“Rights at Work”

Why Unions Matter, To You AND Your Community

Unifor Leadership Meetings, January/February 2014
What are Unions Good For, Anyway?
What are Unions Good For, Anyway?
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• There is an inherent imbalance of power between employers and individual workers.

• Each worker needs a job to support themselves and their family ("work or starve").

• But the employer doesn’t need any particular worker.
  – Unless you are Wayne Gretzky or Steve Jobs!
  – Employer does need all workers to run the business.

• One-on-one, the worker has no power to reach a fair deal. Wages stay low, incomes are lopsided.

• By going to the boss collectively, workers can even the scales, reach a fair deal that shares the gains.
What are Unions Good For, Anyway?
Unions and YOU

• The advantages of union membership and collective bargaining for union members are clear:

  • **Wages**: On average across the whole economy, union members earn $5 more per hour (23%).
    — The positive effect is bigger for part-timers and women.
    — We work hard for those higher wages!
    — $50 billion/yr extra purchasing power from “union advantage.”
    — Would be $150 billion if everyone made a union wage.

  • **Pensions**: Union members have 85% coverage (versus under 30% for non-union).

  • **Other Union Advantages**: drug/health benefits, sick pay/LTD, health & safety, seniority rights, no unjust termination, a voice in the workplace, more.
Unions and Wages

Source: Unifor Research from Statistics Canada
Unions and CANADA

• The broader benefits of collective bargaining for a healthier, more inclusive society are also clear:

• **Inequality**: Where unions are stronger, income is more equal – and communities are stronger.

• **Productivity**: Value-added per worker is higher in unionized jobs, this benefits exports and the whole economy.

• **Purchasing Power**: Union wages support spending & jobs.

• **Health**: Better incomes, benefits produce healthier families – with fiscal savings for government, too.

• **Democracy**: Unions promote participation and voting.

• **Happiness**: International surveys show unionized countries report better happiness! (Denmark 😊).
Unionization and Poverty

Source: OECD
Theory of “Countervailing Power”

John Kenneth Galbraith

- Corporate influence will unbalance society.
- Need institutions to push in opposite direction.
- Unions are a crucial force.

...Imagine what Canada would look like today without unions???
Takeaway #1:

Workers are better off, and society is healthier, when unions and collective bargaining are strong.
Collective Bargaining Needs Support

• Predictably, most employers would prefer not to deal with workers collectively.

• Their resistance can defeat efforts to establish and maintain collective bargaining:
  – Firings.  – Refusal to bargain.
  – Relocation / Outsourcing.  – Violence.

• For stable collective bargaining to survive, supportive laws / policies / standards must be in place.
  – It must be a goal of policy to support bargaining.
Takeaway #2:

Collective bargaining will not survive without supportive laws & policies. This should be a government goal.
A Little History

where did our RIGHTS come from?
The Rand Formula and the struggle for union security
A Little History
A Little History
A Little History
A Little History: PC 1003

• During World War II, for first time, government codified collective bargaining, protected the right to organize, established a process for recognizing and certifying bargaining agents, and required companies to bargain.
  – Majoritarian system.

• Government recognized the broader social benefits of a stable collective bargaining system.

• No clarity yet on union security.
A Little History: The Rand Formula
A Little History: The Rand Formula

• Arbitrated end to 99-day strike by UAW Local 200 (now Unifor Local 200) at Ford in Windsor over union security.

• Sensible compromise: everyone who benefits from the contract, should pay toward the contract.
  – Even if they don’t “join.”

• Avoids the “free rider” problem that is recognized even in conventional economics:
  – If some people can access a good or service for free, its provision will be jeopardized.
“Free Riders”
Labour Rights: Always Contested

• Business never surrenders. If they are able to turn back labour rights, they will.

• History is marked by repeated attacks by business on labour rights & bargaining, whatever the excuse:
  – Early suppression in Industrial Revolution.
  – Banning unions as a “barrier to trade.”
  – 1930s: R.B. Bennett, Mitch Hepburn.
  – 1970s and 1980s: Dictatorships in many countries.
  – Canada today.
Takeaway #3:

We must be prepared and active to defend our labour rights, or they will be taken away.
Canada: The Current Attack

• Business is more aggressive: They once tolerated unions, but now feel they can go for the jugular:
  – “We can fully roll back the postwar system.”
• Many Conservatives (not all) have made a political choice.
• Their strategy: “Divide and Rule.” Stoke envy among those who don’t benefit from unions, to turn against unions (instead of turning against the boss).
• Result: New attacks on right to organize, right to strike, right to collect dues.
A Many-Headed Monster
A Many-Headed Monster

ALTA: Bill 45, 46
SASK: Ess. Service, Rand?
FEDERAL: C4, C525, C377, Strike
ONT: Rand?
NFLD, NB: Pensions
NS: 1st Contract
Federal Bills

• **C-4**: “Omnibus” budget bill
  – Unilateral power to define essential service (PSLRA).
  – Undermines H&S practices, right to refuse.

• **C-525**: “Private members’ bill”
  – Prevents certification, eases decertification in federal sector (where Unifor is biggest).
  – Totally lopsided voting system.

• **C-377**: “Transparency bill” (private members’)
  – Ties up unions in red tape, exposes advocacy activity.
  – Gutted in the Senate: victory? What can we learn?
The Biggest Monster Yet…
The U.S. Experience


• **DON’T USE THEIR LANGUAGE:** There is no such thing as a “right to work.”

• Call it what it is: The government makes it *illegal* to negotiate union security. (Not exactly “freedom”!)

• Now covers 24 states (incl. Indiana & Michigan).

• Dramatic impact on unionization, wages.

• Spillover impact on society: poverty, risk, division.

• No consistent impact on jobs.
## The U.S. Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>States With Check-Off</th>
<th>States Without Check-Off</th>
<th>Effect of Check-Off</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unionization Rate</strong></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>More than double</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% of wage and salary workers, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Avg. Weekly Wage</strong></td>
<td>$925</td>
<td>$760</td>
<td>22% higher</td>
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<td>($ per week, all employees, 2011)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Workplace Fatalities</strong></td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>30% lower</td>
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<tr>
<td>(per 100,000 workers, 2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family Poverty Rate</strong></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2 points lower</td>
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<td>(% of families below poverty level)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education Spending</strong></td>
<td>$12,730</td>
<td>$9,300</td>
<td>37% higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(state and local spending per K-12 pupil)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Manufacturing Jobs</strong></td>
<td>-33%</td>
<td>-30%</td>
<td>Bad all around</td>
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<td>(decline since 2000)</td>
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Source: Unifor Research from BLS, Census Bureau
Rand Formula Lies

• It’s “forced unionism”:
  – But workers must vote to form the bargaining unit (and can vote to end it, if they aren’t happy).
  – And ratify a contract with dues check-off in it.
  – They’re always free to leave a well-paid union job!

• Canada is the only country requiring union dues:
  – Remember: the Rand Formula is only relevant to the majoritarian system in Canada and the U.S.
  – Other countries have other systems, all aimed at supporting collective bargaining – all paying for cost of bargaining.
  – The U.S. is the outlier (lowest coverage in industrial world), and should not be our role model.
Diversity of International Experience

• **Germany**: Mandated works councils, sector-wide collective agreements.

• **Scandinavia**: Unions deliver social services, solidifying their coverage & financial base.

• **Australia**: Sector minimum agreements, unions have access to all workplaces.

• **Brazil**: Government collects a bargaining tax, forwards it to unions.
Unifor’s “Rights at Work” Campaign

• Top priority for our new union (and the whole labour movement).
• Must show that unions play a broader role in building the middle class and a healthy society.
• Must build alliances with moderate voices, isolate extreme Conservatives.
• Given the political problems faced by Harper, Hudak, and others, this IS a campaign we CAN win.
  – Cement labour rights for another generation.

unifor.org
Takeaway #4:

We CAN will this fight, if we are ready and active. Conservatives are vulnerable, and this could be a historic win.
“Rights at Work”: Strategy

1. **Educate** our members about labour rights, their history, and the threat we face.

2. Change the **public conversation** about unions and what we do (including by proposing positive reforms to labour law, not just resisting changes).

3. Mobilize support from **potential allies** among social partners, employers, enlightened Conservatives.

4. Increase the **political cost** on Conservatives for attacking labour rights and bargaining.

5. **Mobilize** our members and supporters before, during, and after upcoming elections.
“Rights at Work”: Elements

1. **Education** activities with membership (leadership tour).
2. Take campaign **through the union** (national and local).
3. **Canvass** every Unifor member with a “Rights at Work” card (with information on labour rights).
4. **Lobbying** / meetings / letters to politicians (federal, incl. Senate, and provincial), from leadership and from members.
5. Target vulnerable or “slim win” **Conservatives**.
6. Systematic approaches to **employers** to oppose attack on Rand (publicly or privately).
7. Systematic outreach & alliance-building with **local allies** (other unions, social movements, community agencies, others).
8. Marshall **research** evidence and experts to speak about benefits and social effects of collective bargaining.
9. Prepare for **workplace action** to defend labour laws.
The Canvass: Start With Our Members

• **Core idea:** Speak with every Unifor member, remind them where their rights came from, explain the current threat, and ask for their support.

• **The tool:** A “Rights at Work” card.
  – Better than any loyalty or air miles card!
  – After all, it’s union cards that created the middle class.
  – Unique features (QR code, screen cleaner).
  – Contains key facts on value of labour rights and bargaining.
  – Not a membership card (but could have name and local info).

• Approach each member to explain the campaign, give them their card & information, have a conversation.
The Canvass
## Timeline

- **Late February:**
  - Begin printing the cards and distribute to locals.
  - Telephone town halls to introduce the campaign to individual members.
  - Briefings for local leaders to plan the canvass.

- Perform the canvass in **March, April, May**.

- At same time: Systematic outreach in community:
  - Lobbying, approaches to employers, social allies.

- Wrap up canvass by **late spring**.
Local To Do List

1. Assemble membership lists.
   – To get personalized cards printed, develop tally lists.
   – Can use contractual right to information from employer.

2. Map your workplaces.

3. Determine best time / place / form for the canvass.
   – Plant gates? Breaks? Cafeteria? Special meetings?

4. Appoint coordinator in each workplace.
   – Barg. unit chair or designate; liaison for Memb. Mob.

5. See a briefing.

6. Perform the canvass; report progress to area office.
   – Treat it like an election campaign!
Remember the Takeaways:

1. Unions and collective bargaining are essential to a healthy society.
2. Bargaining requires supportive labour laws & policy to exist.
3. We must be ready to defend our labour rights, or we will lose them.
4. We CAN win a historic struggle to save our rights for a generation.
“Rights at Work”

Why Unions Matter, To You AND Your Community

Unifor Leadership Meetings, January/February 2014
Table Exercise

• We will encounter criticism and counter-arguments as we promote the message that labour rights and collective bargaining build a better society.
  – Sometimes from our own members.
• What are some of these counter-arguments?
• Let’s practice some of our responses.
• Form small groups. Fill out worksheet together. We’ll reconvene to discuss.
Report-Back

• You’ve identified some of the key arguments we will face as we take this campaign to our members, and into the broader community.

• Let’s discuss the arguments, and how we respond.

• We’ve developed some ideas, based on previous brainstorming sessions...
Tough Question #1

Why am I forced to pay union dues?

Possible Responses:

• The majority of workers in your workplace voted to form a union (and could vote to decertify if they didn’t want a union).
• The majority of workers in your workplace voted to approve a contract that includes dues check-off (and could vote to change that if they didn’t want it).
• The level of your dues is determined democratically by the elected local delegates to Unifor convention.
• Dues payments therefore reflect the majority decision.
• You benefit from the contract, and the services of the union. It wouldn’t be fair to others if you didn’t pay a fair share.
Tough Question #2

Unions are pricing Canada out of competition. We have to cut wages, or we will lose our jobs.

Possible Responses:

• Some of the most successful countries in world exports have even stronger unions (Germany, Scandinavia, Brazil).
• Low wages can’t guarantee your job. Someone else will always work for less. We should emphasize quality and innovation.
• By boosting purchasing power, unions help job-creation.
• US states that banned union security did not do better than other states in avoiding the recession and losing jobs.
• The Canadian dollar is falling back to normal levels. That will help our international position a lot.
Tough Question #3

It should be an individual “choice” to pay dues.

Possible Responses:

• It is certainly a democratic choice to pay dues, but it shouldn’t be an individual one.
• Our workplaces are not individualized. We work together, and our compensation and working conditions affect us all.
• The current system is fair: “majority rules.”
• We decide as a group (through card-check or ballot) to form a union, and the union must fairly represent everyone in the workplace.
• It’s only fair that everyone who benefits from a collective agreement, pays a fair share toward maintaining it.
Tough Question #4

I am not happy with my union. I shouldn’t have to pay dues to them.

Possible Responses:

• Everyone in Canada has experienced tough times in recent years, including unionized workplaces.
• Unions have fought hard to resist the downward pressure on workers, wages, and working conditions.
• Things would have been much worse without a union to hold the line, and maintain a collective voice against concessions.
• Unions are democratic organizations. You have a voice in your union. If you are not happy with how your union is performing, get involved to make a change.
Tough Question #5

I don’t even know what the union does with my money, so I don’t want to pay.

Possible Responses:

• Unifor is constitutionally required, both nationally and locally, to have financial reports for its membership.
• Financial reports are regularly audited, both nationally and locally.
• Your elected leaders make the best judgments about how to use dues revenues to support bargaining and other union activities – but if members disagree, that can be changed.
• Unlike corporations, the union’s finances are driven by, and accountable to, the interests of their members.
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