

# COMEBACK LINES

HOW TO RESPOND  
TO ANTI-UNION  
RHETORIC



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**AT ONE POINT OR ANOTHER, WE'VE ALL HAD TO LISTEN TO A RANT ABOUT BIG LABOUR and union thugs at the dinner table. Who amongst us doesn't have a brother-in-law who faithfully reads the right-wing columnists and religiously repeats**

**what they say? To convince them of the importance of unions in our society, we need sound arguments grounded in reality. The Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) has therefore produced this document to help its members answer union-bashing with reasoned argument.**

# HOW TO RESPOND TO ANTI-UNION RHETORIC

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## UNIONS SERVED A PURPOSE IN THE PAST, BUT WE DON'T NEED THEM ANYMORE

**OVER THE LAST CENTURY**, the labour movement has secured significant protections for workers. It is true that there have been many gains in areas such as the minimum wage, safety standards and pay equity.

**HOWEVER**, we still have our work set out for us to address economic pressures on the job market such as those we are seeing today, and to meet new challenges such as the just transition. Like all social movements, unions must remain vigilant.

**Governments and corporations want to roll back conditions of employment, and no one is immune.**



**IN THE WORKPLACE**, a union plays an important role in protecting employees against abuses of power by the employer. It also helps workers exercise their rights and, of course, negotiates better conditions of employment.

**IN QUÉBEC**, the unionization rate has increased by 10 percentage points since the Quiet Revolution, from about 30% to 40%. It has held steady for the past 20 years. Clearly, workers feel that unions still serve a purpose.

## UNIONS CREATE CONFLICT

**UNIONIZING** improves workers' conditions of employment, but it's something that takes time and energy.

**Workers who step up to organize their coworkers are usually very attached to their workplace. Otherwise, why not just go work somewhere else?**

**ONCE A UNION IS CERTIFIED**, whether or not labour relations are harmonious will depend on the employer's attitude.



**SINCE THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT** clarifies conditions of employment and puts an end to arbitrary decision-making by the employer, it therefore helps smooth labour relations. Workers and managers know exactly where things stand until the next round of bargaining.

**IN QUÉBEC**, 95% of labour contracts are settled without a strike or lockout.

**BUT IN SOME CASES**, a strike is the only way workers can get decent working conditions and a fair wage that reflects the value of their work. It only happens if employees decide democratically to go on strike.

## UNIONS ARE BAD FOR BUSINESS

**EMPLOYERS** like to argue that unionization will make them unprofitable. Sometimes, they threaten to close up shop to keep workers from forming a union.

**The fact is, people who devote their time and energy to organizing a union do it because they care about their workplace and want to improve their working conditions.**

**IT MEANS** they are committed to their jobs. This kind of engagement helps businesses thrive.



**UNIONIZING ALSO MAKES IT POSSIBLE** for more Québécois to earn a decent income. Higher pay means more tax revenue for the government and hence better public services for everyone. Higher pay also means workers have more money to spend, which is good for business. Unions don't wreck the economy—quite the contrary!

**AND UNIONIZED WORKERS EARNING DECENT WAGES** have a vested interest in their employer's success. They will do what they can to make sure their employer thrives, such as pressing for more training and reinvestment in the business.

## UNIONS PROTECT INCOMPETENT WORKERS

**Unions protect the rights of all workers. They are a bulwark against arbitrary decisions and favouritism—the very practices that often drive workers to unionize.**

**THEY ALSO PROMOTE** ongoing training and professional development programs, reducing the number of incompetent workers.

**SECTION 47.2 OF THE LABOUR CODE** requires unions to properly represent and defend all workers who have paid union dues.



**MOST COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS** contain clauses governing dismissal procedures and disciplinary measures. If an employee is fired, the union is there to make sure there were valid reasons and the employee wasn't terminated on a whim.

## UNIONS LINE THEIR POCKETS WITH THE DUES PAID BY MEMBERS

**THE PURPOSE OF A UNION** is not to make a profit. Unlike private companies, unions don't have to watch their profit margin or please shareholders. Their goal is to represent workers to the best of their ability. The dues are returned to the members in the form of the union's operating budget and an array of services: support for employees in arbitration cases, legal assistance, training, support for bargaining and mobilization, and more.

**At the CSN, the members decide how much to pay in union dues.**

**In addition to funding the services provided by the union, the dues paid by the CSN's 330,000 members support unions involved in strikes or lockouts through the Professional Defence Fund (PDF).**



**THIS FUND PROVIDES** weekly payments to enable striking or locked-out workers to hold out. Currently, the PDF pays \$325 per week. It also supports non-unionized workers who are in the process of organizing a union.

## UNIONS ARE TOO POLITICAL: THEY SHOULD ONLY DEFEND WORKERS' RIGHTS

**POLITICAL PRESSURE** from the labour movement was responsible for creating large parts of Québec's social safety net, including the minimum wage, occupational health and safety laws, employment insurance, maternity leave and Québec parental insurance plan. These are just a few examples of the gains unions have won for all Québécois.

**“WHY ARE UNIONS GETTING INVOLVED IN HEALTH OR THE ENVIRONMENT? THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WORKERS' RIGHTS!”**

**RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE** does little good if workers can't find decent housing or have to pay hundreds of dollars to see a private doctor.



**SINCE ITS BEGINNINGS**, the union movement has stood with community organizations and grassroots movements to defend the interests of the majority.

**AT THE CSN**, we fight for a better life for the workers who are building Québec, both on and off the job.

## UNIONS ARE RIDDLED WITH CORRUPTION

**This is untrue. The CSN's Constitution and Bylaws provide for an auditing committee in each union to ensure transparency and accountability to the membership. The CSN's financial statements are also available online.**



**CASES OF UNION** corruption are exceedingly rare in Québec. The Charbonneau Commission (2011–2015) revealed shady practices by some union leaders at other union federations, but such wrongdoing is not widespread.

**IN QUÉBEC**, unlike some jurisdictions, unions are independent of the state, allowing them to defend workers' rights with complete autonomy.

## UNIONS ARE A BUNCH OF THUGS WHO GO AROUND INTIMIDATING PEOPLE

**WHILE THE FIRST UNIONS** in Québec were in very male-dominated industries, the union landscape has changed dramatically since that time. In the 1950s, when women began entering the labour market in large numbers, unions gradually became more feminized and diverse. As a result, the unions evolved and the old muscleman stereotypes became an obsolete vestige of the past.

**TODAY**, unions are organizations that promote social peace rather than the opposite.

**Before the current Labour Code came into effect, employers who didn't care about their employees were**



**free to engage in favouritism, abuse and unfair practices with impunity. Now employees have concrete means to defend their interests, within the limits set by the *Labour Code*.**

## UNIONS ARE FOR OLD PEOPLE

**UNIONS PROTECT WORKERS**, young and old, against abuses of power by the employer. In many organizations, young people are usually the first to be laid off, being considered dispensable. The union is there to defend them.

**EVERYONE DESERVES** to be treated with respect, including employees working their first job and students working part-time.

**According to the Institut de la statistique du Québec, nearly 60% of union members in Québec in 2024 were aged under 45.**



INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC.  
Emploi syndiqué et non syndiqué, résultats selon le genre et l'âge,  
1997-2024, Québec, Ontario et Canada, 2025 (Online. In French).

**“ALONE,  
YOU CAN’T DO ANYTHING.  
WORKING WITH OTHERS,  
YOU CAN’T DO EVERYTHING,  
BUT YOU CAN CERTAINLY  
DO A FAIR BIT MORE.”**

**MARCEL PEPIN,  
FORMER PRESIDENT  
OF THE CSN**

Production  
**CSN**

Illustration  
**Julia GR**

Printing  
**Accent impression**

Legal deposit  
**BAnQ and BAC  
2026**