

# Union Myths & Facts



**Myth: Workers do not need unions anymore.  
Working conditions are good and workers earn fair wages.**

**Fact:** Since workers first banded together to demand fair wages and working conditions, unions have set the standards that benefit all workers. Before unions, most people worked 12 hour days, six or seven days a week. Children did danerous work in factories and paid sick leave was virtually non-existent.

Today, workers enjoy benefits such as maternity leave, vacation pay, and protection from discrimination in the workplace - Things which unions fought for and won. However, there are still many improvements to be made.

Employers continue to keep people in part-time jobs to avoid contributing to government benefits. Young people work without pay as interns without the protections that full time employees enjoy. The government allows companies to pay temporary foreign workers less than Canadian workers.

Unions play an important role in building and maintaining a fair and equitable Canadian workplace.

**Myth: Unions make companies less efficient and profitable.**

**Fact:** Unions know that there are no good jobs without successful, profitable companies. Workers have a stake in their organizations remaining competative and unions play an integral part in developing cutting-edge training to ensure that people work in a safe, productive environment. These are important factors that contribute to efficient, profitable and highly competative companies.

**Myth: Unions make it impossible for employers to fire incompetent workers.**

**Fact:** Anyone who can be hired can also be fired, but having no contract requires employers to keep workers who may be incompetent, lazy or chronically absent. Unions work to ensure that employers have just cause for dismissing their employees. They also ensure that people are treated fairly in the workplace, regardless of their race, gender, physical ability or sexual orientation.

### **Myth: Non-union workers do not pay dues and still make the same money as unionized workers.**

**Fact:** With a high demand for construction workers in Canada, it's true that employers are paying high hourly wages. Yet, recent studies show that unionized workers continue to earn approximately \$5 an hour more.

Workers who do not belong to unions are often expected to work longer shifts for weeks at a time, without earning overtime. They also rarely have access to benefits such as dental insurance, extended health care coverage, legal insurance or pensions.

### **Myth: People who do not want unions are often forced to join and pay dues.**

**Fact:** When the majority of employees at a workplace vote in favour of unionization, those who are opposed do not have to join the union. They do however, have to pay union dues. That may seem unfair, but unions negotiate contracts on behalf of *all* employees, not just those who voted for them. When wages increase or benefits improve, everyone benefits.

This structure is comparable to paying taxes. Taxes may seem unfair too, especially if you didn't vote for the party that forms the government, but, we all benefit from the laws and services the government provides and we all have to pay in order to make them available.

### **Myth: Unions only care about themselves and don't care about inconveniencing others by going on strike.**

**Fact:** Strikes make headlines and can be inconvenient for people, but the truth is today, about 95 per cent of labour agreements are successfully negotiated without strikes.

No union actually wants a strike to happen and no one is more inconvenienced by a strike than the workers themselves. Strikes happen when two sides cannot agree, and workers believe the issues at stake are important enough to justify sacrifices.

Unions have always worked to make gains that benefit the whole community. The labour movement fought for public health care and education, minimum wages, pay equity, sick pay and pensions.