

Labor unions and labor relations

[Life, Relationships](#)



In this paper, unions and labor relations will be defined and their impact on organizations will be elaborated. Also, the impact of changes in employee relations strategies, policies, and practices on organizational performance will be examined. After this, the question “ Are unions still relevant in the U. S.?” will be answered. Furthermore, the campaign, the election, contract negotiations, grievance handling, arbitrations, labor relations, and strikes will be addressed.

Labor unions, which are the watchdogs and negotiators for the American workforce, are a way of collectively bargaining with employers for fair working conditions and fair wages. The craft unions or skilled laborers and industrial unions or laborers in the same industry, regardless of skill are the two types of labor unions that are organized.

In the U. S. Groups of highly-trained carpenters, tailors, printers, and weavers in the colonial age, the seed of modern labor unions were the guilds. Guilds, which are economic and social in nature, are associations of persons who are involved in the same craft or business. The workers who members of guilds are banded together so that the quality standards would be maintained and the employers’ hiring of skilled laborers from home would be ensured.

In the mid-19th century, there was an increase in the number of new industrial unions which were created for the assertion of workers’ rights. This change in the personality of the American workforce was due to the invention of the steam engine and other industrial advancements. The Knights of

Labor, which inaugurated the Labor Day holiday in 1882, was one of the most important industrial unions.

In the 1890s, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was formed. It is composed of the craft unions which include both skilled and unskilled laborers. The federation was formed because its member craft unions were opposed to the composition of the Knights of Labor's membership. The United Mine Workers and the Danbury Hatters case in 1902 were ones of the early conflicts and strikes included in this period.

In the 1930s, when the Great Depression took place, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was formed. Many of the members of CIO were the dissidents of the AFL who favors industrial unionism. Workers in the steel, rubber, auto, maritime, glass, and meat packing industries were some of the major constituents of the CIO. In spite of the conflicts during the 30s and 40s, a powerful body known as the AFL-CIO was formed from the merging of the two national organizations in 1955.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is an independent agency of the U. S. government. It was created under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 or the Wagner Act and was amended by the acts of 1947 or the Taft-Harley Labor Act and 1949 or the Landrum-Griffin Act. The board affirmed the rights of the labor to organize and bargain collectively through representatives they chose or to refrain from such activities. The board which is composed of five members is assisted by 33 regional directors.

The members are appointed by the U. S. President with the approval of the Senate for five-year terms. The proper bargaining units are determined, the elections for union representation are conducted, and the charges of unfair labor practices by employers are investigated by the board. Coercion, interference, or restraint in labor's self-organizational rights is included in the unfair practices (Villanueva Siasoco).

A research study revealed that the collaboration of an organization (such as community organizations) and a labor union is an impetus for change. For example, the labor unions and community organizations in Greater Boston, which have worked together in recent years, have achieved remarkable successes. Some of their victories include the passing of a Boston living wage ordinance, an increase in the minimum wage in Massachusetts, improvement in union contracts and in workplace conditions, an earned income tax credit on state income taxes, \$6 million state job training program for 1, 500 workers, and a number of progressive tax policies which includes a new tax on capital gains.

These significant achievements in Boston are reverberated throughout the country. This is manifested by the continuous formation of alliances by community organizations with the organized labor. Again, these alliances are formed for the purpose of tackling problems that affect the lives of the low-wage workers.

The Service Employees International Union, which is known for its successful Justice for Janitors campaigns, is one of the unions that organize low-wage workers. The Hotel Employees and Restaurant Union is also a low wage-

workers union. These unions are included in the most vibrant and fastest growing organizations in the country.

The collaboration of labor unions and community organizations is really needed for the achievement of long-term goals of economic and social justice. The need for the collaboration is being intensified by the changes in the national economy over the last few decades. One of the changes that forces for a collaboration of labor unions and community organizations is the shifting of the economy from higher-paying manufacturing jobs to lower-paying jobs in the service sector.

Similarly, the public policy efforts for the promotion of the welfare of working families in general are being broadened by the labor movement. The national AFL-CIO, under the new leadership since 1995, has devoted increased resources to advocate policies. These policies include the universal healthcare coverage which is intended to benefit all American who are working (not only those who are members of unions) and the raising of the federal minimum wage.

One of the impacts of labor unions in policies is the announcement of support of amnesty for undocumented immigrants by the AFL-CIO in February, 2000. In addition, the AFL-CIO also played a major role in organizing, planning, and supporting the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride of 2003. This ride is a nationwide effort which aims to raise the visibility of the issues of the immigrant workers (Ranghelli 4).

On the other hand, the impact of changes on employees is the decrease in the purchase of labor by employers because of the higher wages won by unions. The success in asserting for higher wages and better working conditions also reduced the number of jobs available (Reynolds).

The question “ Are unions still relevant in the U. S.?” does not need anymore time to think about. Unions are absolutely relevant in the U. S. Considering the economic situation today, wherein the trend is to shift from higher-paying jobs to lower-paying jobs, to use more machines than labor force, and to employ contractualization, the exploitation of the labor sector becomes more intense. Thus, unions play a vital role in achieving economic and social justice.

Considering the opinions raised by Reynolds, it is very shallow to say that the labor unions are the anticompetitive force in the labor markets. It is very inhumane to think of workers as simply inputs that are needed to be purchased in order for a process such as production or manufacturing to materialize. It is in this thinking where the exploitation of the laborers’ rights arises.

Regarding campaigns and elections, union officers are elected based on the standards established by the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959 (LMRDA). Officers in the local unions are elected through secret balloting. On the other hand, officers of the national and international unions are elected either by secret balloting of the members or by delegates who are chosen by the secret ballot. The election of the officers of the national and international unions is held at least every five years. For the

intermediate bodies, the election of officers is held at least every four years and for the local unions, election of officers is held at least every three years.

The funds of a union may be used in conducting an election. Also, it is an option for the employers and unions to use their funds in promoting the candidacy of any candidate (<http://www.dol.gov/compliance/topics/unions-elections.htm>).

Collective bargaining refers to the negotiations between an employer and a group of employees. Negotiations are done so that the conditions of employment would be determined. The result of the procedures of the collective bargaining is called collective agreement. Union or other labor organizations represent the employees in bargaining. Federal and state statutory laws, judicial decisions, and administrative agency regulations govern collective bargaining.

Arbitration refers to the method of dispute resolution. This method is used as an alternative to litigation. Arbitration is usually used to resolve disputes between employers and employees during a collective bargaining (http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/Collective_bargaining#collective_bargaining_and_labor_arbitration:_an_overview).

Usually, strike is the last resort taken by workers in addressing their grievances. Holding mass pickets is the most effective way to involve all strikers. Although strikes may mean decrease in wages or dismissal from work, success in such solidarity actions is effectively achieved through

picketing the workplaces of the workers (<http://libcom.org/organise/guide-to-taking-strike-action>).

The aforementioned concepts support the answer that unions are still relevant in the U. S. For example, the funds of unions are very vital during an election because they may be used to promote the candidacy of a certain candidate who, when elected, must address the concerns not only of the workers but the families in general. Also, it is very significant in addressing the welfare of the people because what labor unions fight for is not just their interests but the interests of the masses.

Again, labor union should not be viewed as a hindrance for the economic development. It is not enough to say that a country is developed based on a high gross national product which is achieved through lower cost of production that includes lower wages for the laborers. Higher gross national product which is achieved through exploitations of workers does not mean economic and social justice.

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