

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT UNIONS

## MYTH

We don't need unions anymore—working conditions are fine and everybody makes good money.

## FACT

Since workers first banded together to demand fair wages and working conditions, unions have been setting the standards that benefit us all. Before unions, most people worked 12-hour days, 6 or 7 days a week. Children did the most dangerous work in factories and nobody got paid when they were sick.

Yes, things are better today. Everyone enjoys benefits—such as maternity leave, vacation pay, and protection from discrimination—that unions fought for and won.

But not everything is rosy. Employers keep people in part-time jobs to avoid contributing to government benefits. Young people work without pay as interns without the protections paid employees enjoy. The government allows companies to pay temporary foreign workers less than Canadian workers. Unions still have an important role to play in building and maintaining a fair and equitable Canadian workplace.

## MYTH

Unions make it impossible for employers to fire incompetent workers.

## FACT

Actually, anyone who can be hired can be fired. No contract requires an employer to keep workers who are lazy, incompetent or chronically absent.

Unions do try to make sure that employers have just cause for dismissing employees. They also try to ensure that people are treated fairly regardless of their race, gender, physical ability or sexual orientation.

## MYTH

Unions make companies less efficient and profitable.

## FACT

Unions know very well that there are no good jobs without successful, profitable companies. Workers have a stake in their companies remaining competitive, and unions play an important role in developing cutting-edge training and ensuring that people work in a safe environment. These are important factors that contribute to efficient, profitable, highly competitive companies.

## MYTH

Non-union construction workers make the same money as union workers—and they don't pay dues.

### FACT

With a high demand for construction workers in Canada today, employers are paying high hourly wages. But recent studies show that union workers still earn about \$5 an hour more.

And that's not the whole story. Workers who don't belong to unions are often expected to work long shifts for weeks at a time without earning overtime. They rarely have benefits such as dental insurance, extended health care coverage and legal insurance. Pensions are almost non-existent.

## MYTH

People who don't 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 the fact is unions negotiate contracts on behalf of all the employees, not just those who voted for them. And everyone benefits when wages increase or benefits improve.

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 governments provide and we all have to pay for them. The same holds true in a unionized workplace.

## MYTH

Unions only care about themselves and don't mind inconveniencing everyone else by going on strike.

### FACT

Strikes make headlines and can be inconvenient, but the truth is that today about 95% of labour agreements are successfully negotiated without strikes.

No union wants a strike, and no one is more inconvenienced by a strike than workers themselves—think of picketing in a snowstorm or trying to keep up with your bills without a regular paycheque! Strikes happen when the two sides cannot agree, and workers believe that the issues at stake are important enough to justify the sacrifice.

Far from caring only for themselves, unions have always worked to make gains that would benefit the whole community. The labour movement fought for public health care and education, minimum wages, pay equity, sick pay and pensions.