

# Organize a Labor Union

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# Starting Out

- Find a few co-workers that are reliable and leadership potential, they will form the core of your unionization effort. You need to discuss grievances and workplace issues, as well as choosing to go with an established labour union or to form you own collective bargaining group.
- You will need to get representatives established in all areas and work shifts of your workplace. This is the time to quietly educate these organizers and future leaders about the likely anti-union effort that will surely follow the discovery of your organizing effort. Be sure to include minorities and subcultures in your leadership recruiting. If possible obtain an employee phone list and note their work area and shift. Obtain as much employer information as you can, find out about previous unionization attempts and corporate officer history with unions. You will need to know the parent company, and composition of the board of directors. If you want to get outside union assistance you will need to decide which best matches your workplace, product, and employee specialization.
- Develop a list of demands for use in negotiations including even small requests that can be bargained away. Concurrently have a workplace education program to combat employer misinformation and to educate on the importance of organizing.
- Start a union card sign up effort. Once started this needs to be a quick and furious effort to get the largest majority possible of workers to sign up.
- These union cards are required to be signed collected so that you can go to the state or federal labour board and force your employer to enter into negotiations. It will take a few weeks for the labour board to determine who can vote and set up the election. You need to continue your education efforts during this period as your employer fights to keep the union out.
- Once you win the election and have the union in the real work starts. You will begin negotiating a contract with your employer. Look at what other unions in similar fields have gotten in their workplaces, you will need to take the economic health of the business into account when demanding some things like insurance or pay increases.

# Grievances

One of the major purposes of a union is to pursue individual and group grievances whether they are covered by the collective bargaining contract or not. If you receive a reprimand or are fired the first call should be to your union which should have a lawyer on retainer and a trained shop steward who is available at all large locations and on all shifts. Your union may not be able to protect you in all cases especially for doing something illegal such as stealing or vandalizing company property.

# Rights

The National Labour Relations Act (United States) gives you the right to organize a union in your workplace. You Have the Right to:

- Participate in meetings to discuss joining a union
- Distribute, read and discuss union literature (in non-work areas during breaks and lunch time)
- Wear union buttons, stickers, t-shirts, and hats to show support for the union
- Sign a union membership card and demand union recognition
- Circulate and sign petitions
- Join together in other activities to protest unfair treatment or demand improvements in wages, hours and working conditions
- Organize employees to support the union, sign union cards, or to file grievances.

These rights are protected by Section 7 of the National Labour Relations Act (and similar state laws), which gives you the right to join or support a union.

Under the National Labour Relations Act (NLRA) you have the legal right to form a union in your workplace. The NLRA says:

- Section 7: "Employees shall have the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labour organizations, to bargain collectively through representation of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining . . . ."
- Section 8(a): "It shall be an unfair labour practice for an employer . . . to interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed in section 7. . . ."

# Using an Established Union to Represent You

If you choose an established major labour union your dues will likely be lower for the services provided and you will have access to a larger legal framework and strike fund. The reasons for choosing to organize on your own include being unable to find a union willing to support your location, size, or demands. Realize that the labour board and corporations will expect a level of professionalism and an idealistic but non-business savvy radical will usually not be allowed to turn negotiations into a bully pulpit at the expense of his union brothers and sisters.

# Negotiation

It is important to be realistic when negotiation in behalf of your union workers. The easiest concessions to obtain are those that don't cost the company any money.

Safety and worker retention are the most important emphasis, demand strong protections and arbitration in cases of workers being fired.

It is important to include throw away demands in your initial list the company will surely have over requested on their counter offer. Know how much your demands will cost the company when determining if they are realistic. Never believe company cost estimates, hire an expert who is not swayed by the company to evaluate realistic costs of the changes you are requesting.

Your negotiation opposite has both a personal as well as a corporate stake in these negotiations. If you can find out what points will get him the biggest bonus or that he has a personal passion for it will make planning your strategy easier.

# Petition

A petition done right will empower everyone in the union to obtain their deserved demands. With its roots in the English system of government, many countries have adopted the petition as a way to allow average citizens to partake in the shaping of their communities and countries by joining forces to speak out on an issue.



# Strike

Our major threat when in collective bargaining negotiations is that we can deny the company their trained and skilled workers. Once negotiations break down and deadlines are not met we call for a strike. The intent is not to destroy the business but to bring them back to the bargaining table.

## Picket

State your case and empathise with anyone wanting to work when a strike's on. Remember violence at the picket line will end any public backing.

## Strike Fund

It is important that there be a fund established with the monthly dues to cover striking workers basic needs, it is usually a percentage of normal pay. It is advisable to arrange low or no interest loans to help workers with regular expenses. A large business fears a union with a fat strike fund.

## Scabs

When the company is injured by our walkout they will try to scab over the damage by calling in temporary workers and use management to keep the business running. Try to keep track of scabs and their identity, especially keep track of union workers who cross the picket lines. Laws may differ on what can be included in the new contract to penalize scabs.

## Boycott

If there is a continuing strike or the company fires its striking workers it may become useful to call for a general boycott. A boycott is a last ditch measure because it can cause permanent reduction in the business of the company you want to return to work for. Working with other unions to inform their members, placing newspaper and radio ads as well as continuing picketing in front of the company and its customers will help enforce the boycott with concerned individuals.

## **Lock in**

Lock the doors and refuse to come out until your demands are met.

## **Sit in**

Sit down at your work positions so even if they break down the door they can't replace you.

## **Hunger strike**

This will certainly pressure your employer but can seriously damage your health if not kill you.

## **Banner Drop**

More than just sending a message, when you're spending long days locked inside; painting out your frustrations with the company onto a banner will spur on your campaign.

## **Hold Workshops**

At the very least having a time frame will keep everyone motivated. Fill everyone in on Consensus Decision Making and start hammering out decisions.

## **Lower risk action**

These actions have the effect of putting pressure on your employer with the bonus of your employ not being able to replace you, he/she may get incredibly irritated however and if a union member does get fired for taking part in this action you should proceed to strike immediately until reemployment.

## **Slow down**

Go to work and complete tasks that would usually take you minutes in hours. Also don't take any of the rules loosely complete every task exactly to standard this will often take far longer and can't be discouraged.

## **Dirty protest**

Don't wash until your demands are met, come to work absolutely honking and make any excuse to stand as close to your employer as possible.

# Take over

If CorpGov economic policy and bad management is causing the company to fail lead by the example of workers in Buenos Aires, Argentina who reclaimed control of a closed Forja auto plant where they once worked and turn it into a working model of anarcho-syndicalism. With exemplary worker management it has created jobs, conquered the market, and managed to involve a whole community in its defence against repeated threats of eviction.

# Terms of Settlement

Most union settlements contain not only an agreement of benefits, rights, and compensation to union employees, but to the extent allowed by law, also attempt to make the shop union exclusive. The company can be forced to only hire employees who will join the union; it can also be forced to recognise the union as the sole collective bargaining agent for the employees in order to prevent sneaky deals or union breaking.

# Union as a Vehicle for Radicalism

The labour union is one of the most radical and practical ideas to appear in the nineteenth century where coal and steam baron capitalists were growing fat on the dangerous sweat shop labour of the industrial revolution. Even today a good union representative or shop steward should use their post as a place to educate the employees of the importance of collective bargaining and workers rights.

## Weak Union

If the union representation that you have is just too weak you could try to replace it. Even worse is if the union is working as a tool of the factory boss, the union or at least the leadership will have to go. First organize an election or recall for your representation, if you can get popular support this is the way to go. If you have majority support but the union won't budge, establish a second union and attempt to throw out the bums. In doing so you will have both the mainstreamed union establishment, the business, maybe even the government attacking you. Remember that our union brothers and sisters were considered enemy insurgents at the turn of the century and often faced gun barrels, and even had to use armed resistance in some cases to establish unionization as a legitimate means of bargaining in the US and other nations.



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