

Labor Unions: The Benefits and Disadvantages

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I believe that labor unions are one of the most controversial groups in the United States. Pro-union workers consider labor unions a major building block of a solid working class. In contrast, opponents argue that unions issue too many restrictions on workers, thus harming the working class and employees. Labor unions' main goal is to give employees negotiation powers to attain favorable working conditions and additional benefits through cooperation. There are several benefits of being a union member, but there are also some disadvantages.

One of the benefits is that workers gain union protection. In most US states, workers who are not members of a labor union are at-will employees (Chyz et al., 2013). This means that employers can fire employees for no legitimate reason. A simple mistake, even one that does not warrant dismissal, can lead to an employee being fired. However, there are constraints in place, such as discrimination, so that an employee cannot be dismissed from work due to discrimination. For union members, the case is different. An employer must have a just cause for firing an employee. Also, the process of dismissing an employee is not simple. In most cases, this decision takes time because it has to go through an arbitration procedure.

In my opinion, it is an advantage to be a union member because of such protection. The union protection ensures that an employee cannot be fired at will or for an unjust cause. In my experience, I have seen labor unions fighting for the rights of employees who have wrongfully been terminated from employment. My mother is one such case. When my mother worked as a teacher in a certain school, she landed into trouble after she disagreed with some decisions made by the board of directors. Eventually, she ended up being fired for refusing to recant her opinions. My mother reported her case to the labor union she is involved with, and within no time, she had her job back. The union approached the schools' management, and after a few

meetings and discussions, it was agreed that my mother had the right to express her opinion and, in such, does not warrant dismissal.

In my mother's case, the union made it easier for her to deal with the dispute she had with the schools' management. Regardless of her status (junior teacher), she was able to use the grievance processes to fight against wrongful termination. My mother's case helped me understand why it was important to be a union member. Henceforth, I keenly followed other similar cases that I read about to determine how the unions protected their members.

Unions enable collective bargaining for their members. Collective bargaining (this is the labor union's heart and soul) makes it easier for employees to get their reasonable demands met. Collective bargaining takes place when a group of people, for instance, the employees of an organization, come together to increase their negotiating power (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). A single employee might have limited power to get an organization to improve the working conditions. For example, to provide protective clothing for employees working in a chemical firm. However, if the entire workforce comes together to pressure the firm to provide the needed protective clothing, the firm will comply. Labor unions are responsible for joining workers and giving each worker room for his/her voice to be heard. The workers elect representatives who pass their concerns to the union leaders.

I believe that collective bargaining is essential for both the employer and the employee. It helps to smoothen the relationship between workers and employers. When there is a strong relationship between workers and employers, an organization is bound to succeed. Collective bargaining also prevents employees from going on strikes whenever they want to, and this protects employers from losses and damages that accrue as a result of industrial action.

Furthermore, it allows both the employer and employee to come to favorable terms of employment and provides a mechanism for the parties to solve their specific problems.

I support and would even urge workers to join labor unions for the sole purpose of gaining collective bargaining power. Personally, being a member of a labor union helped me attain better working conditions in my previous job. I used to work for a contact center that required all its workers to spend a lot of hours answering calls and responding to emails. The challenge of performing the said tasks was that the company did not provide appropriate headsets to enable the worker to respond to calls efficiently. It was always a struggle making out what a caller needed so that one could respond appropriately.

Several employees, including myself, separately raised the issue with our employer, but no action was taken. It was only later on when we all came together as employees under the supervision of a union leader and demanded that our issue be addressed that our employer acted on our concern. Each employee was handed a new pair of headsets that worked well, enabling a worker to respond appropriately to telephone requests. In this case, collective bargaining helped us acquire better working tools from the employer.

Unions advocate for increased wages and improved benefits. One of the main benefits that unionized workers enjoy is better wages and benefits than non-union workers. Union worker's wages are 20% more than the wages of non-union workers in similar jobs (Wilmers, 2017). Also, union workers have a higher chance of receiving frequent pay raises regularly. The pay raise occurs due to collective bargaining between the union, which speaks for the employees and the employer. The two agree and set up clear terms concerning pay and wages. For workers who do not belong to a union, their wages are determined by the employer without any worker's input. The benefits enjoyed by union workers are better compared to non-union employees. They

include health benefits, pension, and paid sick leave. Union workers receive significantly higher pension coverage than non-union employees.

In my opinion, being a union worker increases the chances for an individual to get an increase in wages and better benefits. I have seen this work for my father in the course of his career. My father is a retired doctor who began his career in the '90s. He started as a non-union worker, but after two years, he joined a labor union. This union negotiated with my father's employer as part of the collective bargaining agreement for higher wages and improved benefits. My father began receiving regular pay raises, and his health insurance cover expanded its scope. With time he was able to obtain pay while on sick leave. Later on, when he retired, my father began receiving a monthly pension.

One of the main disadvantages of labor unions is that they charge their members fees for representation. Contrary to popular beliefs, unions are not free. Union dues differ from one union to another, but generally, the charges range from about two hundred dollars or more per year. This takes away a large portion of an employee's paycheck for employees required to pay such dues. Employees, therefore, pay a part of their wages to unions for representation which may be upwards by 2 % for some unions. Moreover, other fees that members are required to pay include yearly fees, initiation process fees, and agency fees. All these fees increase the total amount of money a union member has to pay to his/her union, thus reducing an employee's salary significantly.

I believe that one reason why most workers do not join labor unions is the fees that such unions charge. Even though not all unions charge members for all their services, those that do may discourage workers from joining. The charges take away a big chunk of the worker's salary such that the worker sees no pay gain in moving from one job to another. If an employee feels

that the fees due to a union are too high, he/she will be discouraged from becoming a member of the union. Worker's salaries go through deductions because of taxation; therefore, introducing other major cuts may be unpleasant for employees. In my opinion, labor unions should only ask their members for an initial membership fee and a minimal yearly charge that can support the union's work.

Labor unions demoralize worker's individuality. Employees have to comply with the decisions of the union even though they disagree with such decisions. In some cases, the unionized member has to resign in order to get out of a decision made by a union, and this option is not always viable. Working in groups discourages individual creativity as people have to think and agree as a group.

Unions may not consider individual ideas as they operate with a group mentality. Even though it is well accepted that there is strength in numbers, it may be difficult for individuals to put their ideas into practice because they are masked by group thinking. Voices are heard when they come together to speak as one, but this means that individual voices are cut out, and one's voice is limited to his/her vote. The fact that unions make all their decisions according to majority votes discourages individual opinions and ideas.

Each individual needs to express themselves at one time or another, either through their opinions or actions. The need to express oneself is a basic want that cannot be denied for long, even in the workplace. Individuality is important because it promotes growth and creativity. Unions should therefore make room for individual opinions and thoughts. When people are allowed to express their individuality, they become more productive, and the general outcome is an increase in output.

Unions make it challenging for employers to promote or terminate employees. Unions concentrate more on the seniority of the employee, which often leads to the lack of progression for high-performing workers capable of advancing to the next level. Also, it is hard to demote employees whose performance does not meet the required standards. Furthermore, unions disregard the education level and the years of experience that an employee has. Since unions focus on seniority, a qualified worker may fail to get a job promotion because the union requires that he work with the company for a specific period before he/she can be considered for a promotion.

I have personally experienced a lack of promotion in an organization I worked with because I had only been a union member for six months. The opportunity arose for the assistant accounting manager in my former workplace, but even though I was eligible for the promotion, the union did not view me as a possible prospect for the promotion. I had the necessary qualification and experience, but because other members had been part of the union for a longer period, I was entirely left out of the list of people considered. I was utterly discouraged by this act, but I could do nothing since being a union member required compliance with the union's decisions.

Union decisions may differ with individual employee's wishes. Many labor unions are politically functional, and as such, they may lobby local or national governments (Kerrissey & Schofer, 2018). This act may not be acceptable to all employees because not all employees in a union support the same political leaders and views. As a result, the union may experience some tension, especially because the levies used to support these lobbying efforts come from the contributions members make to the union (Ahlquist, 2017). Some workers may be against supporting views they do not agree with. Unions may also call for certain workplace changes that

are not favorable to all employees or that are not a priority to some employees who would rather push for different changes. This happens because unions operate under the decision of the majority and not individuals.

Looking at my experience, I have had moments where I wished that the union that represented me could ask for my opinion before lobbying a political group because I had a different viewpoint. I felt that the union's decisions did not reflect my personal opinions at all, yet they were put forward as unanimous decisions representing all union members' thoughts. Some of the changes advocated for by the union in my workplace did not seem needful at all. I felt that some more important changes should have been given priority, but instead, they were entirely disregarded.

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