

Unions: The Equalizing Factor

Between 1991 and 2000, Canada and the United States experienced a major economic expansion. Despite unique circumstances contributing to the current recession, it is worthwhile to look back on the so-called “good times” and ask who prospered, who didn’t and why?

In nearly every province, women still earn less than men and immigrants earn less than non-immigrant workers. A recent survey of working families in Canada confirmed the undemocratic nature of the most recent economic expansion.

The positive effect of union membership was among the few bright spots in the study. Unionized workers in Canada enjoyed higher overall wages and saw less income variation between male and female and immigrants and non-immigrants. Only education was a greater factor in determining higher median household income.

Among the study’s highlights:

- Unionized men working full-time earned an average of \$20.71 per hour while non-unionized men earned \$18.40 – a difference of 13% higher wages.
- Unionized women working full-time earned an average of \$18.70 per hour while non-unionized women working full-time earned an average of \$14.28 per hour – a difference of 31% higher wages
- 79% of unionized women had a pension plan while only 32% of non-unionized women had one.
- Unions also reduce the differential between lower and higher educated employees. Other studies show that union workers with a high school diploma earned 26.6 percent more than workers with the same education level in similar non-union positions.

As workers across North America search for ways to survive and improve their standing in the current workforce, union representation continues to provide answers. As they have been for years, unions are still the key to a stronger, better paid, less discriminatory and more democratic workforce.

For more information on the statistics, please visit the Canadian Labour Congress site www.working4you.ca.

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