Unionized and Non-Unionized Workplaces:

Consider the following work-related issues from the points of view of a unionized and non-unionized worker:

Employment Contracts:

I like the fact that I can negotiate my own wages, hours, benefits, and working conditions. I know what my worth is and I know how to get the best contract. I am compensated for my personal worth and I do not have to worry about others. I don’t need a union to protect me as the Employment Standards Act outlines basic employment conditions – if I want more than the basics, I can further my training or education myself to get a better position.

I like being in a union. The union, through the collective agreement, ensures that all workers are entitled to the same wages, hours, benefits, and working conditions. I do not have to negotiate for my wages, hours, or benefits on my own. There is strength in numbers and the union helps us to get the best contract. With the union, I am guaranteed that the employer cannot play favourites and give some employees more benefits than others; nor can they give them better wages or more hours. I like that all employees are treated the same.

Grievance Procedures:

My boss may be able to dismiss me for almost any reason, but if there is a problem, I can complain to the Employment Standards Branch of the Ministry of Labour. I can sue my employer under the employments standards legislation if I feel that I have been wronged. However, I do have to pay for any lawsuits myself. While there is no provision for me to have my job reinstated if I have been dismissed, I am entitled to severance pay, which is a set amount of money paid to an employee when the contract ended early. My boss would have to pay me a set amount depending on my wages, the length of time I have worked for this employer, and the length of the notice period I have been given.

If I have a problem with my employer, I may grieve or make a complaint through my union representation. I am not alone when I make my complaint, as I have the support of my union behind me. Any costs incurred through grievance procedures are paid by the union and not by me personally. My job is protected from arbitrary dismissal. My boss cannot dismiss me without cause and this must be detailed and follow a specific procedure before dismissal can happen. I can fight any dismissal and be reinstated to my job.

Seniority:

I like the fact that promotions go to people who earn them. Seniority is not important, as the boss will decide who gets to be promoted. Vacation time and scheduling are also at the discretion of the boss. I do not necessarily have to work here a long time to get a good work schedule or great holidays. At the same time, the boss decides who gets what hours and who gets the holidays they want. The employer also gets to decide the layoff order, if it becomes necessary to lay workers off. As a result, it is important to make myself invaluable to the boss as much as possible. Seniority is not important in the layoff order, nor should it be.

I like that the union helps to protect seniority rights. I have been here a while and the union ensures that promotions are based not only on ability, but also on seniority. Vacation time, scheduling, and lay off order are based on seniority. The union ensures that employers cannot only promote those they like. The union ensures the boss cannot play favourites and give more hours or the preferred holidays to only those they like.

Strikes:

As negotiator of my own contract, I do not have to go on strike if I do not want and there is little to be gained by a strike. While I do not have the power to stop work production completely, as with a strike, I know my work is important and I know best how to get the best deal for me.

If we want a better contract and the employer is unwilling to negotiate or make concessions, we can always strike for better conditions. I do not have to go up against the employer on my own. There is strength in numbers and the threat of a strike is a very powerful bargaining tool.

Union Dues:

I don’t have to pay any union dues. All the money I make is my own.

For the services provided by the union, I pay union dues that are directly deducted from my pay cheque. From time to time, unfortunately, these dues are raised to cover the costs of union business.

Training:

If I want to update my skills or advance the level of knowledge needed to do my job, I am responsible for paying for these courses or skills training on my own. These educational developments are for my benefit and as a result, the employer does not have to pay for them. Of course, if I can convince my employer that certain training will be good for the business, she may decide to contribute to the expense of the training, or may even pay for it entirely. Besides, if the union is paying for your educational opportunities, they’re really using your money to do so.

Many of the training programs that are associated with my job, and even some that are not directly related are provided or paid for by my union. My union helps me to grow and do a better job by providing these courses.

Services:

I go to work to do a good job. I do not need the employer to provide me with extra services or promotional offers. I am sure I can do just as well without them.

My union helps to provide a number of support services in the community that are not necessarily directly related to my job. They also have discounts and special offers at local businesses. For example, last week, I received a special deal on my cell phone because I was a union member. I also was able to save 10% at one of the local businesses. That’s service for you. Being in the union is wonderful as it provides me with great deals. These were some of the services our membership asked our union to offer.

Political Involvement:

I think political issues are a matter of personal choice. I certainly don’t want part of what I work so hard to earn to go to a political pressure group that I wouldn’t otherwise support.

Our union supports the political party that best suits our collective ideas. As a result, some of our union dues are used to support political pressure groups that promote issues that impact working people. Since not all people are lucky enough to be part of a union organization, our support of pressure groups helps to change and create better legislation for all working people.

Read the statements and decide whether they reflect a unionized or non-unionized workplace.

1. Last week, Mary was given more hours on the work schedule than Elizabeth.
2. Last week, the employees decided to band together and stop production of goods as part of their efforts in bargaining for better working conditions and wages.
3. I was able to get a raise to reflect my worth in the company. I now earn more per hour than any of the others in my group.
4. The employer was able to cut the benefits program without proper consultation or warning.