

What Unionism Means to Me

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Unionism is defined as the policies and practices of labor unions, particularly those concerned with protecting and furthering the rights of workers. There are so many different portrayals of unions within the media, all depicting how unions work differently depending on the creators. I personally love the commercial put out by the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) called 'Unions Are Great!', giving a short but eye-opening list of rights Canadian employees hold because unions have fought for them.

To me personally, however, unions hold a much more personal meaning. I was raised in a single-parent home, in which my mother has always worked tirelessly to ensure that my sister and I were well provided for. She has always had a full-time career while also taking the time off for our appointments. She never missed a recital, showcase, or parent-teacher meeting in my life. And she would not have been able to do that with nearly as much ease without unions.

Unions give my mother the ability to take paid leave when the need arises. Because she is a union member, she has the right to paid vacation time and maternity leave. She's entitled to compensated overtime, annual wage increases, job security, and a guaranteed safe work environment, all because she is in a union.

My mother's career is not the only reason why unionism is so important to me. If unions hadn't fought for it, I wouldn't receive minimum wage as a young adult working part-time to pay for college. There would be no reason for workplaces to have health and safety protocols and procedures. I would not receive adequate training for my job, therefore hurting the company and my own career.

As well, unionism is crucial the growth of the economy. Unionized workplaces reportedly have a far lower employee turnover rate. This incentivizes employers to invest in their employees with all the key points listed above and more. It also increases the amount of skilled and experienced employees a workplace has, creating a better business overall.

Unions also ensure that no person is discriminated against upon hiring or while working. While the odd occurrence does happen, unions ensure that no harassment takes place within the workplace, no matter race, age, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. This gives employers more qualified workers, thus allowing for career growth and experience.

Unionism is extremely important to me. Since my mother, and now my partner, have become union members, they feel they have a voice within their career. I rest easy knowing that two of the most important people in my life are safe when they go to work – physically, psychologically, and in terms of job security. Knowing more about unions should be a prerequisite to all working teenagers and adults, and yet most people are afraid to become ‘roped into’ a union. I see no such thing. Unions benefit both the employee and the employer, giving everybody basic human rights and the ability to work freely and comfortably.