a hundred toiling women, bent over spools of fabric like crones. We are swathed in wools, hemmed by hands a sunset away, our mouths sweet with fruit ripened beyond our own oceans.

Unions play a particular role in ensuring that all remains equitable in our attempt to pool world resources. Our response to the rapid proliferation of industrialization in the early 1900's saw employees' work weeks shorten to reasonable hours that allowed them to pursue a fruitful life beyond the office, factory and yard. This anticipated our modern concept of work-life balance, allowing workers to take stock and demand things that would enrich the lives of their families and those in their communities. Among these were employer paid benefits, safe and fair working conditions and compensation for injuries sustained at work. This inspired a global philosophy that ensured employers and corporations were beholden to the worker and public rather than the interests of oligarchs.

From this emerges globalization; as economic markets become more complex as a result of limited resource, growing population, and resulting expanded international trade, corporations become transnational. These factors intersect into opportunities for employers to exploit an increasingly connected and globalized work force in order to cut costs, diminishing wages and slashing benefits in their race to the bottom line. Despite rapidly advancing technology and automation that should precipitate an increased of quality of life, we work longer hours and hold more jobs than ever.

Canadian unionists propose a unique solution. Ken Lewenza, president of the Canadian Auto Workers Union, says that we too, must extend our efforts and conversations, so that our coalition building is as international as the material and technology that populates our lives. "This will be a wake up call for the international communities," he said, "for the international labour movement to act like these global companies. If they're going to exploit workers from one country to another, we arm our forces and we just refuse to do work that's going to be moved to the lowest bidder."