

## ***To Protect Those with no Protection***

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Long ago in colonial Canada a small boy went to work. He was young, perhaps six at the oldest, and although his hair was a dusty blonde one could not distinguish the colour due to the layer of soot that clung to his small frame. He could not go to school. His father worked all day in the mines and his mother toiled in the clothing factories, still caring for his three younger siblings. They were all paid pennies per day. All he knew was that if he failed to sweep the chimneys his family would starve. It would get better, soon his siblings would be old enough to sweep the chimneys with him and work the factories with their mother. He had dreams of oneday going to bed with a full stomach and waking up to go explore the forest with his father and not worrying whenever he heard news of the latest mine collapse. Those dreams died the day he was forgotten in the chimney of a rich landowner.

In Canada, thousands of children died working jobs such as sweeping chimneys and working in clothing factories. Only the wealthy could go to school, and even then it was typically only for the boys. A girl would rarely go to school, it was not her place to be educated. Her place was to marry young and hopefully marry a man who would care for her family financially. It was legal for her to marry at the age of 12 so long as her parents approved. For most children they could never be a child, they were far too busy with life as a small adult to even enjoy the simplest pleasures of childhood. Things may have seemed bleak for children in colonial Canada, yet soon they found an ally to champion their rights.

While labour unions are well known for supporting adult worker rights they are seldom acknowledged for their work protecting children. It was the labor unions that abolished child labor, creating new laws that would protect any child from ever having to work until they had grown. It was also the labor unions that pushed to have school become inclusive for all people, both rich and poor could become educated. They also supported women and the right for girls to go to school without having to worry about spending their lives learning how to be the perfect housewife before marrying and having children. Soon all children in Canada were given the human right to education and the right to play, something that mere generations earlier was wishful thinking.

In less than 100 years Canada went from a place where children burned in chimneys to being world renowned for how amazing it is to be a child within it. This unlikely turn is largely due to labor unions and their unceasing efforts to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Labour unions stand for human rights, and those do not stop within the workplace. Even today labour unions will champion the rights children across the globe, raising funds for classrooms, fighting for better education, and even collecting toys so that those without any can still have the chance to play.



Before labour unions children as young as three would work in atrocious conditions, many of whom would perish due to their hazardous workplaces. With the rise of labor unions a child's right to be a kid was recognized. Even today the labor unions are a leading voice in the eradication of child labor and providing opportunities for all children to go to school. Whether it be petitioning for change in child labor laws overseas, rallying against the government to fund education, or even just filling up a dump truck with toys at Christmas for those without the labor unions have been a critical part of children receiving the rights they deserve.

