



Women's Right to a Union



Their union booms:

The Organized Tailoresses to Hold an Open Meeting. The Tailoresses' Protective union held a very successful meeting in Temperance Hall last night. A number of new members were initiated, and it was decided that the next meeting should be an open meeting, and to invite the members of the sister organizations of bookbinders, shoe-workers and Women's Union League to be present. The Toronto Daily Star, 1894, Front Page.

(From page 10 of the OFL Book: "A Century of Women and Work")

For over a century, women have used organizing into a union as a vehicle to pull themselves out of low wage ghettos, increase their pay and improve their standard of living. In the year 2007, we find labour laws which continue to discriminate against women in low wage jobs, making it very difficult for them to exert their right to be in a union. In this year's Provincial election it is urgent that Parties which support this discrimination be held accountable.

Union representation matters to women. Studies continue to show that women and racially visible workers want unions. Women know that unionized workplaces have significantly higher wages and benefits than non-union workplaces. Union members make 26% higher wages than non-union workers. For full-time union members, wages are 19% higher than non-union and for part-time union workers wages are 66% greater than non-union. Unionized workers have significantly better access to dental, medical and pension plans, longer paid vacation and leave entitlements and human rights protection in the workplace such as protection from harassment and discrimination.

During the mid 1990s the Harris/Eves conservative government slashed the rights of workers to join unions. One key area of this attack was to abolish card certification. Card certification is a process where workers sign union membership cards as evidence they wish to join a union. Where the percentage of employees signing cards was between 40% and 55%, a secret ballot vote was held. This ballot was necessary because a clear majority of employees had not indicated their support for the union. However, where a clear majority of employees (55% or more) signed cards, the Ontario Labour Relations Board could certify the union as the bargaining agent for those employees. The Labour Board also had the power to order the certification of a union when it was proven that an employer interfered to the point where a fair vote could not be held because of a poisoned environment.

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The Harris/Eves Conservative Government abolished the of majority card certification process in 1995. Workers were forced to vote even if 100% of workers signed union cards. The effects of these changes saw employers increasingly successful in keeping unions out as they used intimidation and coercion to get their employees to vote against unionization.

Premier McGuinty had committed to improving labour relations in Ontario and to correct the imbalance created by the Harris/Eves government's anti-worker, anti-union policies. In 2004, the McGuinty government announced changes to the *Labour Relations Act* to restore majority card certification, but only in the construction sector. The changes were not extended to other sectors such as retail, health care and hospitality where the majority of workers are women.

Since 2003 the McGuinty Liberals:

- Restored majority card certification only to the male dominated construction sector.
- Brought in labour law of card signing and union vote that leaves in place significant barriers to women, racially visible workers and immigrant workers being able to access their right to a union.
- Brought in labour laws that leave women, racially visible workers and immigrant workers vulnerable to employers' intimidation and coercion during the time leading to a vote.

What Women Need

Women must have their democratic right to join a union restored. Women want to have the freedom to join a union without being vulnerable to employers' intimidation and coercion.

Ask Your Local Candidate:

- Do you and your party support working women's right to join a union without being vulnerable to employers' intimidation and coercion?
- Will you and your party commit to changes to labour law to prevent employers' interference with a worker's right to choose a union?
- Will you and your party commit to restoring majority card certification for all Ontario workers?

Women know that pre-election promises won't make up for years of chronic under-funding to the programs and services they need. Women know that health care matters, pay equity and employment equity matters, income security and safe affordable housing matters, ending poverty and violence against women matters, good jobs matter. In the 2007 election women have the voting power to set the future political direction of the province.

Pledge of Support

Women know that pre-election