

Winning Essays

Grain and General Services Union

Scholarship and Bursary recipients



Congratulations to our 2012 scholarship and bursary recipients* who were chosen to receive \$2,000 from GSU's scholarship program.

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* Grain and General Services Union scholarship recipients are selected by GSU's scholarship committee.

* GSU's First Nations University of Canada bursary recipient is chosen by the FNUC scholarship administration.



Grain and General Services Union's First Nations University of Canada bursary

Tonya Crowchild

Tonya Crowchild is a member of the Tsuu T'ina Nation which is located on the southwest corner of Calgary, Alberta. She is enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Studies program at the First Nations University of Canada located in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Tonya is the mother of two daughters and she returned to school to further her goals in education and to gain the tools to further her career goals. Tonya hopes to run for the Regional Chief of Assembly of First Nations in Alberta or obtain employment within an Industry related organization in an Aboriginal Relations department.

"I would like to send a HUGE THANK YOU to the Grain and General Services for the bursary I am awarded towards my educational goals. As of April 2012 I have successfully completed my 4th semester in my Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Studies Degree Program. Although, I have only attended four semesters at First Nations University of Canada, I am close to completion of my program.

With only 7 courses remaining I will achieve my degree by April 2013.

I would like to say that you and your team have assisted me in my goal to succeed and I am truly grateful. Student funding is limited and with your financial help it has assisted me and my children with the high costs of our living expenses.

I owe you a big thank you for your belief in me and giving me the opportunity to receive this bursary."

There is no essay requirement for this bursary.



Grain and General Services Union's scholarship recipient

Courtney Jenkins

Courtney is a 22-year-old student at the University of Regina. She is currently in her final year of studies where she is working toward a degree in Business Administration with a Major in Accounting. In 2011, she graduated from SIAST where she received an Accountancy Diploma.

Courtney is a GSU member who has worked at Viterra in head office since 2011 as a Data Analyst.

She is an instructor for the Chaban Ukrainian Dance Group and is a member of the Performing Ensemble with the Kolos Ukrainian Dance Ensemble.

How Important Is the Right to Strike?

The right to strike is a fundamental freedom that every individual in Canada is entitled to. Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 2, it states that everyone has the “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication” as well as the “freedom of peaceful assembly”. Historically, strikes were considered to be illegal and only became legalized within the 19th century. Once legalized, strike action was often organized by unions in order to combat unsafe working conditions, labor practices and other issues regarding employee grievances. Currently, strike action is often used when unions and management are unable to come to a fair agreement in regards to workplace contracts in areas such as salary, pension plans, benefits or hours of work. In 1956, former Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau made the following statement: “it is the possibility of the strike which enables workers to negotiate with their employers on terms of approximate equality. If the right to strike is suppressed, or seriously limited, the trade union movement becomes nothing more than one institution among many in the service of capitalism - a convenient organization for disciplining the workers, occupying their leisure time, and ensuring their profitability for business”. This reiterates the fact that there is critical need to have the right to strike in place for the many organizations with unionized employees.

As an employee of Viterro where there are significant changes being implemented with regards to the Glencore takeover, I feel that it is imperative to have the necessary steps in place to ensure the protection of employees and their collective bargaining rights which may include taking strike action. The right to strike gives employees the opportunity to negotiate terms with their employers that are fair, as well as consistent. In one's job, stability, protection and support is highly valued and strived for, and unions grant us the ability to be vocal and take control of unfairness in the workplace. Unions not only give us a sense of belonging, but they also give us a voice when we need to be heard in times of uncertainty.

In many situations there is validity in having the right to strike, but I would also need to justify what state the global economy is in when making this choice. A question such as, "can my employers afford to provide wage increases in excess of the national inflation rate?" needs to be asked of oneself when considering taking action for matters such as a wage increase. There are cases such as health care and/or transportation workers where they are, more often than not, given back-to-work-legislation by the government as a strike could potentially affect the safety and needs of others. In situations such as this, although these workers deserve the right to strike, it should not be at the expense of the health and safety of other people. I feel that these cases make a bigger impression on the employer as they now have the public to answer to as well.

As a SIAST graduate, I have seen first hand the struggles that individuals, teachers in this case, go through when making the decision to go to on strike. Although it was very important to these employees to be given fair wages for the positions they are in, there were also negative aspects that were affiliated with taking strike action. Many teachers were forced to consider the impact their actions would have on students who would be affected the most in the event of their strike with having missed classes and postponed finals. In cases such as this, the question remains; how important is the right to strike? Does it take precedent over the rights of other people which would be compromised in these situations? I believe that having the right to strike, is of more importance than going on strike itself.

In conclusion, I thoroughly believe that the right to strike is one that is critically essential to all unionized employees. As the Charter of Rights and Freedoms states, people in Canada are entitled to the freedom of peaceful assembly and this includes the right to go on strike when required. There is a certain comfort level that comes with being a unionized employee and as a member of GSU, and I am confident that I am in a secure, protected and stable environment. Through this union, we are given a voice, either alone or together as an organization that comes in loud and clear about what we are fighting for. Ultimately, one universal goal. There are situations where it is necessary to go on strike, but what is more important, is the having the right to do so.



**Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient**

Trevor Johnson

Trevor is a GSU member of GSU Local 9 (Hi-Pro Feeds) in Chilliwack, BC. He is 32 years old and he lives in Chilliwack with his wife and two sons.

Trevor has worked at the Chilliwack feed mill for six years. He recently finished his grade 12 in night school and he is currently attending the Criminal Justice Program at the University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, BC.

How Important is the Right to Strike

“A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity.” Fredrick Douglass. 1818-1895.

On February 6, 2012, Justice Dennis Ball of the Court of Queen’s Bench gave a precedent setting decision that found, a Canadians right to strike is protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. According to Justice Ball the right to strike is protected under section 2 (d) the freedom of association clauses. Justice Ball also referred to many UN treaties that Canada has signed including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article 8 section 1 (d) of the ICESCR states that workers have “the right to strike, provided that it is exercised in conformity with the laws of the particular country.” It has been established that Canadians have a legal right to strike, but how important is this right.

The strike process is very important. It is a natural process that can help bring parties back to the negotiating table after refusals to negotiate. Strike action applies economic pressure to both parties and is used only as a last resort. During a strike the company isn’t making any revenue from their striking workers but still have to pay business related expenses such as utilities and land taxes. Striking workers may get strike pay, but it is only a percentage of their regular pay and most workers will tell you it is hard enough making ends meet with a full paycheque. The plan is that eventually, when both the company and union members tire of not making money, they will return to the negotiating table with honorable intentions to bargain a fair collective agreement. This process however does not work when interrupted by unnecessary government interference.

“The right to strike is a matter of freedom, and a democracy cannot function without freedom”
Unknown.

When the state interrupts the bargaining process and orders striking workers back to work they are tipping the scales in favour of the company. Without the ability to show force and place economic pressure on the employer, the union has lost the power it needs in order to deal with the company on an equal footing. Unfortunately for Canadians, the past few years have shown a disturbing trend of our elected officials disregarding workers democratic choice to strike and ordering them back to work. You may think it can’t possibly be that bad, but let’s take a look at how our federal labour minister Lisa Riatt has been handling labour disagreements in the past few years.

Speaking to locomotive engineers at C.P.Rail, Raitt warned: "Any work stoppage that threatens to have a grave impact on the economy is fair game for government action." She then proceeded with talk of back to work legislation. In March, after introducing back to work legislation in the labour dispute between Air Canada and its pilot and machinist union, Lisa Riatt was quoted as saying: "A work stoppage at Air Canada will take a toll on our fragile economy, and that we simply can't afford." Concerning the Canada Post workers being legislated back to work, Riatt played the economy card again claiming the "drastic" move by Canada Post locking out its workers forced her to reassess the impact on the Canadian public and the economy. It would seem that the Labour Minister is so terrified of any disruption in the economy, that she is willing to trample and ignore rights promised to Canadians by our own Charter of Rights as well as International Law. Allowing fear of economic downtime drive our decisions on human rights is a recipe for disaster that has already been played out in the past.

Germany May 2, 1933-Trade Union Offices were closed, their money confiscated, and their leaders put in prison. In their place Hitler put the German Labour Front which reduced workers' pay and took away their right to strike.(There's no room for democratic action when living under tyranny.)Hard times and a longing for a strong economy helped pave the way for Hitler's rise to power. The German peoples fear of a weak economy convinced them to give up many rights and freedoms to Hitler's government, with the belief that it was for the good of the economy.

Today I believe we are seeing this mirrored in our country with many citizens ignoring the government's attacks on fellow Canadians right to strike. Fear of a weak economy is no reason to discard the rights and freedoms that many before us fought so hard to attain.

"Without some self-assertion in the defence of ones rights, one will be subjected to exploitation by some peoples." Howard Brotz.

The comfortable standard of living that most Canadians enjoy today is due in part to the hard work of unions. Organized labour has given us 40 hour work weeks, health and dental benefits, pension plans, overtime pay and stat holidays just to name a few things. Unions fought hard for the benefits we now enjoy, but without the threat of strike action we would probably still be fighting for these benefits today. Organizing unions, collective bargaining, and strike action are all part of the democratic process. In a democratic society the democratic process is one of the most important rights citizens have. As such I believe that a Canadian's right to strike is an integral part of democracy, which should be important to all of us.



Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient

Keifer Mack

Keifer is the son of GSU Local 1 member Theresa Mack.

Keifer grew up in Montgomery where he attended Mount Royal High School. He played basketball and football and was also in Voyagers.

After high school, Keifer went to work for Lafarge Concrete. When he isn't at work or attending school, Keifer enjoys camping, golfing, and other outdoor activities.

Keifer is currently attending SIAST Palliser Campus for Environmental Engineering Technology.

"Thank you very much for selecting me for this scholarship."

How important is the right to strike?

Having the right to strike while working in a union is very important to the average working person. It gave workers the rights to not be treated like slaves for little money in unsafe conditions. It also contributed to benefits, unemployment insurance and CPP. There are also many other labour laws that there are to keep the workers safe and comfortable. A job action in the form of striking is the only real weapon the labour workers have against the employers who have all of the power but very little of the ability to do the work that needs to be done. It is very important that the workers have the right to strike to fight for what they deserve.

Currently in Canada, although we do have a constitutional right to organize and bargain collectively, the right to strike has not been enshrined in the constitution. That took a big leap forward this spring when the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and trade unions including the SGEU challenged the province's essential services legislation. In his decision declaring the act unconstitutional, Justice Ball stated that the workers have the right to strike. The provincial government is appealing that part of the decision, as it could lead to a Canada wide right to strike enshrined in the constitution.

On May 23, 2012, Canadian Pacific began their strike. They were fighting against management, work rules and pensions that were at the core of the negotiations. Canadian Pacific was drastically and unfairly trying to cut the workers' pension while only improving the benefits and retirement plan of its managers.

There was a lot of support throughout the strike for Canadian Pacific. In one situation, on the Teamsters Canada Twitter page, a wife of a locomotive engineer in Alberta tweeted that her husband's impossible schedule is very difficult on their family life. Their children's birthdays, visiting with friends and also time as a couple all had to take a back seat to work.

It was only on May 31, 2012, 4800 Canadian Pacific workers were legislated back to work. It turned out the companies strategy was to wait until the government stepped in to order the employees back to work. The strike had lasted ten days but failed to resolve many important issues for the Canadian Pacific workers. A mediator has been appointed and will have 90 days to settle the dispute. A negotiated settlement would most likely turn out better for the workers than a forced negotiation is going to.

It is very important that we have the right to strike as workers. It is our only real defense against big employers only trying to make money. It keeps our benefits, rights and also working for competitive wages. We need the right to strike as employees to keep our rights in the workplace.



Grain and General Services Union's scholarship recipient

Bree Michalos

Bree is the daughter of GSU Local 4 member Alvin Soloway.

"I would like to thank Grain & General Services Union for choosing me as one of the recipients of the GSU scholarship award. I am very grateful and honored to receive it.

Growing up I have seen the positive impact unions have done for my family one being Grain Services Union where my father of 30 years works and C.U.P.E where my mother worked 11 years. Also, my husband is a C.U.P.E member.

When I finish my Psychiatric Nursing program I will continue in the path and be a part of the S.U.N (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) Union.

Being accepted into the Psychiatric Nursing program in Regina at the SIAST Wascana Campus is not only my dream because I'm fascinated by mental health, but also because I will be able to have a better life for my young family and will have the support of a wonderful union for the rest of my career."

"How Important is the right to strike"

Definition of Right:

That which is morally correct, just, or honorable: "the difference between right and wrong".

Definition of Strike:

A refusal to work organized by a body of employees as a form of protest, typically in an attempt to gain a concession or concessions...: "local workers **went on strike**".

Most unions make reasonable demands which are always rejected by management. In some cases management just does not understand the needs of the employees. It seems that when the people use their "right to strike" privilege and do begin to strike, management is shaken up and realizes that their employees are not happy. They also realize how important the workers really are, and that there is no "I" in team. Management will come to a settlement once the people have the power using their "right to strike".

Once all avenues of negotiation have reached an impasse then the "right to strike" begins. Though out the years, unions fighting for the "right to strike" fought very hard. Through their courage, loyalty, tenacity and honour they earned this right. My generation sometimes takes this right for granted because we do not see that the people before us fought for such a worthy cause. We thought that this right was always there for us.

My parents Alvin and Loretta Soloway raised and instilled me with strong values and beliefs. The "right to strike" is one of them. I have seen growing up how important unions are to my family. My father has been a part of a union for over 30 years with Manitoba Pool and Grain Millers. He also has been a part of the bargaining committee 2 years in a row with Grain Millers. My mother has had to strike two times with the C.U.P.E union when she was a Continuing Care Aide. I was teenager during that time and I was so proud she took a stand for herself and her co-workers.

Striking and the "right to strike" are so important because it means you can make a difference in your life as well as others. Striking sends a strong message to

everyone. You are not alone and that team work is the only way to get things done. Striking gives a person the confidence; it shows you have self-worth and that you have a lot to offer your employer. Everyone wants to be able to provide for themselves and family. The "right to strike" means fighting for job security, better benefits and higher wages these are just a few examples. All of which can put you on a path for a better life.

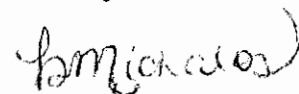
I am enrolled at Siasst for the Psychiatric Nursing program in Regina at the Wascana Campus commencing August 27, 2012. I feel the needs of others are so important. I want to help improve my future patient's lives so that they can be fulfilled. I will be a part of the S.U.N union and I look forward to being on the committee so that I can make a difference and strike if there is necessary cause. I want to be a part of a wonderful team that helps the education of employees on the importance of the "right to strike". Everyone deserves equality, fairness and the right to have the best life for themselves and family.

Having a voice is necessary to make a change and the "right to strike" gives you the opportunity to show your voice in a positive way so that you can get the chance to make a change for the betterment of your career and fellow co-workers.

There was a time in Canada as well other countries where striking was band and there were very serious consequences for those people who wanted to make a difference. If it was not for those very brave individuals our country would not be as successful as it is today. I am very proud to be in a country where the "right to strike" is possible and I am thankful for all the unions out there that are protecting families and hope to be a part of one so that I can continue on the path that my parents did for me.

Workers never want to strike, they are forced to it. The "right to strike" is earned and supported by unions, fellow colleagues and my family members. All working Canadians unionized and or otherwise should respect the "Right to Strike".

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bree Michalos".

Bree Michalos



**Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient**

Kelsey Walcer

Kelsey was born and raised in Melfort, Saskatchewan. She graduated from high school in 2012.

This autumn Kelsey will be attending the University of Saskatchewan in the College of Kinesiology. Although she is unsure what direction her schooling will eventually take her, she is certain it will be in the medical or therapy field.

Kelsey's father, Mark Walcer, is a GSU Local 1 (Viterra - Operations & Maintenance) member working for Viterra in Ethelton.

"Thank you so much for selecting me for a GSU scholarship. It is greatly appreciated!"

The Importance of the Right to Strike

The right to strike is a crucial component within our Canadian legislature as it epitomizes the rights and freedoms of all citizens. As a free country everyone is granted equality, the freedom of thought, association, religion, peaceful assembly, and numerous others. We are privileged with the benefits of living in a country run by democracy, and throughout the use of our freedoms, striking allows the public to relay their desires that will benefit countless people. The demands of society ranging from issues involving work, school, religious beliefs, or politics can all be demonstrated through strikes that express the emotions that as a community you share. The true value of strikes is unable to be defined as the significance cannot be characterized by a single definition.

Whether it is boycotting your occupation to receive a much deserved wage, protesting new policies, or several other reasons, striking is the only way that unionized workers are able to get their employers attention if you would like changes to be made. The executives of a company cannot fully understand the implications of their decisions until workers begin to vocalize their viewpoints in a peaceful manner. Without the option and liberty to strike, it is quite possible that no improvements could progress within a company because there would be no way to communicate effectively and efficiently. Strikes can be used as a bargaining tool, as workers can refuse to perform certain jobs before adjustments are implemented which helps in getting your point across, and allowing your employer to realize how serious you are about the problem. Without a way to articulate your requests you would be helpless and at the mercy of others, which will not help your situation in one way. This said, the importance of strikes is apparent because everyone deserves their voice to be heard and the freedom to express the changes they would like to be made.

Strikes allow you to exercise your rights and freedoms as a Canadian citizen. We are privileged with the benefits that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives us, which permit demonstrations against issues that you see within your society. If the right to strike was removed and banned from everyone, it would be in direct violation of everything this country is built on, and you would not have the opportunity to make beneficial changes. It is a pivotal element within our nation since it concedes the notion that you should fight for what you believe in, and without action you will not make any progress. Standing by and waiting for others to fight your battles does not assist you, so with strikes and the prospect of a group of people combining their efforts, it makes everyone's goals seem much more realistic.

Grabbing the attention of the leaders of big corporations or politics may seem like a daunting task, but strikes are a practical way to present your opinions in a format that is organized and constructive. For countless years strikes have been documented in history books as events that have changed the world, whether in a big or small way. They are fundamental in getting the public's voice heard, and they will continually be used to help receive the modifications you yearn for and need. The worth of strikes can never be fully appraised as you cannot view the impact that it has on families, but no matter what the circumstance they will always be important in decision making.