

# Union communities, healthy communities: The new attack on unions and its threat to shared prosperity in Canada <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Broadbent Institute

**Format:** Report

**Publication Date:** 30 Apr 2013

## AVAILABILITY

Full report in pdf and responses from the community <sup>[2]</sup>

Response to *Union communities, healthy communities: Canada won't work without them*

by Laurel Rothman, national coordinator for Campaign 2000

There's no doubt that low-income people, especially children and their parents, are better off because of social unionism's strong tradition in Canada. At all levels, unions take the lead in pressing for public policies such as decent minimum wages, fair labour practices and progressive public services that support families when they are in the labour force and when they are not.

Nearly 1 in 7 children still lives in poverty in Canada, in spite of the 1989 House of Commons unanimous vote to end child poverty in Canada. This commitment was broadened in 2009 when all MPs voted to develop an immediate plan to end poverty for all in Canada. Most recent statistics indicate that 979,000 or 14.5% of children in Canada lived in poverty in 2010, compared to 13.7% in 1989 (Low Income Measure After-Tax). While annual poverty rates fluctuate with business cycles, these slight increases and decreases should not be mistaken for long-term improvement. Neither the promised poverty elimination nor plans have materialized, but unions have been key partners in the struggle to hold governments' feet to the fire.

Unfortunately, finding employment is not a guaranteed way to escape poverty. Many low-income families have some employment income yet are not finding jobs with sufficient pay, hours and benefits to lift themselves above the poverty line. Indeed, more than 1 in 3 low-income children has at least one parent working full-time throughout the year. Far too few of these working poor parents are in unions since many of the jobs they find are part-time, seasonal and/or short-term. Many parents juggle more than one part-time job to make ends meet. These families are among the main beneficiaries of the campaigns for change championed by unions with civil society groups for decades in Canada, campaigns for higher minimum wages and safe, fair working conditions; for good jobs that provide decent wages and benefits; and for high quality, affordable childcare services combined with maternity and parental leave.

Strong evidence in Europe demonstrates that countries with higher levels of unionization have lower levels of child poverty because of the higher floor for low-end wages and because of the narrower gap between the top and bottom wage levels. These countries, often Scandinavian, provide more universally-accessible public services that are widely used by all income groups and widely supported by all. High quality childcare services complemented by well-developed maternity/parental leave and robust job training are two good examples to which social unionism has contributed.

Andrew Jackson is correct that union communities lead to healthy communities. While the rising economic tide does not lift all boats, the push for better wages and public services helps all Canadians including those not in unions. We are all better as a result of the solid, long-standing role that unions have and continue to play in partnerships, coalitions, alliances and movements in Canada. Whether it's the \$10/hour minimum wage campaign in Ontario, the pressure for a national child benefit and a Poverty Elimination Act or the Code Blue for Childcare Campaign, the sustained commitment of unions working in coalition with anti-poverty activists to improve the quality of life for all families has made a substantial difference. The loss of union dynamism would leave a definite vacuum. Indeed, Canada won't work well without it.

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**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** economics <sup>[4]</sup>

poverty <sup>[5]</sup>

health <sup>[6]</sup>

funding <sup>[7]</sup>

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/13/04/union-communities-healthy-communities-new-attack-unions-and>[\[2\] https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/en/unions](https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/en/unions) [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/economics> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding>