

How are Unions Relevant in Today's Society?

With the current economic situation, Unions are beneficial in protecting the rights of the common worker. Recession has hit our economy very hard, few jobs are being created from year to year. In the first three months of 2008 in Canada, 104,000 jobs were created while in 2009 over 100,000 jobs were lost in the first three months. With our economy averaging a growth rate of 0 from 2008 to 2009, and the jobless rate in Canada growing nearly one percent to 7.2 percent¹, businesses often make decisions to try to supplement their income. Businesses have tried several different approaches to try to remain profitable. Among these, cutting wages, reducing employee's benefits, and in extreme cases cutting jobs or even shutting down parts of the business. With these threats to workers, Unions are relevant in protecting the workers and their rights.

In tough economic times consumers have less money to spend on products and services, and producers are selling less and therefore losing a great amount of their profit. In order to stay profitable, one option employers have is to decrease the wages of their employees. Governments are no exception, as the economy falters, the tax base decreases and governments feel the pressure to reduce their costs as well. Unions such as the PSAC (Public Service Alliance of Canada), protect the workplace and human rights. Unions fight for fair pay, in both the public and private sectors. With unions such as the PSAC, fighting for workers rights, workers will be able to maintain a steady wage and the standard of living that they are used to.

Instead of making wage cuts, some businesses resort to other options such as cutting various benefits of the workers. Benefits with a significant cost to the company are medical and dental coverage. These are very vital for workers, so that they can maintain good health for themselves and their families. Healthy workers mean an efficient and effective workplace. Companies are only hurting themselves by not having productive workers to create the products and services they are wishing to sell. Another major benefit that companies may try to reduce from their workers is their pensions. Pensions allow workers to retire at a reasonable age and have money to support them for the duration of their continued lives. Without pensions workers would be forced to work long hours, into the older years of their lives. This would only lead to weakening the economy with consumers being able to spend less in their older years. In this situation Unions are very relevant in fighting to enhance the workplace health and safety for the workers.

The third and possibly most extreme approach to enhance profitability is for businesses to cut jobs or even more drastic, close down parts of the company permanently. There is little unions can do in this case, besides ensure fairness in the treatment of their workers through company transition and retraining programs. Cutting jobs may indeed allow the company to regain some of its profitability in the short term, but in the long run they would be forcing remaining workers to work longer and harder

¹ <http://www.cbc.ca/money/story/2008/11/11/recession-report.html>

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hours in order to try to maintain stable operations. Workers would become unhappy and this could lead to a inefficient work environment. Unions in this case, would be relevant in supporting the business and its unionized workers through productive dialogue and action to sustain the operation through challenging times.

With the recession hitting the world economy hard, it is uncertain how long it will take it to recover completely. With businesses often attempting to supplement their profits by treating their employees unfairly, it is important that unions step in and support their unionized workers. With almost as many jobs being lost as created through the years, the relevance of the unions is becoming more and more important each day. With the best efforts of unions, workers, goverments and businesses will be able to make it through these tough times and eventually recover from this serious economic crisis.