

A union means

we'll go on

strike ?



Many people automatically think of strikes when they think of unions.

Yet according to government statistics, over 90% of contract negotiations in this country are settled without a strike. The time lost due to strikes is not the economic problem that some people would have us believe. For the Canadian work force, the average amount of time lost due to strikes is approximately one day per year for each worker. But the amount of time lost per year due to sickness is eight days and for unemployment, seventeen days per year are lost.

Certainly the legal right for unionized employees has an effect on negotiations. This right is an important equalizer in the development of employer-employee relations. The legal right to strike allows employees to sit down at a negotiating table with a substantial degree of the economic power that the employer has already.

As unorganized employees, most of our wages fall significantly below the average wage in B.C. of \$1157 per month. While it is true that we lose wages during a strike, still from a simple dollar and cents point of view strikes can pay. For example, unionized cashiers in supermarkets, who have been on strike a few times in B.C., and have threatened strike action more often, now earn \$7.80 an hour. This means that they could now go on strike for an average of four months a year and still make a higher annual wage in the remaining eight

months than bank tellers get paid in an entire year. Of course they have not, and will not, go on strike anywhere near four months a year. So here is a case where even with loss of wages during strikes, a group of workers clearly is financially better off than workers who do not have the right to strike.

In our union, all members first vote on the proposals to be taken to the negotiating table by our elected contract representatives. If a collective agreement cannot be reached, then we usually apply to the government for a conciliator, a third party who attempts to mediate the negotiations. For industries like banking that fall under federal jurisdiction, the use of the conciliator is compulsory. It is only after mediation fails that the membership of a union would strike. In SORWUC, a strike vote is done by secret ballot and only our members who are employees of the particular company in negotiations can vote.

Our union was formed by women in Vancouver to organize employees in the clerical and service industries. None of us can afford to go on strike. Obviously we will vote to accept any reasonable contract with an employer. As well there are many other options besides the strike - publicity about an employer who relies on a public image; a boycott by customers; the 1 or 2 day strike; the collective refusal to do overtime or all the 'extra jobs'. But we can no longer afford to sit quietly waiting for our employer to voluntarily improve our wages and working conditions.

For more information, please contact the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) and if you work in a bank, the United Bank Workers, a section of SORWUC. #1114 - 207 W. Hastings, Vancouver, B. C. 681-2811 or 684-2834

I would like further information about SORWUC _____
I would like to join _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____ WORKPLACE: _____

All replies in strictest confidence.