

Working together to accomplish more than we can as an individual is the heart of what it means to be part of a union.

150 years ago, people acting together fought for a shorter work week, changing the lives of millions of families. During the depression, a group of unemployed workers trekked across the country, won the hearts and minds of Canadians and helped create unemployment insurance. In 1965, a group of government workers defied the law to force the government to bargain collectively with them. Within weeks, the “wildcat” led to all public service workers in Canada getting the right to join a union.

Worker protection, parental leave, Canada Pension Plan, Medicare and so many other benefits we cherish in Canada today come from the ability of people to sacrifice, fight and work together for something better.

I am proud to be the president of the Union for Northern Workers but I know that our ability as a union to make positive change doesn't come from any personal strength but instead from our members' strength as a collective.

Strength comes from people who sacrifice their time to participate in their Local's meetings. Strength comes from those who march together, even in the most frigid weather, to show unity. Strength comes from the member who goes to work proudly wearing orange to show they support their bargaining team's efforts to negotiate a fairer contract for them. Our strength is in our solidarity and our solidarity is our strength.

It is not always easy to be part of a collective. There are powerful forces that will always be lined up against you. Sometimes it is going to be a struggle. Sometimes there will be doubt and it may seem there's an easier path just to go your own way and look out just for yourself.

I know it's easy to divide people at these times. We see it every day these days in the news or in politics. But we can do better. As Benjamin Franklin put it many years ago, we must all hang together or for sure we are all going to be hung separately.

We can say I will stand with my co-worker. I am not going to go my own way or just stand idly by. I am going to join with others and take action, not necessarily for myself — but for my neighbors, my community and for future generations.

In the tough times we have to remember that we have weekends, pensions, employment insurance and paternity benefits because of all those who came before and were strong in the face of struggle.

Right now in our territory, thousands of public service workers are negotiating a new collective agreement. Hard working people fighting for better job security and a fairer contract.

These workers have been without a collective agreement for over three years and, unfortunately, after many months of talking we still can't get a fair agreement from the government. It's frustrating.

I know that if we hang together, if we support one another and stay strong in our fight for what's fair, history has shown us that a bunch of workers can stand together and accomplish great things.

In solidarity,

Todd Parsons