



## **Unions have always been a positive force in society**

### **Unions create greater workplace democracy**

Through unions, working people have a collective voice at work and an avenue to equality, fair treatment and economic security. They provide a powerful check to the almost total power of management in the workplace and ensure workers have a voice in workplace decisions that affect them.

Unions assist workers in obtaining a decent wage so they and their families can enjoy a quality standard of living and financial security. They help workers achieve workplace benefits over and above legislated benefits and universal public programs. Vacations, extra medical insurance, disability and life insurance, and a retirement income are all areas where unions have negotiated enhanced provisions. Unions provide workers with greater job security and thus economic security for themselves, their families and their communities.

But unions play a much broader role in society.

### **Unions help strengthen democracy of nation states**

Unions have been, and continue to be, an important force for democracy, not just in the workplace, but beyond, in the community – locally, nationally and globally. Unions make democracy work better. They press for better social, economic and environmental policies, through various forms of political action and through coalitions with others who have common aims.

A just and democratic society depends on a healthy and free labour movement. It is no coincidence that in countries where there are free and active trade union movements, there are more democratic, transparent and representative forms of government.

In those countries where there is no union movement or where the movement is vulnerable, the vast majority of citizens continue to be trapped in poverty. It is in these conditions that instability and extremism thrive at the expense of democracy.

### **Unions promote greater economic equality**

Not only do democracies benefit from unions, so do economies.

Unions have historically been a major force in humanizing and democratizing the economies of nations. Unions promote higher levels of economic equality and social rights for all citizens.

Even the notoriously conservative World Bank agrees that unions are good for the economy. In its 2003 report entitled, “Unions and Collective Bargaining Economic Effects in a Global Environment”, which was based on more than a thousand studies of the effects of unions on the performance of national economies, the World Bank found that high rates of unionization lead to lower inequality of earnings, lower unemployment and inflation, higher productivity and speedier adjustments to economic shocks.

Most recently, a major International Labour Organization (ILO) study found that

the countries in which income inequality was on average lower tended to be those in which a greater proportion of workers were members of unions.

The ILO's study also found that higher rates of union density had a positive impact on the range of social rights afforded to citizens:

“The countries in which union density rates are higher are also the ones in which the welfare state is more developed, taxation levels higher and more progressive, collective bargaining more centralized and labour law both closer to international labour standards and better implemented.”

### **Labour rights – a key component of economic and social justice**

The growing body of evidence shows that laws and practices which promote unions and the right to collective bargaining make a major contribution to higher economic productivity to the benefit of the community as a whole.

The labour movement in Canada and its progressive allies must create greater public awareness and understanding of labour rights as a key component of a functioning democracy and an equitable and sustainable economy. We need to build effective political momentum and public support for progressive labour law reform.

