

Labor Organizations

- Instructions:
1. Read the following pages carefully.
 2. Answer the questions at the end. You may refer back to the text if you need to.

Structure of the Labor Union

Although labor organizations throughout the years have included many different structures, today in the United States the labor structure is divided primarily into two factions—industrial unions and craft unions.

Industrial Unions

Industrial unions, which are found chiefly in large industrial concerns, include the majority of workers in all career fields who are working for a single employer or industrial concern. For instance, a large steel mill, employing ten thousand workers, will include craftsmen in the foundry, welding, electrical, and assembly sections. These workers, grouped together, will more than likely belong to an industrial union.

Craft Unions

Craft unions may be defined as groups of organized individuals who practice one trade, or related trades, but for different employers. Large cities will contain both industrial and craft unions, and most small towns will support several segments or “locals” of a number of craft unions. Two examples of local craft unions are the International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America for those in the building trades.

Labor Union Administration

The organization of a labor union is usually considered to exist at two levels—the national level and the local level; although a state or district level in between may exist, it usually has very little power since most policies are handled either at the local or national level.

The local union is probably the most important level to the ordinary workingman because here he attends meetings, pays his dues, uses his voting privileges, and elects local and national leaders. Delegates are elected at the local level and are sent to national conventions to represent local membership. The local elects a president and a business agent to handle local affairs. The business agent is paid a salary by the local union and usually works full-time. In small local groups, the president and business agent may be the same person. The main committee of the union is the executive board, which is usually elected by the local membership. All the locals in a craft or in a particular industry join together under the national organization and are governed by a single constitution.

Labor Union Objectives

Collective Bargaining

The term COLLECTIVE BARGAINING sums up what a union is. This activity brings together a group of workers in a like craft or industry to give them collective strength in bargaining with management. Through collective bargaining, labor and management draw up a contract that is mutually satisfying to both parties and that is binding for both.

Self-Improvement

Through the objective of self-improvement, the worker gains status and importance it would be impossible to gain as an individual. Activities within the union allow the worker to improve himself through educational programs, election to offices or as a delegate, recreation programs, or voting with his fellow worker to improve job conditions or wages.

Representation

Although representation would be involved in the collective bargaining process, this particular objective focuses on representation for the workers in community affairs, before government agencies or boards, and before legislative bodies through lobbyists. Other labor representation might include civil defense, special honorary occasions, or citizen's advisory boards.

Self-Preservation

Because unions have had some problems in the past with employers either trying to keep a union faction from forming or breaking up a union in their midst, the objective of self-preservation was added as a reminder that self-preservation was imperative if collective bargaining was to take place. Since many employers would rather deal with the individual than with a union, the union must keep in mind that its existence is dependent upon its ability to stay alive.

Welfare

The objective of welfare covers a variety of different activities and includes insurance, credit unions, cooperative buying or housing, and education. Education under this objective does not conflict with the objective of self-improvement. Under the welfare objective, help would be given to allow the worker to attend classes.

Management and Labor Relations

Most people outside unions only hear about union clashes with management, not the cooperation that takes place between these two factions. A person entering the world of work must decide whether he wants to work inside or outside a labor union, and the decision must be his alone.

Cooperation

Many topics arise during collective bargaining where both labor and management recognize the problem and the need for cooperation. Some areas that have been successfully dealt with are safety, retirement, insurance, working hours, and overtime.

Problems

Because of news coverage, most conflicts between labor and management are blown out of proportion and the general public is hard pressed to gain a complete picture of any issue. Conflicts do arise, and sometimes they are very stormy. One side may be completely in the wrong, a lack of communication may exist, or perhaps both sides are partly wrong. The largest single conflict is usually over wages: labor wants more money and management says they cannot pay it. When conflicts do arise, company and union representatives meet together to try to reconcile differences. In most cases, compromises are made by each side until a mutual agreement is reached where both sides have been fair in their negotiations.

Intervention by an Arbitrator

When the two parties simply cannot work out their differences because the problems are too complicated or too charged with emotion to be easily solved, an arbitrator is called in. Both parties

(intervention by and Arbitrator cont.)

involved sign an agreement to stand by any decision the arbitrator will make. Both sides call witnesses; written evidence, such as account books, payrolls, and contracts, are studied; and a decision is made, written up, and given to both parties concerned.

Management-Labor Contracts

A collective agreement between labor and management is drawn up in a contract and signed by both sides. Sometimes the contract is quite lengthy—especially when it involves many people or many different crafts. A local union drawing up a contract with a small concern may need only a few pages in the agreement. A contract usually contains agreements on wage, hours, and work conditions; work rules; coverage and time-span; renewal means; means of recognition; reinforcement; special problems; and fringe benefits.

Questions – Short Answer (use dictionary or other sources)

1. Briefly describe the term “collective bargaining.”

2. Define the term “union lobbyist.”

3. What is the function of an arbitrator?

4. Name at least five items normally covered in a management-labor contract:

5. In your own words, describe your parents' feelings regarding labor unions. Cover such questions as: Are they for unions or against them, and why?

Questions – Fill in the blanks

1. There are two basic types of unions: _____ unions and _____ unions.
2. A member of a craft union works at _____ trade for _____ different employers.
3. Members of industrial unions typically work for _____ employer or industrial concern.
4. A worker in the foundry of a large steel mill would probably belong to an _____ union.
5. A carpenter on a local housing project probably belongs to a _____ union.
6. There are two levels of union administration: _____ and _____.
7. To the average working person, the _____ level is most important because that is where dues are paid and benefits gained.
8. The person who handles local affairs on a salaried basis is called a _____.
9. A union's desire to stay in existence is called _____.
10. The union objective covering such things as insurance and cooperative buying is called _____.