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### Women in the Workplace and the Importance of Unions

Unions often represent the idea that workers should be treated fairly and that there are certain standards that need to be upheld in the workplace. If these standards are not upheld, then the union will intervene on the person's behalf to find out why these standards are not being upheld and what the employer intends to do about it. The union will also undergo negotiations on behalf of the people for items such as higher or fair wages, better work conditions or better health benefits. (Canadian Labour Congress, 2021).

Women have been fighting for equal rights in the workplace for years. Women often come upon discrimination in the workplace because of their gender. They can be stereotyped for certain jobs because stereotypically, women are seen as being caring and soft, which would make them the perfect fit for being a nurse, but not as an engineer, according to some people. When they are stereotyped like this, others think that they are not suited for specific jobs because they couldn't possibly have the skills needed for the job based on the fact that they are female.

"Only 16 percent of corporate officers in the United States are women, and only about 1 percent of CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies are occupied by women." (Baron & Branscombe 2017). This is a prime example where females have a hard time penetrating a traditionally male dominated job and if they do manage to get in, being treated the same as their male coworkers is a fight that needs to be fought every day.

Women also often face the glass ceiling effect where there is "an invisible barrier that prevents women and other equity-seeking groups, regardless of their skills or qualifications, from advancing into leadership positions within organizations. While in theory, nothing prevents a woman from being elected to a top leadership position, the glass ceiling represents the subtle ways that organizations devalue and doubt women's leadership skills based on gender stereotypes." (Ross & Savage, 2020)

This is why Unions are important for women because they give women a platform and equal footing to fight for equality in the workplace. "Unions also provide an arena in which they can actively engage with fundamental issues affecting their home and work lives. (Briskan & McDermott, 1993) Women have needed unions in order to ensure that they were being treated fairly whether it was contesting the pay gap between females and males of the same profession or ensuring that they received the same opportunities as males for advancement in their careers. The Union has also fought for women in the way of some workplaces having paid daycare to take the burden off women who are trying to balance work and home-life thus ensuring that women had the same equal opportunity as men in their choice to work.

"Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey data reveals that, as of 2019, women made up 53.1 per cent of union members. That's up from 45.8 per cent in 1998 and 29 per cent in 1978. (Statistics Canada, 2021) These numbers clearly show that women see the importance of the Union and what it can do for them. One way the Union has worked for women is by women being in positions of power within the Union. By women being

in these positions of power, it shatters the stereotype of women not being fit for powerful leadership roles and it encourages others by showing it is possible to be female and hold a position of power.

Women also being in these roles allows there to be a female point of view when issues arise so that it is no longer just from a man's point of view, which is important because females face different challenges than men do that they can speak to.

A few examples of a Union having a female in a leadership role is CUPE in 1975 when Grace Hartman was elected as its national president and she was the first female unionist to hold a top position in a Canadian union. (Macdowell, 2013) Jan Simpson was the first Black woman to lead a national union in Canada, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. (Ross et al, 2020) This was an especially important message to send that you could be female AND a women of colour in a top position.

Unions have benefited women throughout history and continue to play an essential role in workplace equality. With more women being in public sector unions than men, the issue of work equality will continue to be at the forefront where slowly but surely important progress is being made!

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