

The Necessity of Strike Action

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6/29/2018

Unions have been, and continue to be, a very important part of many jobs today. Unions have existed since the 1700's (Cussen) and have been used as an intermediary between the world of employers and employees. Unions are so important because, through the use of collective bargaining, they are able to give the power to negotiate to their employees. With this power, employees are able to negotiate for benefits and other favorable working conditions that they may want and need. Although unions have multiple ways to achieve their goals for their employees, one of their strongest and usually last tactics is a strike. Strikes can be very difficult to organize and perform as they can be risky but sometimes they are necessary when the unions have no options left and feel like they need to stand their ground to accomplish their goals.

Although there are not as many strikes in today's world when compared to the 1900's, I believe there is still sometimes a need to strike. I believe this is the case when all other negotiations and strategies to obtain a reasonable benefit or working condition have failed and you still need to accomplish something. Fraser Oliver, President of the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association stated that strikes are "necessary as a last resort after all parts of a collective bargain have broken down and when all possibilities of reaching a collective bargaining agreement are exhausted." Two recent examples of the necessity of strike action involve junior doctors in August 2016 and higher education professionals in March 2018 (Simms). In the case of the junior doctors, they began to strike in an attempt to undo a recent change that had been made to their contracts that saw their premium weekend and unsociable shift pay redefined to give new doctors less pay for these reclusive shifts (Nick Jephson). The higher education professionals used their strike in an attempt to save their pension from being axed (Cook). In both of these cases, the employers were unwilling to deal with the union fairly on these matters until the strike happened and then both situations ended with an overwhelming majority voting to reopen discussions. While those are two recent examples of people needing to strike, there are many other issues that can arise wherein employees and unions will need to strike to protect and change including dissatisfaction with company policy, the wrongful discharge or dismissal of workmen, disputes connected with wages and many other legitimate issues and reasons that can make strikes a necessity. While

at times it is indeed necessary for unions to take strike action, they must do so knowing that there is a potential for a great positive and negative impact on the relationships between employer and employees. While having the ability to strike is crucial, it is also important that it be used in a last case scenario.

For unions and their own members who strike, they do so with the end goal of acquiring some kind of positive impact on their jobs whether that is a higher salary, better hours or the reimplementation of some past benefit. Regardless of the success of a strike, there may also be impacts on employment and workplace relationships as well as economic effects (Israelstam). Money is a huge problem area during strikes for unions and employees alike. Due to the “no work, no pay” principle which employers usually engage in, the people that are performing strike action will not receive their normal salary while they are striking. They often will get strike pay but that is significantly less than they would normally receive and their finances may become a concern. On top of this, if they were to lose their jobs because of the strike, they might lose their livelihoods along with the job (Israelstam). As well as those financial and economic impacts, if the strike does succeed then there may be a strain on the employment relationship. One example of this can come in the form of the owner or management feeling animosity or bitterness towards the employees and union that performed the strike against them which caused them hassle, time and money. Another possible strain on the employment relationship could come in the form of fellow employees. If some employees did not actively participate in the strike, but still benefit from the positive outcome, the employees who did strike could feel anger and betrayal towards these coworkers. On the flip side of that, if the strikers lose and some are dismissed, those former employees could feel a strong sense of hostility towards the employees that did not help with the strike action.

When talks of a collective bargain agreement shut down because the owner or employer uses their power to deny to what the union is seeking, it will lead down a path towards work action or a strike which will definitely have a great impact on the employer. Usually the negative impact that occurs in this situation is loss

of revenue and business but it can also be a public relations nightmare for companies. If the company is a large factory with many workers, one issue that can befall them is loss of production time or likely loss of money due to delayed services to clients (Israelstam). With a different type of employer however, the impact might be different but can still be just as crippling. Fraser Oliver explained that, in the case of teachers, the school boards, unlike a factory, would not lose money if a strike occurred; they would however have delayed service to clients in a different sense. If teachers were to strike, the school boards delayed service would be in not providing education to their students which is what they are in place for. Other impacts feature things like publicity on the strike and how it will affect the company, or in this case school boards, image and future community status (Rahul). As well as these impacts, just like the unions and employees, post-strike conflict and tension can easily arise out of the workers that had taken strike action. While there are much more negative effects of allowing a collective bargaining agreement breakdown to the point of strike, a strike can leave a once powerful union weakened and divided (Rahul) which can be useful for employers as they will then have leverage in future bargaining agreement talks. Once again, a strike is not a golden solution to every problem and there are pitfalls in it for all parties included. However, the ability to take job action or to strike is still an extremely powerful and important tool for the union and the employees.

Workplaces can be a very tricky world for both employers and employees to live in and unions are there to help ensure that there is a balance of power between these two factions. Through the use of collective bargaining agreements, unions strive to obtain fair and just benefits and work for their employees. When this falls through however, steps need to be taken and unfortunately as a last result sometimes, it is necessary for unions and employees to take strike action. Whether that strike is successful or not, we can see clearly that there are very large impacts to all people involved and that it truly is a desperation move and should only be used as a last resort. With this warning in mind, unions and workers are much better off with the ability to strike than they would be without it.

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