

What I foresee as the role of organized labour in the future.

Rachel Wang

The contributions of Canada's organized labour have ensured the quality of life for Canadians, protecting their rights and providing favourable working conditions. By helping more workers make decent wages and have more job security, unions are largely responsible for stabilizing the economy and stimulating its growth. As a result, more working people can afford housing, clothing, cars and other consumer goods. Moreover, Canada's labour movement has a long history of improving workers' everyday lives, fighting and winning many of the rights enjoyed by workers today - minimum wages, overtime pay, workplace safety standards, and so on. Today unions work hard to protect these rights for all workers, promoting higher levels of economic equality and social rights for all citizens. Despite the strategies unions are fighting to be implemented, unions are facing challenges such as demographic changes, technological changes, globalization and international competition; this may impact the relevance of organized labour in the future. Furthermore, there has been a declining trend in Canada's unionization rate; this results in lower membership fees and reduces the resources unions need to fight for their members' rights. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred interest in unionization. Heightened concerns around health and safety in the workplace have inspired more workers to seek union representation. Therefore, organized labour will need to focus its efforts on the areas of health and safety, rebuilding a fairer economy, and seeking ways to become more relevant and effective for Canadian workers.

As the world is transitioning back to in-person working from the pandemic, Canada's unions are providing a clear blueprint for a robust recovery. Canada's organized labours are calling on the federal government to focus on the country's economic recovery and social safety net in its budget. Firstly, they are urging the government to invest in the care economy in order to improve compensation for early childhood educators and child care workers, implement a workforce strategy and develop a multi-year capital investment plan to build new and expanded public child care facilities. Furthermore, unions are looking to make workplaces fairer for Canadians by bringing in 10 paid sick days and anti-scab legislation in the Canada Labour Code into effect in 2022. Not only that, unions are requesting a commitment to permanently increase the accessibility of employment insurance benefits and restore direct federal government contributions in order to improve EI access and benefit adequacy. Unions will continue to look toward implementing new strategies to ensure the health and safety of Canada's workers, and by maintaining and improving these efforts, Canadians will both improve worker productivity and overall well-being.

Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted long-standing problems across the workforce, such as unequal pay in the health care system and discrimination in the workplace, including racism and sexism. For example, care aids, dietary workers and cleaning staff are paid less today than they were during the SARS outbreak. Even before the pandemic, discrimination against people of colour, women, and other minority groups persist in the workplace. In fact, unions were a traditionally male-dominated environment, and many unions did not allow women to join. Moving forward, unions will work to reduce the pay gap and gender inequality in Canada, hence fighting for progressive policies that will shape a better future for all Canadians. These policies include: raising the minimum wage to a living wage, mandating paid sick days for workers, implementing the Pay Transparency Act, establishing affordable, accessible public child care with decent wages and conditions for childcare workers, and rebuilding the economy by funding public services and providing health community and social services, and education workers with decent wages and working conditions. Also, unions will work continue to work together with employers to develop internal policies and procedures, as well as take a proactive role in human rights training and education for their members and the workplace to create a non-discriminatory workplace. Accordingly, unions will continue to implement strategies for promoting women's leadership in unions, such as strengthening mentorship programs for women, to encourage more activism by female members. Such programs will improve unions through inclusivity and prioritization for all of their members, allowing more women and people of colour to feel protected and rise to positions of power. As organized labour continues to aim to

What I foresee as the role of organized labour in the future.

Rachel Wang

promote fairness, equality and freedom from discrimination, more people will be inclined to seek out unions.

Shifts in the workforce, such as artificial intelligence and demographic changes, are resulting in a steady decline in union membership. For example, the arrival of the digital age may result in the mass replacement of human labour by automation. The rising possibility of human substitution by intelligent machines puts in question the feasibility of labour unions' policies and their role in the future. Moreover, there has been a decline in Canada's unionization rate resulting in lower membership fees, which reduces the resources unions need to fight for their members' rights. Part of this decline is due to demographic shifts in the workforce. The low rate of youth unionization is due to the failure of engagement unions have with young people. As organized labour continues to work towards improving its relevance in the future, union leadership must ensure that the growth of automation and artificial intelligence does not lead to more punitive and discriminatory ways of working, but rather higher-skilled workers. Unions will also need to connect with young people so they can grasp their rights as workers and understand union benefits to promote engagement from the youth demographic. Due to the pandemic, the younger generation understands economic vulnerability and is more willing to accept the power of collective bargaining to help secure jobs with good wages, benefits and working conditions. Unions must focus on implementing outreach strategies that target the younger generation and encourage them to not only join unions but become participants in union activities. Utilizing digital media or creating subgroups that are tasked with promoting union awareness will boost engagement among youth. Organizing labour should focus on improving relevance among young Canadians to ensure quality resources are available for the future working class.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the existing inequity in Canada's workplaces and sectors defined by low wages, unstable hours and lack of basic unemployment rights. As a result, working people, particularly low-wage workers - who are disproportionately women and workers of color- have suffered and even lost jobs. Without unions, many workers are forced to work without personal protective equipment or access to paid leave. However, the pandemic has showcased that Canadians working lives have become increasingly unpredictable and less stable. This has boosted young workers' interest in labour unions and discover the benefits of collective action, which could reverse the long-term membership decline. Therefore, the future of organized should focus its efforts on the areas of health and safety, inclusivity and fairness in the workplace, and ensure relevancy in order to provide Canadians with a better quality of life and ensure proper living standards in the future. As we look into the future, unions will proceed to improve the health and safety of workplaces by providing health insurance, paid sick time and empowering workers to report unsafe conditions. Furthermore, unions will continue to help reduce gender and racial wage gaps through collective bargaining and win better wages and benefits for women and racialized workers. By continuing to focus on health, safety and equality, union membership will steadily increase, thus allowing unions to promote economic equality and build worker power, helping workers to win increases in pay, better benefits, and safer working conditions. As Canada continues to recover from the pandemic, workers are recognizing their power in the current labour environment and striving for better pay and working conditions. Overall, the role of organized labour will have an important role to play in the future for Canadian workers.

What I foresee as the role of organized labour in the future.

Rachel Wang