

How do Unions effect equality in the workplace?

Union is defined as “an organization of authorized employees representative of the workforce acting in the purpose of gaining negotiating benefits before management”. Unions use the platform to actively practice and implement actions that result in better and fairer workplaces. So, the area of their work is vast and continues to grow with changing needs. Protecting workers on the job, facilitating the negotiation with organizations' management, ensuring more transparent pay rates and promoting the policies are some of the examples. Unions ensure minimum standards like health and safety are consistently carried out and demand applicable and updated policies with consideration of real-life situations. So, they not only protect the employees but also benefit the organizations economically, allowing them to save on leaves, health care expenses and new hirings and trainings. They aim to balance the power employers have over employees and act inclusively to consider everyone, especially the most vulnerable. They use collective action to obtain the rights for fair pays and working conditions and they can even seek further assistance from legal services for unfair situations or behaviours at workplace.

Collective bargaining, a strong force Unions have, can contribute to elevating equality in the workplace and removing potential direct and indirect barriers for groups that have been given less attention and advantage in the work environment. Collective agreements, as a result of collective bargaining practice, affect employees and their rights extensively; but even more specifically, certain groups that are more sensitive and more prone to be exposed to discrimination. Examples of these groups can be women, Aboriginal people, minorities by race, religion, or sexual orientation and people with disabilities. Unions can play a great role in enforcing environments that do not tolerate but challenge hate and hate groups like the ones expressing racism. They can promote inclusion, visibility and social equity by being representative of all the groups that form the employee body; for example, pushing management towards implementing policies that serve women's rights. Defining these rights and their scale within the organization is also substantial that can be inquired into by the unions. For example, improving retirement security, medication accessibility, career advancement, pay and benefits, allowing better work and life balance for women can all be considered as part of women's rights. The obstacles for certain groups as a result of discrimination can influence their advancement and employment while equal visibility and opportunities should be provided based on merit. Having a collective agreement that is made with participation of the underrepresented groups in decision making and truly implementing it can create greater workplace democracy. Also by having representatives of each group, race, age, and gender in a union, there are better chances to tackle a wider range of potential risks threatening each group. (Swinton, K. 1995 & Canadian Labour Congress. 2019).

Any aspect relating to an individual's well-being and quality of life can be considered but some of the main defined aspects are social justice and economic equality allowing equal opportunities for employment and advancement for everyone. Economic security and retirement

income, allowing an acceptable Standard of living for employees and their families, safe workplaces, vacations and medical insurance are some of the basic but most fundamental ones.

These categories and the level of attention given to them can vary by the sector and this also highlights how important it is to have specific unions for different sectors. Unions are made and representative of the staff body so they can serve the public benefit and common good better by directly using their experience. They can push the limits and introduce new initiatives or equality and fairness concerns taking advantage of their experience and involvement but as their commitment in unions is voluntary and independent from their position, they do not have to be answerable to their seniors about their union activities; so this creates a democratic platform for them to be the voice of the employees and more freely pick up initiatives that broaden the range of equality in the workplace. It is a great platform for these specialized individuals to take advantage of the dynamic nature of collective bargaining to make sure standards are maintained and are getting updated based on the employees' needs or requests of underrepresented groups.

Unions can act on various levels; ranging from local to state and national levels; as they can unite different forces to fight for their rights and new causes even through movements and activism if needed. They can become powerful political forces protesting and demanding the officials to change policies affecting them; even things as great as the Labour Law that will serve them in the long term. These united acts from the authorized individuals that have the support of the rest of the community put officials in a tough position to respond to them.

There is strong evidence throughout the history of unions that they have largely influenced inequality and wage gaps. One of the most important benefits of collective bargaining has been its impact on reducing the salary gaps of women and men while leaving the discussion open for other premiums like maternity leaves and shift work. They also challenge the gap between the wealthy and others to support and foster a healthy middle class in the society (Engler, M. 2108).

Generally, they thrive to provide higher income for employees and with better stability and that is how they impact inequality by raising the bargaining power of workers. In Farber's words (Valenti, 2018), "A strong lesson is that when unions were strong and they were growing, they were organizing the less-skilled workers and raising their wages, and that tends to reduce inequality,"

To sum up, by using their collective bargaining power, Unions can be the collective voice of the employees that is louder and can attract more attention from the officials to take actions and be answerable in their positions by taking speedier actions responding to changes. Unions too, assist and carry some of the burden. They actively engage in improving the policies to better equality, identify the gaps, raise awareness and subsequently create a more positive vibrant working environment by turning all these practices into habits in the workplace.

References

Canadian Labour Congress. (2019). Canada needs a government committed to challenging hate and intolerance in all its forms retrieved from <https://inclusion.canadianlabour.ca/>, 2019.10.31

Engler, M.(August.21.2018). Labor Day 2018: Unions and the Battle for Equality accessed from <https://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/labor-day-2018-unions-and-battle-equality>, 2019.10.31

Swinton, K. (witner 1995). Accommodating Equality in the Unionized Workplace retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1639&context=ohlj>, 2019.10.31

Valenti, D.(June.21.2018). Princeton economists find that unions had historical role in helping address income inequality retrieved from <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2018/06/21/princeton-economists-find-unions-had-historical-role-helping-address-income>, 2019.10.31