**UNCLASSIFIED - NON CLASSIFIÉ**

**Bob Haywood Bursary 2021**

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* 1. **Do workers of today take their rights for granted?**

When I think of this question, I had to really reflect upon a few of the rights that I am currently aware of. Here are a few that come to mind, and I will elaborate on each of them in the following paragraphs. As a worker, I have the following rights: to receive a competitive salary, to participate in collective agreement negotiations, to have access to benefits such as: short term disability, and maternity benefits, to have access to safe working conditions, and to work in an environment that is free from discrimination, harassment.

It’s my understanding that unions were formed in Canada in the late 1800’s. When I think of the word “union” it represents a group of people who are working for a common interest and/or purpose. The act of having the freedom to join a union, or to start the process is in itself a right. This right is not granted equally amongst many countries.

As a government employee, joining the union is an obligation. Some might not be aware of significant milestones that have been achieved to date.

Workers often take the right to receive a competitive salary for granted. They might not be aware that this item is often negotiated during collective bargaining negotiations. And when these presentations are being done, there are experts who present rationales for wages, and salary increases (which also might include cost of living allowances). We should be proud of the people who work on our behalf during these negotiation periods. I can speak of the fact the wages for government workers are indeed competitive. When I speak to colleagues or family members in other countries, who aren’t unionized, I often hear stories of low wages, poor compensation for overtime, and a great lack of salary increases over time.

Workers have the ability to participate in or provide suggestions with regards to collective agreement negotiations. Through various locals, workers have the opportunity to be kept informed of collective bargaining negotiations. And if they attend a bargaining conference, they can be nominated, and secure votes to participate at the negotiation table. To have the ability to allow workers to come together to have “their” say is very important, and it also gives them opportunity to see how negotiations are conducted.

If a worker becomes injured on the job, or has to take a leave of absence, in most cases they will be entitled to some sort of compensation. If it’s an injury, there would be access to short or long term disability benefits. If an employee has to take leave without pay, then they would be entitled to various leave options such as: leave without pay (whereby they would receive unemployment insurance), leave with income averaging, maternity leave, etc. As we know, the maternity and parental leave benefits has been significantly improved over the years. The leave is not only applicable to mothers, but it can be shard with a partner, and more recently the leave has been extended from 12 months to 18 months. In my mind, I was always of the belief that maternity/parental leave was always for 12 months. In the late 1990’s, Ontarians weren’t entitled to be on leave for 12 months. Canadians are fortunate to have generous benefits for new parents. When compared to the US, they don’t have a paid maternity leave policy, which has been a constant issue for new parents.

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Lastly, to have the ability to go to work in a safe environment is something that many workers don’t think about. In the workplace, the buildings are kept clean, safety protocols are maintained according to industry standards, and workers should be free from discrimination and harassment. Most workplaces have health and safety committees (workers are encouraged to join them), and they have the ability to approach their managers regarding any health and safety issue that may arise. The same goes for those employees who are experiencing any form of discrimination or harassment. These items are treated seriously, and mechanisms have been put in place to deal with them.

In conclusion, when compared with other countries, workers in Canada do take some of their rights for granted. But at the same time, they just might not be aware of the work that was done before they became employed. Perhaps they should be reminded of the current and past achievements, and by doing so, they will have a greater appreciation for the rights that they have today. And by being aware of what they have, they can advocate for others.