

## **What being part of a union family means to me**

**Sparsh Agrawal**

In my mind, I always equated unions with large union dues that I heard people talk about. My mom also joined a unionized company and to her, it just meant another deduction out of her paycheque like the random fees that appear on my cell phone bill. That changed last year when my mom was telling me about an issue at work where she was unfairly not given her bonus. She was stressed out about this and nervous about this being corrected. A quick call with her union representative later made her feel better. They went and fought on her behalf and ultimately my mom received her bonus. Had she not been part of a union, she never would have thought to fight back because she wouldn't have an institution backing her. This experience was the quintessence of being part of a union family.

My parents moved to Canada to seek a better life. They believed in the power of taking pride in your work and working hard to secure a better life for my sister and me. As immigrants, my parents have had to start from scratch without any family nearby to support them and their jobs have always been very important. Being part of a union has allowed my mom to take a breath and feel secure in her work. Even when her company was being bought out and there were fears of redundancy layoffs, my mom didn't have to stress about keeping her job. Her union stood by and negotiated an agreement that made sure that even if my mom were laid off that she would receive a very generous package that would take care of my sister and me. Feeling secure in her employment allows my mom to take pride in her work and be confident that she will be treated fairly. Her union makes her perception of Canada as a place where workers are treated fairly and hard work pays off reality for her. Being part of a union family has shown me the value of my parents' adage about the importance of hard work.

When I was still in pre-school, my mom didn't work at a unionized company and her hours were much tougher on our family. I used to get picked up from my pre-school at 7:00 PM or later in the evening by my dad and would only see my mom before I went to bed and on the weekends. After my mom joined her current unionized company that changed. She was able to work reasonable hours and give back to our family as much as her office. Now we can spend time together in the evenings and take more family trips. Being part of a union family means spending more time with my parents and not having them exhausted from work all the time.

My mom's union stood up for her and allowed her to voice her own opinion when she saw something wrong happening to her. Without a union, my mom wouldn't have been able to speak because the only people she could ask for help would be those who wronged her in the

first place. Being part of a union gave my mom a voice and the dignity to be able to stand up for herself. Instead of simply being beholden to her superiors in the workplace, she has solidarity with her fellow workers and as a group can demand fair treatment. To me being part of a union family means understanding the importance of standing up for myself and demanding fair treatment. One of my biggest passions is debating and being able to voice my own opinions. My mom's experiences with her union have shown me the power in that.

I am not the only child that has benefited from being part of a union family. Many of the basic dignities that workers receive that are taken for granted originated from unions. The notion of having weekends and a proper work-life balance guaranteed protection from discrimination in the workplace, and workplace safety standards are only taken for granted because unions fought for them. I am a proud Canadian and one of the many things I am proud of as a Canadian is our cultural belief that the working class must be afforded basic rights and dignities whether that be universal health care, a national pension plan or parental leave. Being part of a union family has shown me how much unions were involved in fostering this culture and the importance of fighting for progress.