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# THE CUPE CONNECTION

Official Publication of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 38  
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## ANNUAL CHILDREN'S XMAS PARTY

The application form for the 2006 Children's Christmas Party to be held on December 9th is inserted into this issue. If you are a card carrying member of CUPE Local 38 and have a child/children born in 1996 or later, please complete and remit the form to mail code: 132 no later than the **November 30th deadline**.

If you require a union card or further information, please contact the office at 233-2700.



## LOCAL 38 AWARDS TWO SCHOLARSHIPS

The CUPE Local 38 PR & Education Committee is pleased to announce the successful applicants for this years scholarship/bursary. The committee had a difficult task in selecting from the largest group of submissions ever, as well as the best overall quality of submissions since the inception of the scholarships.

The applicants were asked to write a 1000 word essay on the benefits of belonging to a union. The essays varied in their approach by using statistical arguments as to why people are better off belonging to unions to personal experiences in belonging to a union. There were many essays that contained both these focuses in combination and to different degrees.

This years winners are Leah Zerke and Suzanne Dickinson. Leah is studying Business Administration Accounting at SAIT while Suzanne is a full time student at Queen's University.

The following are some excerpts from their submissions.

### Benefits of Union Membership by Leah Zerke

Being a member of a union requires that each individual be aware of what the union can accomplish for them and the community, in order for it to be helpful to them. Many people are greatly misinformed about what a union really does for them, and tend to only notice the fees coming off their pay check. The benefits one receives upon entrance into a union are plentiful. There are many personal and professional reasons for joining a union, but the one that stands out the most is the protection of individual rights and freedoms. Not only do unions help to ensure that conditions of em-

ployment are maintained, they often strive towards improvement and enhancement of current workplace standards. Unions are not hierarchical organizations where the little guy has no voice, but a conglomerate of many diverse employees who are all given equal rights to voice their opinions and concerns. Unions also provide clarity with written contracts and trained shop stewards, who assist in consistent and measurable outcomes.

Unions make it possible to deal with issues one individual might typically feel too overwhelmed to handle. From time to time employers make errors in the legal working standards, such as hours allowed between shifts and payment for overtime hours. The employee may or may not notice these errors, and if they do notice, might feel too intimidated to inquire about or dispute them. Unions act as a liaison between employees and employers, which levels the playing field dramatically. Filing a grievance through the union avoids the stress of trying to resolve a complex situation alone, directly with the employer. Employers are trained on the legalities of many situations, as are key members of your union. Unions bring together employees and enable them to feel as though they belong to a team, rather than being one small individual versus a very large corporation. Maintaining employees' rights is a priority, and has much less chance of being overlooked with membership to a union.

Membership with a union presents employees with a collective voice that has a much greater chance of being heard, thus giving individuals a chance to make changes they would otherwise be unable to make. This generally works because there is power in numbers. Unions provide a comfortable lifestyle for employees, because their individual concerns are acknowledged and resolved in a much more straightforward manner. Unions not only ensure present employment standards are met; they investigate future opportunities to improve workplace standards and the quality of life for their members.

Unions generally are involved in social and ethical issues and can bring these issues to the forefront for the membership to "lend a voice". CUPE in Canada appears to be the "watchdog" of pertinent issues ranging from wait times

in health care to a response on safety in schools. Unions are also a required component in the political arena and have the ability to mobilize and assist the "smaller voices". Each Canadian will at some time benefit from the work of this major union which improves our quality of life in communities as well as on the job. This can bring a feeling of general wellbeing and understanding to your community which can enrich and enlighten.

Localized workplace improvements are made through implementing wage increases, work hour reductions, and increased holidays. In particular, pension benefits ensure that the "golden years" are indeed achievable. These changes are usually made through a transitional bargaining process, but in some cases the choice to strike is made. The ability to participate in this decision is only given if you are a member of your union. This said, declining membership to your union is actually revoking a major choice regarding your personal future.



### **Benefits of Belonging to a Union**

## By Suzanne Dickinson

Unionized workers experience wage and pay benefits that non-unionized workers have difficulty negotiating with their employer. The Canadian Labour Congress states that unionized workers are earning \$5 more per hour than exempt employees. This is supported by a recent Canada-wide study performed by Job Quality Canada, which shows that across all employment sectors, unionized employees earn higher wages than their non-unionized colleagues. This is particularly true for unionized women, who earn significantly more per hour than non-unionized women. In turn, this higher pay for unionized women reduces the well-publicized wage gap between men and women and is a step towards equal pay for equal work. In addition, unionized employees are about half as likely to work unpaid overtime as non-unionized employees in most employment groups. Unionized workers in utilities, transport and wholesale are only one-third as likely to work unpaid overtime as their exempt counterparts, while those in manufacturing are one-fifth as likely. Thus, unions play a key role in ensuring that workers are paid in full for all of their overtime hours.

Students can also benefit by entering into unionized positions and joining the union. In my previous summer positions, and when conducting my job search, I found that the average wage for most student positions was between \$4-8 less than the wage offered for this position. In addition to earning more, I am also gaining real and valuable experience. Unlike some of my previous summer positions or those occupied by other students of my acquaintance, I am not exploited as cheap labour or given menial tasks. I am given the opportunity to apply, expand and grow my skills and to be a meaningful contributor to the organization. In large part, these rare but highly positive qualities of this student job are because the union has protected this position and ensured that the value of this position is not undermined by exploitation of its incumbent.

Unions ensure that employees' jobs are secure. An external employee is only hired if no-one in the union is qualified for the open position. In the event that layoffs occur, unionization ensures that employees with seniority in the union retain their positions. If the organization later needs

to re-increase their workforce and the company reopens some positions the former employee is the first person to be offered the job. In this way, union members are somewhat protected from economic downturns.

Those who oppose unions may claim that unions have a negative effect on productivity. However, a research article by Bruce Kaufman found that the performance effect of unions on productivity of employees is at about zero. Management may attempt various strategies to prevent unions in the workplace, because it is more beneficial for them to exploit their employees by paying them less or by asking them to work long hours, under the threat of losing their job if they refuse.



### Thought for the Month

A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a detour.

# LOCAL 38'S SAFETY COMMITTEE INSPECTS PUBLIC BUILDING

The City has been forced to move employees back into the Public Building prior to a complete retrofit of the building. This has caused members to express concerns with many aspects of the building, including air quality, the quality of the carpets, and the cleanliness of the windows and walls.

Based on these concerns Local 38's Health & Safety Committee, the Corporate Safety Advisors and Corporate Properties inspected the Public Building in early October. While the building is showing its age and the carpets are in need of replacement, it does not constitute an unsafe working environment.

The committee will continue to monitor the building over the next year. The City has indicated that a number of employees in the Public Building will be relocated prior to next summer.

## **REGULAR MEETING**

**Tuesday, OCTOBER 24 2006**

**7:00 p.m.**

**Union Office (NEW LOCATION)**

**1439—9th Avenue South East**

**BUSINESS: Regular**

### **ELECTIONS:**

- 1) Two (2) Executive Members—Term till April, 2007**
- 2) Trustee—Term till April, 2007**
- 3) Trustee—Term till April, 2008**
- 4) Committee Elections to fill vacancies**
  - 1) Social Committee—1 Member**
  - 2) PR & Education Committee—1 Member**
  - 3) Equal Opportunities—3 Members**

**There will be a motion at this meeting to amend the bylaws. To pass amendments a 2/3 majority vote of those members in attendance is required. These amendments are administrative and deal mainly with the stewards committee.**