

In your opinion, what is the most significant gain workers have received universally across Canada as a direct result of union activism since the Trade Union Act of 1872? And why?

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There are many aspects that make the Trade Union Act of 1872 (TUA) extremely important to union history. Through this act workers became legally allowed to negotiate with their employers by using the collective as one union. This caused increases in job security, workplace safety, collective bargaining, legalization/recognition of unions, access to support and resources, plus many others gains for workers. The TUA introduced many crucial protections and rights for Canadian workers, collective bargaining with the right to strike was the most significant gain because it empowered workers to fight for fairness in the workplace. Collective bargaining power is the most important result of the TUA because it serves as the essential backbone of change. It actively shaped working conditions and laid the foundation for lasting improvements in labor rights.

Collective bargaining is the process where unionized workers, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine wages, benefits, hours, job safety, and other conditions. This allows employees to advocate for themselves and is effective because of the power of the collective. It provides a balance in the power between employer and employees. Without collective bargaining employees would have no advantage in bargaining and because of its collectivity, it's not just one person advocating for change and receiving consequences. Everyone receives both, it is worth it because withholding labour will jeopardize the business profits. It ensures that workers are not just passive participants in the economy, but active contributors who can advocate for their own wellbeing, fair treatment, and dignity at work.

Collective bargaining has allowed workers to secure some of the most basic rights many take for granted today: minimum wage, breaks, overtime pay, safe working conditions, maternity leave, the 5 day work week and more. These were not simply handed out by generous employers or governments; today's basic rights had to be won at negotiation tables by strong unions backed by organized labor. The reason collective bargaining is significant is because of the continuous process not a one and done approach. The bargaining cycle allows workers to adapt to the changes in economic conditions while rights are continuously protected. Without collective bargaining, the rights granted in the TUA would have no real enforcement or weight.

Collective bargaining played an important role in the 1872 Printer's Strike and the 2025 Air Canada strike, showing its importance across different centuries. In 1872, when Toronto printers demanded a nine-hour workday the situation was cluttered with legal challenges. Strikes were illegal at the time, punishable by imprisonment on charges of criminal conspiracy. However, the growing public support for the printers' cause led to the recognition of collective bargaining, giving workers the legal means to negotiate

their demands without fear of criminal prosecution. This shift in power dynamics enabled workers to push for better conditions and ultimately played a key role in the passing of the 1872 TUA. Which made collective bargaining a core component of workers' rights in Canada. In the present years, collective bargaining proved to be critical once again during the Air Canada strikes. Pilots in 2024 and cabin crew this year, were seeking better wages, job security, and work-life balance, leveraging their collective power to reach a resolution that avoided prolonged disruptions. In both cases, collective bargaining provided workers with the legal framework to challenge employers, address grievances, and secure fair agreements, highlighting its continued relevance in shaping labor rights.

The Trade Union Act of 1872 introduced historic gains such as union recognition, protection from prosecution, and the right to organize. Yet, without the ability to act on those rights, their impact would have been limited. Collective bargaining is what truly differentiates these rights, transforming union recognition into real leverage. It's not just about the right to exist as a union; it's about the power to negotiate tangible changes. While other labor gains may be static, collective bargaining is dynamic. It allows each generation to redefine what fair labor looks like, responding to evolving challenges like precarious gig work, automation, and economic inequality. In this way, collective bargaining remains the most significant gain from the 1872 TUA, ensuring the act's legacy continues to evolve with the dynamic landscape of labor.

The Trade Union Act of 1872 was a turning point in Canadian labor history. No part of it has had a more lasting and meaningful impact than the right to collective bargaining. It was through this process that workers found their voice, built power, and achieved lasting improvements in their lives and workplaces. The courage of the 1872 Toronto printers sparked collective bargaining and became the heart of union activism, not just a right, but the foundation for every major labor victory since. Due to these reasons, I believe it is the most significant gain Canadian workers have received because of union activism.