

Historical impact on  
working conditions  
(hr, employee labor  
and relations)



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Till the beginning of the eighteenth century, approximately 90 percent of the Americans worked in farms. Most farms functioned on personal ownership basis. Working in farms required hard work from each member of family.

There was shortage in supply of outside labor. In 1785, when US government marked the western boundary of Mississippi River, the land was sold for the first time in the public realm. By the close of eighteenth century, a big change started happening with the start of the industrial revolution. In 1790, first textile mill was established at Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The momentum of 'cotton culture' took off with deployment of large number of Black slaves. In 1790, it is estimated that 700,000 slave workers lived around Ohio River and Mason-Dixon Line (Reef, 2007, pp. XVI-XIX).

Throughout eighteenth century, factories grew rapidly where profit was the chief motive. Without any legislation to protect workers rights, the situation was quite messy for laborers who often had to work 14 hours a day. Laborers often protested, but could not match the power of employers. In 1835, a strike was organized in Philadelphia for 10 hours in a day work. By the end of civil war, factories were more organized in technical terms with better equipments and tools. Coming up of railroads carried the next level of growth momentum. Yet, labors had little say on their workings. After the civil war, the struggle gained momentum from labors, though in unorganized and uncoordinated fashion. With little or no government assistance, it was tough to move forward (Reef, 2007, p. XIX).

Although the term 'collective bargaining' was initially used in 1891 by economist Sidney Webb, it was introduced in raw form ever since the <https://assignbuster.com/historical-impact-on-working-conditions-hr-employee-labor-and-relations/>

inception of trade unions soon after the post civil war period. Collective bargaining is a method of arbitration between firm and the agents of a unit of employees intended at arriving at deals that sets operational conditions. Collective agreements normally specify wage amounts, shift hours, training, security, extra hours pay, and rights to take part in factory or corporation issues. Working conditions slowly improved side-by-side with the growth of trade unions. Many labor legislations were passed that set standard rules for hiring and remunerating labors. The first key event in the US labor history was establishment of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886. AFL ran on the form of 'craft unions' and was conservative in the sense that it did not challenge capitalism per se. Instead, it was focused on addressing improving working conditions of workers. However, being established on the form of 'craft union,' it failed to organize itself into a form of industrial trade unions. While sectors like auto, steel were rapidly growing, AFL failed to meet bargaining tactics required in such scenarios. Another important entity that came out was Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) in 1935. They evolved over time, competed, and progressed with many setbacks. Presently, 60 unions in the US are associated with AFL and CIO. They do not have influence directly on a firm or industry, but work as an umbrella organization in terms of policy guidance (Singh, n. d., 54).

The first major industrial change was the Norris La Guardia Act, 1932. Before this act, employers were not legally bound to enter into process of collective bargaining. Entrepreneurs had free hand regarding hiring and firing. Unfair labor conditions were not surprisingly ubiquitous. One such unfair condition could be forcing an employee not to sign for any labor union as precondition for hiring. Norris La Guardia Act put a bar on such practice. In 1935, National <https://assignbuster.com/historical-impact-on-working-conditions-hr-employee-labor-and-relations/>

Labor Relations Act was passed. This act is also known as Wagner Act. The act, in addition to giving the right to each employee to participate in collective bargaining also gave them right to strike in support of their demands. Also, format of elections of union leaders by secret ballot was decreed. These two acts gave a big say to trade unions on their fight to improve working conditions. In 1947, Taft Hartley Act was passed. This act, also known as Labor-Management Relations Act, put restrictions on labor union activities in order to balance the relationship between employers and employees. The act, apart from other things, prohibited certain kinds of strikes. The Landrum Griffin Act passed in 1959 was targeted at safeguarding union members from potential bad behavior. While Norris La Guardia Act and Taft Hartley Act address rights of workers in private organizations, state government employees were extended working condition reform through Executive Orders and Civil Services Reform Act (Singh, 54)

Side by side, there has been significant progress in addressing gender issues. Today, modern firms try to view employees as their most important capital. In a new knowledge-based economy, often employees are the chief source that generates revenue for the firm. This has led to more and more participation of workers in the form of their inclusion in profit sharing. Today, child labor is not permitted in a factory. Women are supposed to receive fair treatment, taking into account issues like maternity. Unlike past, women now become factory staff instead of merely serving their families (Schirmacher, 2010, p. 24). Women are also occupying positions in management or higher ranks. Working conditions have, therefore, improved a long way since end of civil war when 90 percent of all children between 12 and 18 were working in factories, mines, and fields (Unger, 2007, p. 219).

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