

Unions are continuing to make gains with regards to important issues like racism and LGBTQ+ rights. Through collective bargaining they continue to strengthen existing language these protections provide. If not for the fact they are protected to a certain degree, I would definitely choose to write about one of them.

Looking past the recent advancement of those important causes, I believe the next thing unions need to fight for is more work life balance and where possible entrenching the right to work from home into collective agreements.

COVID -19 and the world's response to it rocketed "work life balance" to the top of the catchphrase list. Although in use long before that, the environment in which we existed through the pandemic was altered so greatly, practically overnight, which thrust the topic into the mainstream. The new stressors associated with life during a global pandemic necessitated significant, previously unthinkable lifestyle changes. As we approach the 30-month mark of the world's response, indications are that employers are anxious to get people back into the workplace.

The necessity of this shift back to working in offices is being hotly debated by workers and employers all across the country. The famous Subway meme is being used by workers in Government of Canada departments. Those departments are telling workers they need to return to the office to support local businesses, but more specifically one department that used the Subway sandwich shop near their building....and that meme was born.

Although being consulted, unions are no co-managers, so the decision ultimately falls squarely on the shoulders of the employers. As departments gradually unveil their policies there has not been much reason for optimism. Based on what we have seen thus far, employers are not basing their return to the office policy decisions on data accumulated over the past couple of years. That data shows how well workers transitioned from working in the office to their homes and that initial productivity and work discipline concerns were not substantiated.

Since employers are continually showing their desire to regain that control, they forfeited through the pandemic, my belief is unions should be trying to entrench this right, where practical, into future collective agreements.

There are human, environmental and economic justifications for this. The first harkens back to work life balance. Over the last 30 years people have grown accustomed to the extra time in their life. Hours saved with no commute have been put to good use and losing that flexibility will have grave implications to many. Mental health in the workplace is approaching crisis levels, why make the situation worse by unnecessarily converting discretionary hours into time spent in white knuckle traffic.

That is a perfect segue into the environmental consequences of forcing unwilling workers back into the office. The waste and greenhouse gasses associated with such a mandate contravenes what Canada stands for. Known as a world leader in fighting climate change, it goes against the very fabric of what we have stood for all these years.

The economic reason is simple actually and I say this with no disrespect to Subway or their delicious sandwiches. That government department's logic simply does not hold

water. If Joe or Jane Public is not buying a coffee on their break or something to eat on their lunch, you can rest assured they are spending that discretionary money elsewhere. It is getting back into circulation and driving the economic engine, just mostly through businesses that are not in close proximity to office buildings.

It will be interesting to see what the government and private sector do over the coming months. I am certainly on the side of unions and their fight to protect their members right to work from home. I am just beginning my two-year Network Administrator program, but I am hopeful that when I enter the workforce, I am able to have the opportunity to work from home at least part of the time.