



January 30th, 2020

Dear Editor,

I write in response to the recent Brian Jones's column "Snowmageddon buries St. John's, uncovers social justice." (Telegram, January 29th, 2020).

Mr. Jones left me puzzled. He argued the obvious, that unionized workers tend to have protections that make life more bearable, even during a week-long city shut down. Not so for low-wage workers who find themselves unprotected and left to the whims of their employers and market forces.

The logical conclusion from this argument is that there is value in belonging to a trade union, whereby by coming together workers are better able to secure improved working conditions, salary and benefits.

Our trade union history traces the hard-won gains that were necessary to ensure fairness and dignity for workers. It was through workers struggle that we won the 40-hour work week, weekends, vacations, child labour laws, maternity leave, overtime, minimum wage, health and safety protections, workers compensation, pension security and the right to organize. And yes, some collective agreements cover compensation during states of emergencies. Some of those workers' rights have been enshrined in labour laws so that all workers can benefit from minimum standards of work. Our Federation continues to push for stronger employment standards, especially with the changing world of work.

As for income inequality, unions bargain fair compensation for the work their members do. Obviously - not all jobs are paid the same.

Thanks to the work of unions, we have a middle class that is able to participate in our market economy, purchase a car and maybe a house, take a vacation, help their kids with their tuition fees and pay their taxes.

With the state of emergency, we can appreciate that the local small-business owner who relies on day- to-day sales to survive will have difficulty paying wages to their full-time and part-time workers.

However, the giant retailers and food chains around this Province can, and should, offer better compensation and protection for their workers. It is these same corporations, often foreign-owned, who go to extremes to keep wages low and ensure their workplaces are never unionized. The same ones who amass millions of dollars of profits each year, some of which may not even stay in Newfoundland & Labrador.



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As to Jones's point that not every worker has such protections or abilities, is to state the obvious. The fact is, the majority of workers in Newfoundland & Labrador are not unionized. However we continue to advocate for improved labour legislation to make it easier for workers to join a union. Not an easy battle to win. In addition we are leading the fight for a \$15 minimum wage as a step towards a living wage for all workers.

The fact that unions have benefitted workers is the bread and butter of our existence. We take pride in any victory where workers get a fair deal.

Sincerely,

Mary Shortall
President, Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Labour

JR/MS
Unifor 597