

## **UNION MYTHS**

### **DEBUNKING THE ATTACKS ON UNIONS AND LABOUR RIGHTS**

**MYTH 1**  
IF YOU ARE INVOLVED WITH A UNION, YOU ARE EXPECTED TO VOTE NDP

OSSTF/FEESO does not dictate how its members should vote; nor does it have an exclusive political partnership with any one party. Through our lobbying efforts, we try to keep all politicians aware of issues facing our members. We promote the importance of public education and champion ideas and practices that benefit education workers and students. All members are free to vote as they choose.

**MYTH 2**  
UNIONS PROTECT INCOMPETENT WORKERS

OSSTF/FEESO has no tolerance for incompetence or unprofessionalism. Our Federation does, however, vehemently protect a member's right to a fair performance appraisal and due process. We recognize that members accused of unsatisfactory performance may have been unfairly targeted or that there may be underlying issues or conditions that need to be taken into consideration. OSSTF/FEESO protects every member's right to a fair process.

**MYTH 3**  
ACTIVE UNION MEMBERS GET BLACKLISTED BY EMPLOYERS

Your right to belong to and be active in a union is protected by provincial and federal laws and is guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Furthermore, many progressive employers recognize that unions are an integral part of doing business and regularly consult union leaders on matters of employment. OSSTF/FEESO protects its members from any arbitrary actions from employers.

**MYTH 4**  
INVOLVEMENT IN THE UNION TAKES UP TOO MUCH TIME

It's true that some members donate generous amounts of time to their union. However, there are many Federation opportunities which will take up little or no time: distribution of newsletters, attending a workplace meeting, discussing Federation issues and initiatives with colleagues and voting in local elections. Being involved in OSSTF/FEESO means contributing as much time (or as little) as you wish.

**MYTH 5**  
EDUCATION UNIONS BENEFIT WORKERS, BUT ARE BAD FOR EDUCATION

Our Federation is an important stakeholder in Ontario's public education system. We provide cutting edge professional development to education workers and we produce current, socially-relevant curriculum. We initiated the first comprehensive research project on bullying in North America. We do, however, acknowledge that the working conditions of our members are intrinsically entwined with the learning conditions of students and when we advocate for one, we advocate for both. OSSTF/FEESO is committed to protecting and enhancing public education.

## MYTH 6 UNIONS ADD TO THE STRESS OF A WORKPLACE

There is no doubt that working in the field of education can be stressful, but the image of a union presence as a disruptive force in the workplace is unfounded and outdated. OSSTF/FEESO prides itself on the working relationships it endeavours to develop with employers. When stress originates from conflict between members, our Mediation Resource Services Bank provides mediators to help bring peace. Rather than being a source of stress in the workplace, OSSTF/FEESO works to address such problems.

## MYTH 7 UNIONS ARE ONLY ABOUT GOING ON STRIKE

OSSTF/FEESO members have participated in many notable provincial actions including: the 1973 protest to protect our right to strike, the 1997 protest against Mike Harris' Bill 160, and most recently, opposing Bill 115. A vast number of collective agreements are reached with no need for any type of job action. Our members are committed to their jobs and the students they teach and support, but they also realize that the important work they do must be protected. The decision to resort to a strike is never taken lightly.

## MYTH 8 I PAY MY DUES TO THE UNION BUT GET NOTHING IN RETURN

Members of OSSTF/FEESO pay one of the lowest dues rate in Canada: 1.3%. Some of the benefits and services that our Federation offers its members include: contract and salary negotiation, the handling of labour grievances and arbitrations, pay equity, pension advice, health and safety training, healthcare benefits, long-term disability, curriculum advice and lessons, educational resources, legal advice, professional development, political lobbying, international assistance, awards and scholarships, mediation, and the promotion and protection of public education. OSSTF/FEESO provides its members a broad range of services to ensure that their jobs are secure and protected.

## MYTH 9 THE UNION IS JUST A BUNCH OF COMPLAINERS

It's true that union members complain . . . they complain when they witness: unfair labour practices, members being treated unfairly or arbitrarily, when a mutually agreed upon contract is broken, when health and safety regulations are ignored, when the work of education workers is undervalued, and when the tenets of public education are threatened. We lobby the government on issues of education and workers' rights. We not only ensure that health and safety rules are being adhered to, we provide input on the writing of such legislation. OSSTF/FEESO acts on behalf of its members.

## MYTH 10 UNIONS WERE ONCE NEEDED BUT NOW THEY ARE OBSOLETE

Anti-union sentiment in North America is at an all-time high. Recent actions by governments in North America to circumvent the legal collective bargaining process is troubling; this means the need for unions is more important than ever. One strategy used by businesses that don't want to deal with unions is to acknowledge that they were needed during the industrial age, but have no place in a modern economy. They cite today's absence of industrial age conditions such as: low wages, poor benefits, no job security, and employer greed. Unions continue to fight for the rights of workers and have extended their mandate. Not satisfied with having helped establish, among other things: the weekend, eight-hour work days, public education, universal healthcare, public pensions, and the minimum wage, unions now also champion many social movements and causes that benefit everyone. Unions remain relevant and valuable in today's society.