

## **ORGANIZING - WHY ALL THE FUSS?**

- by John Aman, National Director of Organizing, CAW-Canada

In the labour movement, there has always been a lot of debate and discussion when it comes to organizing - its importance and the need for us to do that just that, 'organize.' A person can only guess the hectares of trees that have been mowed down to write about and evaluate this issue - it's likely enough to make most environmentalists cringe. But what exactly does 'organizing' mean and why all this talk?

Organizing, for the uninitiated, is the procedure in which a workplace goes from a non-union status to a unionized one. That might not sound like a significant achievement, but it has a tremendous impact on all of us. That's what all the fuss is about.

Many of us are union members today because when we were hired in our workplace, we were blessed to discover that the workplace was unionized. We had a collective agreement which enshrined our workplace rights and we didn't have to constantly look over our shoulders, especially once the dreaded probation period was over.

For about 68 per cent of the workforce, this luxury does not apply. The unorganized live and work in a constant probation period where their treatment, working conditions and everyday lives are governed by the boss' discretion and whims.

Organizing changes all that. There are countless benefits to organizing - for the workers who join, our current workplaces, our Local and National unions, our communities and our country. We all win when we organize, it's that simple.

The benefits to workers who join are obvious - it's like night and day in many workplaces. Those of us who are union members fail to realize the lack of rights, fairness, respect and dignity in many non-union workplaces. The rights and privileges that we enjoy were not mandated or given. They were negotiated and earned through our collective struggles. And even in 'good' non-union workplaces, there are no meaningful enforcement mechanisms to uphold the rules. It's like David vs. Goliath, and unlike the original story, the little person never wins.

But once unionized, contrary to what many employers want their workers to believe, the benefits are plentiful and almost immediate. Management must sit down, listen to workers' issues and work to reach solutions on their concerns. BBQ's and pizza days are no substitutes for a grievance procedure and a collective agreement.

The facts are also very clear when it comes to *union density*. The higher the unionization rate in any sector or industry, the better the wages, working conditions and standards across the sector. The more workplaces that unionize, the more opportunities we have to raise the standards. We can't leave that up to employers whose objectives are to decrease workplace standards in order to put more money in their pockets.

The more we organize, the greater our voice. Employers and politicians of all stripes have to listen to the collective. As we organize, we educate. As we organize we mobilize and as we organize, we fight back. Fighting back makes a difference and that is exactly what organizing is: fighting back against the status quo and fighting back to make a difference.

When we organize we raise our living standards. Our communities and country are based on all of us contributing fairly, for the good of the whole. The work of the CAW extends beyond the workplace - we are a progressive influence on public initiatives, social programs and economic policies.

The CAW and its members have consistently demonstrated their social commitments. Whether it is a United Way initiative, food bank drives, fundraisers for women's shelters, Tsunami or Katrina relief, picket line support, International social justice campaigns . . . we always step forward to help those less fortunate than us.

When we look around the world and see the countries with high living standards, good working conditions, full access to all levels of education, access to health care, lower crime rates, better environmental standards, they all have one thing in common. You guessed it, high levels of unionization. It is not a coincidence – unions are an important factor in the development of a just and fair society.

Unions make a difference, a big difference. Perhaps mainstream society will never give unions the accolades that we deserve, but that is not why we do what we do. We do it because it is the right thing to do. We organize because it is our obligation to help our fellow workers and to protect the quality of life of our own members.

If you are aware of anyone or any workplace that might benefit and need a union, please contact the CAW organizing department toll free: 1-877-495-6551 or e-mail: [organize@caw.ca](mailto:organize@caw.ca)

In solidarity

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