Changes to Work Unions

Labour unions offer employees convenience and ease when it comes to job security, fair working conditions, and medical plans. Their collective power allows them to better negotiate for equity rights, which leads to increased job satisfaction and promotes more productivity in the workplace. However, younger generations are now facing new challenges that require attention from unions. Seniority protects long time employees but poses a challenge to young employees who are entering the work force. In addition, it is no secret that housing in British Columbia has been on the rise, and without wage growth to accommodate for the increased prices, young workers struggle to find residence in their own province. To help young PEA workers against new disadvantages, labour unions should change their seniority policies to encourage merit-based promotions, routinely fight to raise wages in accordance to inflation, and provide extensive health care coverage.

Despite unions offering excellent job security, young workers and new-hires struggle to find peace when their coworkers have seniority over them. They have been accused of “[encouraging] restrictive work rules that impede workplace flexibility and undermine employee engagement” (ctd. in Pohler & Luchak, 2014, p. 1064). Unions protect their loyal workers and give them increased benefits over time, but young workers have less incentive to do their best when there are limitations on their rewards. Labour unions can sometimes fail to appreciate the talent and hard work that young workers have to offer. Despite honouring loyal employees being important, it is also important to recognize that new-hires can be just as deserving of special work benefits. When promotions or new positions open within the union, employees with more seniority are more likely to fill these positions despite other workers being more qualified. Rewarding long-time employees has benefits, but other employees may become unmotivated if they know that they will not be rewarded for their efforts, just because they have less seniority. If these workers become unmotivated, their quality of work will drop and the workplace will become unproductive. As Adrian Lee (2014) writes, “the hierarchical nature of unions is hurting their reputation among youth” (p. 53). With this in mind, both the employee and the employer would benefit from a change in policy which not only promotes based on seniority, but also considers qualifications and eligibility.

Senior citizens reminisce the days when they paid twelve cents for a litre of gas. The middle aged population gloats that they put themselves through university with a summer job and that today’s generation is lazy and unproductive. But the reality is that minimum wage earned through part-time jobs is no longer enough to pay tuition or a tank of gas. When students graduate with debt, they hope to pay back their money and begin a new life. However, the cost of living is rising and worker’s wages
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need to grow in accordance so that young workers can sustain themselves and stay in British Columbia. It is unrealistic for recent graduates to pay off their student debts and start living independently when costs are high and wages are insufficient. Even if these young workers can get by paying their bills, they should not have to sacrifice enjoyment from their lives by excessively budgeting. Phipps and Prieto stress that having a work and life balance “is neither a novel area nor a transient fad” (2016, p. 256) but rather is crucial in maintaining health and happiness in every individual’s life. By adjusting salary on a regular basis to accommodate for the rate of inflation, work unions in British Columbia can help young workers comfortably pay their bills while balancing work with their personal lives. If young workers cannot afford to live in British Columbia, the province will lose its youth culture as new generations are forced to move away. Unions can keep young workers in the province by helping them afford to be here.

Canada is known internationally for providing exceptional healthcare, and for making it accessible to all citizens. If labour unions can provide health coverage for all of their workers and prioritize their state of being, workers will perform better. Keeping employee bodies safe and healthy improves worker quality by maintaining their physical performance. Knowing that they have access to health coverage should they need it puts workers at ease. When they do not have to stress over making these payments, they are in a more secure mental state, which also improves the quality of their work. While the majority of large workplace unionized workers in British Columbia receive extensive health and dental care, less than half of smaller workplace (1-19 employees) workers have this coverage (BCFED, 2016). By providing all unionized workers with benefits, workers, without the worry of emergency expenses, will surely have reduced stress and be in both better physical and mental states.

By fighting for higher wages and benefits for their employees, work unions drive change in society by being role models whose footsteps can be followed. By questioning what changes need to be made for young workers in all of British Columbia, we can then decide what steps unions can take to improve the lives of their young employees. Switching to a merit-based promotion policy, increasing wages regularly to match the cost of living, and providing extensive benefit plans will likely increase job satisfaction and work productivity within unions. Young workers will pave the way to the future, so by investing in them, we can invest in the new world.
References


