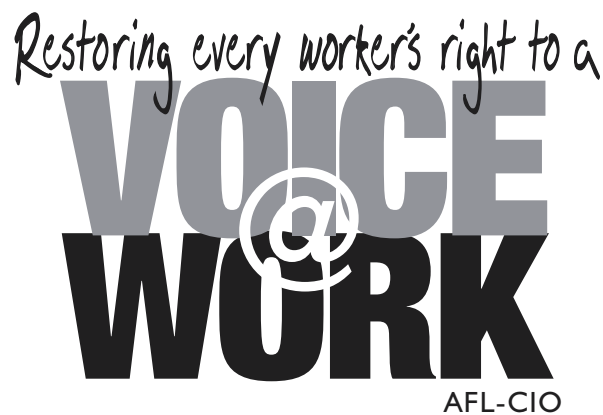


Teach-In Toolkit  
Workers' Rights Are Human Rights



**Handbook for  
Students and Faculty  
Who Support  
Workers' Rights**

**2004 Edition**



# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Introduction</b>   | 1  |
| <b>Teach-In Goals and Message: Workers' Rights Are Human Rights</b>           | 3  |
| <b>Ideas for Teach-Ins Supporting Workers' Rights</b>                         | 5  |
| <b>When to Hold Your Teach-In</b>   | 7  |
| <b>Checklist for Planning Teach-Ins</b>                                       | 8  |
| <b>Teach-In Agenda and Content</b>  | 9  |
| <b>Teach-In Is Just the First Step</b>  | 11 |
| <b>RESOURCES</b>  |    |
| Sample Teach-In Leaflet   | 12 |
| Student Pledge Form   | 13 |
| AFL-CIO Voice@Work <i>Student Teach-In Workshop</i>                           | 14 |
| Sample Call for Campus Organizations to Co-Sponsor a Teach-In                 | 16 |
| Sample Letter of Invitation to Speak at a Teach-In                            | 17 |
| Evaluation Form   | 19 |
| Publicizing Your Teach-In   |    |
| <i>Get Great Media Coverage for Your Campus Event</i>                         | 20 |
| <i>Time Line and Checklist for Talking with the Media About Your Teach-In</i> | 21 |
| Sample Article for Campus Publication   | 22 |
| Mobilizing Students   | 24 |
| Discussion Questions  | 27 |
| Suggested Answers   | 28 |
| Workers' Rights Reading List  | 34 |
| Resource Guide  | 35 |
| <b>FACT SHEETS</b>  |    |
| Support the Employee Free Choice Act  | 37 |
| Workers' Rights <i>Are Human Rights</i>                                       | 38 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The Union Advantage by the Numbers             | 39 |
| Employer Interference by the Numbers           | 40 |
| Unions 101                                     | 41 |
| Communities Do Better When Unions Are Stronger | 42 |
| Young Workers Want to Form Unions              | 43 |
| Codes of Conduct for Universities              | 45 |

# Introduction

**CONGRATULATIONS!** By reading this toolkit, you are taking an important step toward educating and motivating a generation of young people about a serious abuse of the fundamental human right to form unions and bargain collectively, without employer interference. This denial of workers' freedom of association in the United States is widespread. Few people know this is a fundamental human right; fewer still are aware of how badly it is violated in the United States or the consequences of these violations.

With your help, at workers' rights teach-ins on college campuses around the country, we will shine a spotlight on the pervasive suppression of workers' freedom to form unions and the devastating consequences for workers, their families, our communities and the nation. The teach-ins will also address solutions, including legislation to protect workers' freedom to form unions, support for organizing campaigns on campuses and in communities and motivating students to enter programs such as the Organizing Institute that can equip them with skills to fight more effectively for workers' rights.

This toolkit is intended as a guide to help you plan every aspect of your teach-in and includes everything you need to make it a success. A typical teach-in might last two hours and might begin with a panel of speakers,

including a knowledgeable faculty member, a student activist, a worker struggling to form a union and a union leader, followed by questions and discussion.

Among the basic human rights guaranteed by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the right to form and join trade unions, recognized by the U.S. government 13 years earlier in the National Labor Relations Act.

Today, U.S. workers are routinely denied this fundamental human right.<sup>1</sup> Over the past six decades, anti-worker legislation, employer manipulation and ineffective enforcement of labor laws have eroded workers' legal protections. Most efforts of workers to organize unions are met with fierce employer opposition—often including brutal and illegal tactics.

The consequences of suppressing workers' freedom to form unions are severe. Wages are held down for union members and nonunion workers. Society's safety net is weakened, race and gender pay gaps are widened and income inequality increases. For example, African American workers make 35 percent more with a union and Latino workers earn wages that are 51 percent higher with a union than without one.<sup>2</sup> Political participation is harmed, and a vital counterweight against unbridled corporate power is diminished.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most serious of all, workers are denied a voice in their workplace to shape the terms and conditions of employment and are forced instead to submit to arbitrary, unchecked employer authority.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the public objects to employers blocking workers' freedom to choose a union, but most Americans—students included—do not know about the massive abuse of human rights taking place in the nation's workplaces.<sup>5</sup> It is largely a secret war employers are waging to prevent workers from having a voice in

***“Employees shall have the right to... form...labor organizations...to bargain collectively...[and employers may not] interfere with...the exercise of...this right.”***

NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT, 1935

***“Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”***

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS,  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1948

the workplace. When workers try to form unions, one in four private-sector employers responds by illegally firing workers for union activity.<sup>6</sup> Three in four use workers' own supervisors to pressure workers to vote against the union. More than half of employers threaten to close or move the company if workers choose a union. These abusive tactics are just the tip of the iceberg.<sup>7</sup>

At workers' rights teach-ins all over the United States, we will deliver the message that when employers violate workers' rights, they are hurting the entire community. Good union jobs that pay well and provide benefits help the economy and the community. Union members are strong contributors as taxpayers and are good customers for local businesses. Union jobs provide stability for families and strengthen communities. Collective bargaining is a vital public good that benefits all of society.

At these teach-ins, we will put our creativity to work to convey the message to students that workers' rights are human rights.<sup>8</sup> We

will enlist student and faculty support for new legislative and government action to protect and promote workers' freedom to form unions, such as the Employee Free Choice Act (see page 37). We will educate students about why the freedom to form unions is so important and how savagely employers fight to block their workers' right to a union voice at work.

At the teach-ins, we'll feature workers who are struggling to form unions. We'll connect students with workers who are organizing, on campus and in the community. We'll urge them to participate in local International Human Rights Day events. We'll tell them about programs such as the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute and Union Summer that will empower them to make an even greater contribution to social and economic justice.

This kit has the tools you'll need to make a teach-in happen: resources, suggestions and tips to help you effectively reach out to students, faculty, campus unions and other allies.

<sup>1</sup> See *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States Under International Human Rights Standard*, Human Rights Watch report, 2000. Available at [www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor).

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

<sup>3</sup> Political scientist Ben Radcliff has estimated that each percentage point decline in union density triggers a 0.4 percentage point decline in voter participation. "Organized Labor and Electoral Participation in American National Elections," *Journal of Labor Research*, Spring 2001.

<sup>4</sup> See Roy Adams, "Labor Rights are Human Rights," *Working USA*, July/August 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Hart Research Associates, commissioned by the AFL-CIO, February 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Bronfenbrenner, *Uneasy Terrain: The Impact of Capital Mobility on Workers, Wages and Union Organizing*, report for the U.S. Trade Deficit Review Commission, September 2000, Table 8, p. 73. Available at [www.ustdrc.gov/research/bronfenbrenner.pdf](http://www.ustdrc.gov/research/bronfenbrenner.pdf). Bronfenbrenner's report is also the source of the statistics quoted in the rest of this paragraph.

<sup>7</sup> See Martin Jay Levitt and Terry Conrow, *Confessions of a Union Buster*, New York, Crown Press, 1993, and John Logan, "Consultants, Lawyers and the 'Union Free' Movement in the USA, 1970-2000," *Industrial Relations Journal*, Fall 2002.

<sup>8</sup> See Roy Adams, "Labor Rights Are Human Rights," *Working USA*, July/August 1999; James A. Gross (ed.), *Workers' Rights as Human Rights*, Cornell ILR Press, 2003; and Hoyt Wheeler, "Viewpoint: Collective Bargaining Is a Fundamental Human Right," *Industrial Relations*, July 2000.

# Teach-In Goals and Message

## Workers' Rights Are Human Rights

**PLAN YOUR TEACH-IN** so students will leave the event energized and informed, having learned the following:

- Workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively, free from employer interference, is an internationally recognized fundamental human right.

- The fact that this fundamental human right is suppressed in the United States today and some of the ways in which it is suppressed.

- The high price being paid—in good jobs, good benefits, good working conditions and strong communities—not only by workers and their families but by all of society as a result of the pervasive suppression of workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively.

- What students can do to make a difference to ensure workers' fundamental human rights will be better protected and respected in the future in the United States.

### **Here are some of the particulars:**

- U.S. laws supposedly guarantee the right of America's workers to choose for themselves whether to have a union, but in reality the laws are eroded and poorly enforced and no longer protect workers. Employers routinely take advantage of the situation to violate the rights of workers trying to form unions by lying to them, intimidating them, spying on them and even firing them.

- Human Rights Watch—an internationally recognized organization that monitors basic human rights—calls the routine violation of workers' rights in the United States a fundamental human rights issue.<sup>1</sup>

- The routine violation of workers' rights is a huge issue, because more than 40 million nonunion U.S. workers say they would form a union tomorrow if given the chance.<sup>2</sup> It is their right to do so. America's workers want to improve their jobs, gain health care, ensure job security and have a say in their working conditions. Unions strengthen families, communities, our social support networks and our economy.

- Employers routinely fight to block workers' right to form unions. A quarter of private-sector employers illegally fire workers for supporting a union. More than three-quarters use workers' own supervisors to pressure workers in one-on-one meetings. Ninety-two percent of private-sector employers force workers to attend meetings against the union, according to Cornell University researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner.<sup>3</sup>

- When employers violate the right of workers to form unions, everyone suffers. Our basic constitutional freedoms are compromised. Wages fall, race and gender pay gaps widen, workplace discrimination increases and health coverage, pensions and job safety standards disappear. Unions are the best tool we have for fighting poverty and bringing about social justice.

Major new federal legislation, the Employee Free Choice Act, presents an exciting opportunity to strengthen the rights of workers to freely choose a union (see page 37). Our U.S. senators and representatives should co-sponsor and support the new bill. Our goal is to obtain firm commitments from elected officials at all levels to support the right of workers to form unions.

■ Students have an important role to play in determining the future of workers' rights in America. As current and future workers,

and as educators, activists and policymakers, students are in a unique position to make a difference in the lives of working people.

<sup>1</sup> See *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States Under International Human Rights Standards*. Human Rights Watch report, 2000. Available at [www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Freeman and Joel Rogers, "A Proposal to American Labor," *The Nation*, June 2002; Hart Research, February 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Kate Bronfenbrenner, *Uneasy Terrain: The Impact of Capital Mobility on Workers, Wages and Union Organizing*, report for the U.S. Trade Deficit Review Commission, September 2000, Table 8, p. 73. Available at [www.ustdrc.gov/research/bronfenbrenner.pdf](http://www.ustdrc.gov/research/bronfenbrenner.pdf).

# Ideas for Teach-Ins

## Supporting Workers' Rights

**OUR GOAL IS TO EDUCATE STUDENTS** about the importance of restoring the freedom of workers to form unions and energizing and motivating them to join in this campaign. This is a human rights issue; it's also an opportunity to demonstrate democracy in action. It's our job as teach-in organizers to plan a program that gets across the message that workers' rights are human rights, that the rights of America's workers are routinely being violated and that we have the chance right now to do something about it.

In planning your teach-in, be sure to:

- Pull together campus groups that can help plan and organize the teach-in, including student activists, faculty supporters, campus unions and others.
- Develop a program that includes faculty, student and worker speakers who are knowledgeable and who have compelling stories to tell. For help in finding good worker and union speakers, contact Voice@Work at [vaw@aficio.org](mailto:vaw@aficio.org) or 202-637-5102. For help in finding faculty or other knowledgeable speakers, contact Sheldon Friedman at [sfriedma@aficio.org](mailto:sfriedma@aficio.org) or 202-637-5310.
- Put workers out front. Include in the program workers who have been abused for seeking to exercise their right to form or join a union. Give workers themselves the opportunity to tell their stories about why they want unions and what happens when they try to form them.
- Involve every group and organization on campus that cares about workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively—in other words, everyone who cares about human rights and economic justice in the United States. This includes sympathetic faculty and students and their organizations, campus chaplains, local civil and human rights organizations and campus unions and groups of workers who are trying to form unions.
- Make use of the AFL-CIO's *Voice@Work Student Teach-In Workshop* (see page 14). It's specially designed to educate and motivate students. Contact Voice@Work at [vaw@aficio.org](mailto:vaw@aficio.org) for more information.
- Make use of the Discussion Questions (see page 27).
- Work with speakers to encourage them to keep workers' freedom to form unions—including the dismal state of this freedom in the United States and the resulting costs for everyone—front and center in their remarks. Refer speakers to the resources section of this toolkit (starting on page 12) for ammunition for their remarks. Make sure speakers are familiar with the Discussion Questions and have thought about possible answers (see page 27). Furnish speakers with suggested answers to the discussion questions (see page 28), well in advance of the teach-in.
- Have plenty of good materials on hand that students can take with them to learn

more (see resources section of this toolkit, page 12). Be sure to include copies of the Workers' Rights Reading List (see page 34) and the Resource Guide (page 35).

■ Think politically! Make sure students learn about the new Employee Free Choice Act to promote and protect workers' freedom to form unions. Distribute copies of the Employee Free Choice Act fact sheet (see page 37), and review the contents of this fact sheet with students during the teach-in.

Make sure they know whether their senators and representatives have signed on as co-sponsors, and, if not, explain how they can contact them to urge them to do so.

■ Make sure the students who attend know specifically what they can do *next* to continue their support. Ask all teach-in participants to sign pledge cards committing them to enlist in the struggle until justice for workers is a reality in the United States. (See pledge card on page 13.)

# When to Hold Your Teach-In

**A WORKERS' RIGHTS TEACH-IN** can be held any time of the year that fits well with students' schedules and the academic calendar. Possible hooks—dates with national or local significance that might be a focus for a teach-in—include:

- Organizing campaigns or collective bargaining campaigns affecting workers on the campus or in the community
- Political primaries, caucuses or general elections
- April 12—The anniversary of the date in 1937 when the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Wagner Act
- May 1—The date celebrated as Labor Day in nearly all other countries around the world (except for the United States)
- July 5—The anniversary of the date in 1935 when the Wagner Act became law
- Labor Day
- December 10, International Human Rights Day—The date in 1948 when Eleanor Roosevelt and delegates from over 80 percent of United Nations member states adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the cornerstone of the modern human rights movement. The Universal Declaration states unequivocally that “everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association,” and “everyone has the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”

# Checklist for Planning Teach-Ins

**THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST** will help you plan a teach-in.

- Identify and pull together a core planning team (consider including student activists, faculty supporters, campus unions, students of color, workers who are trying to form unions, chaplains and social justice and human rights organization representatives).
- At the first meeting, focus on:
  - Agenda for teach-in and line up of speakers
  - Publicity and turnout
  - Location
  - Local message themes (for example, is there an organizing campaign on the campus or in the community)
  - Time of event(s)
  - Date and time for teach-in
  - Other relevant logistical matters
  - Assignments and time line
- Identify and contact a broader organizing coalition (civil and human rights groups on the campus, etc.). Solidify message and turnout with the broader coalition.
- Develop a turnout plan with a time line and accountability. Set a realistic but ambitious turnout goal based on specific turnout commitments from planning committee members. Relentlessly follow up.
- Develop a campus media and publicity plan for the teach-in. Write articles and opinion editorials for campus publications to generate interest in the teach-in.
- Identify current organizing campaigns on your campus. Tie these campaigns into your teach-in.
- Find workers with compelling organizing campaign stories. Put at least one of these workers up front as a speaker at the teach-in.
- Schedule a post-teach-in meeting of the core planning team to review student evaluations (see page 19) and debrief about the teach-in and report on ways to improve future workers' rights teach-ins around the country. Please share your ideas and results of the student evaluations with Sheldon Friedman at [sfriedma@aficio.org](mailto:sfriedma@aficio.org) or Sarah McKenzie at [smckenzi@aficio.org](mailto:smckenzi@aficio.org).

# Teach-In Agenda and Content

**EVERY TEACH-IN** will be different. Be creative in designing yours! But every teach-in shares the same goals and needs to include several key elements. This is a rough guide to stimulate thinking about agenda and content while highlighting important common outcomes.

■ As people arrive for the teach-in, make sure to give them a student pledge form (see page 13) and encourage them to fill it out before they leave. Steer them to a well-stocked literature table, and encourage them to browse and take copies of materials that interest them. (See the resources section of this toolkit for fact sheets that can be printed and made available on the literature table. *The Silent War* issue brief provides a good overview of many of the issues that will be addressed at the teach-in. It can be downloaded at [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw\\_issuebrief.pdf](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw_issuebrief.pdf) and copied.) Copies of the Student Pledge Form (see page 13), Teach-In Evaluation Form (see page 19) and Discussion Questions (see page 27) also should be given out.

■ The event's moderator should be someone familiar with the teach-in's goals and subject matter. The moderator could be a faculty member, student, chaplain or union person. In addition to welcoming the students and introducing other speakers, the moderator should set the tone for the teach-in by explaining that the teach-in will explore the following: why workers want to form unions; the impact of unions on workers and society; what happens to workers when they try to form unions in the United States today; how to evaluate the treatment of workers struggling to form unions, in human rights terms; what's at stake—the high cost to workers and society of suppressing the freedom to form

unions and bargain collectively; and how students can make a difference.

■ Pick faculty speakers who know the subject. For example, if there's a law school on your campus, there may be a law professor who knows about workers' rights as human rights. Or perhaps there is a professor who can speak about the economic and social costs, to workers and society, of suppressing workers' freedom to form unions. If you need ideas about faculty speakers, contact Sheldon Friedman at 202-637-5310 or [sfriedma@aflcio.org](mailto:sfriedma@aflcio.org).

■ It is extremely important to include worker speakers who can describe their personal experiences—why they tried or are trying to form a union and how their employer and the government agencies that are supposed to protect their rights responded. If you need help finding a worker speaker, contact Voice@Work at 202-637-5102 or [vaw@aflcio.org](mailto:vaw@aflcio.org).

■ Speakers should explain what students can do to make a difference in the struggle for workers' freedom to form unions. In particular:

- They can support organizing and collective bargaining struggles on their campus and in their community.
- They can work for the election of political candidates who support workers' freedom to form unions, and they can encourage politicians to back the Employee Free Choice Act and other legislation and policies that protect and promote this fundamental human right. (See the Employee Free Choice Act fact sheet on page 37. Be sure to distribute this fact sheet and review its contents during the teach-in.)

- They can persuade the university or college administration to adopt a tough, enforceable code of conduct on workers' rights (see Codes of Conduct for Universities, page 45).
  - They can apply to the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute and Union Summer programs.
- Don't forget: The 30-minute *Student Teach-In Workshop*, described on page 14 of this toolkit, is a terrific resource for your teach-in. If you want to obtain this workshop (and perhaps a workshop presenter) for a teach-in, contact Voice@Work at 202-637-5102 or [vaw@aflcio.org](mailto:vaw@aflcio.org).
- Encourage student participation by making use of the discussion questions (page 27). Teach-in participants could discuss the discussion questions in small groups and report back their answers.
  - Close the teach-in by reminding people to participate in events in their area. Remind everyone to fill out a pledge form, and be sure to collect the forms as students leave. Give them copies of the Workers' Rights Reading List (page 34) and the Resource Guide (page 35). Ask everyone to complete the Student Pledge Form (see page 13) and the teach-in Evaluation Form (see page 19) and collect them as people leave.

# Teach-In Is Just the First Step

**THE UNITED STATES** does not allow America's workers to exercise their right to form a union. Our goal as students who support workers' rights is to make a lasting change to the system that allows widespread abuse of workers' rights to continue. Workers' fundamental right to form a union without employer interference is a public concern requiring public policy solutions, including legislative change.

Human Rights Watch has issued a report declaring that employer abuse of workers' right to form a union is now so extreme that "the United States is in violation of international human rights standards for workers."<sup>1</sup> Executive Director Ken Roth says: "These abuses we found constitute a huge obstacle to workers' choices to try to form a labor union. There is an urgent need for Congress to take action to restore fairness in our labor relations and to improve respect for this basic right of our nation's workers."<sup>2</sup>

With a new bill in Congress, the Employee Free Choice Act, now is the time to support workers' freedom to form unions. Our senators and representatives must realize public opinion

requires them to co-sponsor and support the bill and to stand clearly for the rights of workers. To that end, we must follow up on the educational campaign we launch at this teach-in.

## **Here's how we can do it:**

- Hold more and better teach-ins, on our campus and other campuses.
- Support workers' organizing struggles on our campus and in our community.
- Turn the 2004 congressional and presidential elections into a referendum on the freedom to form unions. Our candidates must realize a strong economy depends on workers having a voice on the job. It is up to us to let the candidates know where we stand—on the side of the workers whose fundamental rights are being denied.
- Find out more about the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute and Union Summer programs to gain the skills to participate more effectively in the long-term struggle for workers' rights.

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Roth, "Workers' Rights in the United States," Industrial Relations Research Association, 2001, *Perspectives on Work*, V. 5., No. 1, pp. 19–20.

<sup>2</sup> Testimony of Kenneth Roth before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, June 20, 2002.

**RESOURCES**

# Sample Teach-In Leaflet

## **Campus Teach-In Workers' Rights *Are* Human Rights**

When workers try to form unions, some employers routinely harass, intimidate and even fire them. Laws that are supposed to protect the right to form unions just don't work. Today, more than 40 million workers on our campus and across the country would join a union if they could.

**Highlights**

**Date:**

**Location:**

**Time:**

For more information, contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.



## RESOURCES

# AFL-CIO Voice@Work *Student Teach-In Workshop*

### **What is the Voice@Work Student Teach-In Workshop?**

This 30-minute presentation is designed to educate and inspire students to participate in the national campaign to restore workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively in America.

### **Why do we need a national campaign to restore workers' freedom to form unions?**

Despite increased efforts to help the tens of millions of workers who want a union to get one, the organized strength of workers in the United States has continued to decline. Students moving into America's workforce are faced with an unjust system that does not protect their rights or offer them access to the promised "American way of life." The underlying problem is America's workers are losing the freedom to form unions, to have a say in their working conditions and environment and to determine their own futures.

The violation of the human rights of workers is not a phenomenon isolated to any one geographical area or to blue-collar workers. Whether you're a graduate student employee, a medical intern, a restaurant server or a landscape gardener, you're more likely than not to encounter employer resistance when you and your fellow workers attempt to form a union. Even though America's workers have had the legal right, in theory,

to form a union since 1935, today the laws, which should protect them, are weak and ineffective.

### **Why an educational workshop?**

Workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively is recognized internationally as a fundamental human right—but many students don't know this. Nor do they know the reasons why it is a fundamental human right or the fact that this right is suppressed in the United States and the high price being paid as a result. Recent polls indicate huge majorities of the general public oppose employer tactics designed to suppress workers' rights. But tiny fractions know employers routinely deploy a variety of tactics to fiercely and effectively resist the efforts of workers to form a union.

The AFL-CIO's Voice@Work *Student Teach-In Workshop* is designed to educate thousands of students about these serious human rights abuses and their consequences and mobilize students to join the fight to restore workers' freedom to form unions in the United States.

### **How will the Student Teach-In Workshop be used?**

This workshop will be used in teach-ins and classrooms around the country to educate and create a network of students interested in joining a highly public campaign to restore workers' right to form a union in America.

**What is covered in the workshop?**

The student mobilization workshop has four parts.

Part One: Why Workers Want Unions explains that the freedom to form unions is a fundamental human right and demonstrates that union representation provides clear advantages to workers.

Part Two: Why America Needs Unions shows how collective bargaining is a vital public good that plays an important role in creating a more just, equal and democratic society. It also prepares us to convey this message to our fellow students and co-workers.

Part Three: The Freedom to Form Unions and Bargain Collectively is a Fundamental Human Right explains why these things are and should be human rights—and the consequences of calling something a human right.

Part Four: Why Workers Can't Get Unions exposes the tactics employers use to prevent workers from winning a union and how we can spread the word about what's going on out there.

Part Five: What You Can Do About It explains how students can make a difference in the struggle for a better world by joining the fight to promote and protect workers' rights to form unions and bargain collectively.

**Who should come to the Voice@Work Student Teach-In Workshop?**

You! And leaders of campus organizations, civil and human rights groups, employees, faculty members and your classmates and roommates. Spread the word!

**Whom should you contact to set up a Voice@Work workshop on your campus?**

Contact Voice@Work at 202-637-5102 or [vaw@aflcio.org](mailto:vaw@aflcio.org).

## RESOURCES

# Sample Call for Campus Organizations to Co-Sponsor a Teach-In

Dear [*insert name of organization*],

We are planning to host a teach-in to prepare for the upcoming intensification of a massive campaign in support of the freedom of America's workers to form unions. Enclosed you will find information about the campaign to restore workers' freedom to form unions and about the horrendous situation facing workers all across the United States when they try to exercise their legal and moral right to come together in a union.

We would welcome your involvement as a co-sponsor of the event, which we see as a chance to educate students and faculty about workers' rights and employer wrongs: the widespread routine violation of the right of workers to form a union. It will also be a forum for information on what action we can take to remedy the situation, through educational, networking and political actions.

We would like to have your organization endorse this effort, because we believe this attack on human rights affects your organization and its values. In particular, we believe this affects your [*issue or constituency*] because [*reasons*].

We have tentatively set the date and location as [*date and location details*].

If you would like to be involved, please contact [*contact information*] as soon as possible, as we hope to pull together a solid plan well in advance of the event.

We look forward to working in collaboration with you and other campus organizations.

Campus Teach-In Planning Committee  
[*name of college or university*]

## RESOURCES

# Sample Letter of Invitation to Speak at a Teach-In

Dear [*insert name*],

We invite you to speak at the upcoming teach-in in support of the freedom of America's workers to form unions. All over the United States, workers and student groups are gearing up to launch a massive campaign to educate the public about the widespread violation of the rights of employees seeking to form a union and to push for strong legislation in support of this fundamental right.

The situation today is so far from justice that the United States has been declared to be in violation of basic human rights by Executive Director Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch.

When workers try to form unions, *most* U.S. employers launch comprehensive campaigns to stop them, often including tactics such as intimidation, spying, harassment and firings.

Most of us believe these employer tactics are wrong, but what we don't know about, we can't change. By far, the majority of Americans don't realize what is going on behind the closed doors of workplaces. That's why we are organizing a teach-in to inform and educate students and faculty of [*campus*].

Our goal for the teach-in is to energize and inform the students who participate. We want them to come away from it having learned:

- That the freedom to form unions and bargain collectively, without employer interference, is an internationally recognized fundamental human right.
- The fact this fundamental human right is suppressed in the United States today—and some of the ways in which it is suppressed.
- The high price being paid—in good jobs, good benefits, good working conditions and strong communities—not only by workers and their families but by all of society as a result of the pervasive suppression of workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively.
- What students can do to make a difference to ensure workers' fundamental human rights will be better protected and respected in the future in the United States.

We know your remarks will contribute to the students' understanding of these important topics.

The teach-in will be held on *[date and time]* at *[location]*. We would be honored to have you join our panel of speakers. The program of the event is *[details, e.g., introduction, presentations by workers, student organizations, faculty, community allies]*. We ask each speaker to be prepared to speak for *[length of time, e.g., five to 10 minutes]*.

If you would like to speak, please consider addressing the following issues: *[why you and your fellow workers are trying to form a union and what is happening in your workplace as a result, or what your organization is doing to support the rights of workers]*.

Enclosed is some resource information about employer abuses of workers and the campaign for workers' freedom to form unions.

Please contact *[contact information]* to RSVP by *[date]* so we may confirm our list of speakers.

Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to the opportunity to listen to you on *[date of teach-in]*.

Campus Teach-In Planning Committee  
*[name of college or university]*

**WORKERS' RIGHTS TEACH-IN**  
**Evaluation Form**

Location and date of teach-in: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please rate the quality of the speakers at the teach-in:**

Very good      Good      Fair      Poor

**Please rate the PowerPoint presentation:**

Very good      Good      Fair      Poor      Wasn't used at our teach-in

**Please rate the materials that were distributed at the teach-in:**

Very good      Good      Fair      Poor

**What did you like best about the teach-in?**

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**What did you like least?**

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**What are your suggestions for improving future workers' rights teach-ins?**

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**How did you find out about the teach-in?**

- Classroom announcement
- Another student told me about it
- Campus newspaper
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## PUBLICIZING YOUR TEACH-IN

# Get Great Media Coverage for Your Campus Event

### **Keep the human interest in human rights**

Is there a union organizing campaign happening on your campus or at a local employer of students? Students want to hear about what's happening to their classmates, and the media responds to messages with substance. So, creating opportunities for worker-students to tell their stories is an ideal way to achieve our goal of educating all Americans about the unacceptable violation of workers' freedom to form unions and to create change in a system that now permits this abuse. However, in planning your events and communicating with the media, make sure the focus remains on the unworkable system rather than targeting a few bad employers or educational institutions. The experiences of workers attempting to form unions are *examples* of what isn't working and needs changing.

It's a good idea to set up a working relationship with reporters in advance. Let them know well ahead of time that a major event is coming up, and give them the opportunity for in-depth coverage. Give them good background information to work with, brief them on organizing campaigns on your campus and set up advance interviews with workers.

### **Dos and don'ts for getting good media coverage at teach-ins**

**DO** know your core message and stick to it. Speak on behalf of *all* workers. Demonstrate that the system needs changing.

**DON'T** talk about the union as a third party. Remember, "workers organize unions," not "unions organize workers."

**DO** assume reporters know little about unions—give them well-thought-out background information about why workers want

to form unions and how unions in your area benefit the community (see samples in the Resources section of this toolkit).

**DO** start your conversations with reporters early—*never* the day before. Consider setting up a time to meet with reporters and bring workers to the meeting.

**DON'T** assume that because you sent a fax or an e-mail you've contacted anyone. You *must* make follow-up calls. Nothing beats personal contact.

**DO** make sure speakers at events are diverse and represent faculty, student organizations, local workers and the larger community.

**DON'T** have a press conference in which only union leaders speak.

**DO** put workers out front. Prepare workers to speak with reporters. Remind workers to explain why they wanted to form a union in the first place.

**DO** make your event camera friendly:

- Use the opportunity to get out a message.
- "Students Support Human Rights of Workers" is a better slogan than "Union Yes!" Use slogans that show how unions help the community. "Students Need Decent Jobs" is better than "Stop Union-Busting!"
- Put a small sign on the podium—big banners rarely make it into the camera shot.
- For placards, use two-sided signs or staple two together if around a stick.
- Put lapel stickers with your message on your speakers, your participants and on the sides of bullhorns.
- Make sure speakers are above the crowd.
- Use colorful and interesting props that help deliver your message.

## PUBLICIZING YOUR TEACH-IN

# Time Line and Checklist for Talking with the Media About Your Teach-In

### **Two weeks prior to your event**

- Seek out a location. A large classroom, a gymnasium, theater or cafeteria can be good places to hold your event.
- Select a date and time. Generally evenings are the ideal times for busy students.
- Gather a varied group of participants. Include workers, elected leaders, students, faculty and religious and community leaders.
- Update your media lists by obtaining phone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail addresses for the heads of your campus radio, school newspaper and school television or Web cast, as well as for media in your larger community.
- Arrange for a sound system, podium, seating and, if needed, a police permit.
- Assemble workers who can speak about the experiences and difficulties they had when trying to form a union. Ask them to describe why they wanted to form a union in the first place.

### **One week prior to your event**

- Gather props for your event that complement your message.
- Prepare a background packet to distribute. It should include information about the event, a list of speakers, your newsletter,

union difference information and anything else you feel might be necessary.

### **Three to four days prior to your event**

- Begin to call print reporters (school newspaper, etc.). Be sure to offer to send them a background packet in advance. Assume they know nothing and start with the basics.
- Ask the reporters directly if they will be there. Don't just assume they are coming.

### **One to two days prior to your event**

- Pitch your campus radio about interviewing workers and community and union leaders in advance for airing the morning of the event.
- Place follow-up calls to print reporters.
- Speak to *all* participants—including workers—and make sure they are prepared with the core message and agenda. They should know what roles they are playing, the message they should deliver and their time limits.

### **Day of the event**

- Meet and greet all reporters. Have them sign in with their contact information.
- Give reporters your background packet, which should include names and titles of all speakers.

## RESOURCES

# Sample Article for Campus Publication

*“When we filed for an election, they flooded us with misinformation, threatening lower wages, saying our quality of life would worsen, that our environment at work would worsen; they divided us against each other, supervisors sent bullying letters that threatened our job security. Then, once the election was held and (according to an independent polls) won, it has been a year and they still refuse to count our votes.”*

JOANNA KEMPNER, GRADUATE STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Did this undemocratic retaliation take place in some war-torn developing nation? **No—it was much closer to home.** It happened to a graduate student at University of Pennsylvania who was trying to form a union.

Every day, right here in our communities, employers violate the legal and moral right of workers to choose to form unions.

Most of the public believes it’s wrong and shameful of employers to lie to, spy on and fire workers trying to form unions, but two-thirds of those polled in research for the AFL-CIO have no idea how widespread and routine these abuses are. In fact, nearly a third of employers illegally fire workers for supporting a union. More than three-quarters use workers’ own supervisors to pressure workers in one-on-one meetings. Ninety-two percent of employers force workers to attend meetings against the union, according to Cornell University researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner.

More than 40 million U.S. workers say they would form a union tomorrow if given the

chance, according to a February 2003 survey by the nationally respected polling firm Hart Research. Workers realize a union gives them a say in their working conditions, wages, benefits and the quality of the service or product they provide.

Until recently, Carol Farel of Ashton, Pa., was an employee of Cintas, the nation’s largest uniform rental and laundry company. She wanted to form a union because “for one thing, our rights are being violated, we have no say in anything, you just have to do what you are told. I feel that there is discrimination—people of color are forced in the back or are doing only basic jobs that make it impossible to move up. Most Mexicans and Puerto Rican workers were forced only in the bad laundry area, and even if they got promoted to a new area, they were never given a wage increase.”

But when she and her co-workers tried to form a union, they were threatened with termination. Farel says she was harassed and forced to do heavy work despite a doctor’s note confirming her back was hurt. She was even prevented from talking to her co-workers. The company used consultants as informants, meeting with every worker in the plant. Job security was nonexistent. Unfortunately, stories like Farel’s are the norm rather than the exception.

In rallies, town hall meetings, teach-ins and other gatherings, students and workers are joining together to demand changes in the system that permits the routine violation of workers’ fundamental freedoms of speech, association and “to form and to join trade

unions for the protection of their interests” guaranteed by the International Declaration of Human Rights, signed by four-fifths of the delegates to the United Nations in 1948.

With an exciting new bill in recently introduced in Congress, the Employee Free Choice Act, we have a new and unique opportunity to turn the wheel of democracy and ensure strong legislation to protect the rights of workers forming unions. This bill, sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass) and Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) among others, ensures that when a majority of employees in a workplace decides to form a union, the

employees can do so without the debilitating obstacles employers now use to block workers’ free choice.

Students, more than ever, need to step up the fight to protect workers’ rights at home and abroad, because when employers violate the right of workers to form a union, everyone suffers. Our basic constitutional freedoms are compromised. Wages fall, race and gender pay gaps widen, workplace discrimination increases and job safety standards disappear. You can learn more by visiting [www.aflcio.org/voicetowork](http://www.aflcio.org/voicetowork).

## RESOURCES

# Mobilizing Students

## FROM JOBS WITH JUSTICE

Students can lend a powerful voice to the call, “Workers’ Rights *Are* Human Rights!”

### Tips for Outreach to Students

Organized outreach to students will be essential for a successful teach-in. Getting students to attend your event is not enough, though. Most student groups would like to be involved in planning the event because they have a real investment in workers’ rights issues. Here are some tips to help find those students.

#### Ask them

Quite simply, students won’t come unless you ask them. Recruitment is a hands-on process, and it happens one person at a time. Don’t assume students will show up at your event just because you put some posters up on their campus or sent a few e-mails. Get ready to hit up your local college or university and ask students to come to your planning committee meetings. Many colleges and universities have student unions, identity organizations and student–labor action alliances that will be interested in joining this campaign. If you need help finding out which student organizations to talk to, please contact some of the people listed below.

#### Self-interest

As you approach student organizations, determine why they would want to help with your event. Don’t just talk at them about what you think—*listen* to their personal and organizational needs. Think about what will specifically attract them. Articulate the goals of the teach-in to educate students about the freedom for all workers to form unions and collectively bargain.

#### Agitate

A little emotion can go a long way. Getting people upset about the oppression workers face could be a great way to motivate them to be involved in your teach-in. Retaliation, harassment, firings and union-busting are abuses workers are subjected to when trying to organize or collectively bargain. Students who come from union families will definitely relate to the connection of these issues and will want to get involved.

Once students are committed to getting involved in the action, be sure to:

- Include a student representative in the planning process of coalition-led events.
- Inform students of next steps in the campaign for the right to organize in your area. How can students help support the right to organize on campus and in your city as this campaign builds momentum?

For more information about student groups in your city and how to reach out to them, contact the Student Labor Action Project (SLAP). In 1999, Jobs with Justice and the United States Students Association together created SLAP to support, advise and solidify the student–labor work energizing campuses and communities across the country. SLAP has maximized the depth and breadth of this new student movement by facilitating networking, training, material development and technical assistance for student activists. Every year, SLAP coordinates the National Student Labor Week of Action from March 31 to April 4, which links the wide range of student interests in worker justice and organizes support for student actions from unions and local Jobs with Justice coalitions.

## **Contact**

Ana R. Rizo, National Coordinator  
SLAP  
e-mail: ana@jwj.org  
telephone: 202-434-9512  
website: www.jwj.org

Shabatayah Andrich, Coordinator  
AFL-CIO Student Program  
Field Mobilization Department  
e-mail: sandrich@aflcio.org  
phone: 202-508-6989

## **Tips for Students Mobilizing**

Students, get ready!

When we stand up for workers' rights, we are also standing up for health care coverage, retirement in dignity, reduction of the wage gap for women and people of color, right to access affordable public education, immigrants rights, domestic partner benefits and the right of all people to work in a climate of respect. We are standing up for the greatest anti-poverty program that this country has ever known, bringing millions out of poverty with living wage jobs.

## **Tools for Campus Mobilizing**

Whether you are an individual student looking to build campus support for organizing actions in your city or a student organization that wants to mobilize the campus to turn out for the event, remember the right to organize effects all of us. So construct your message broadly and inclusively.

Educational events are useful because they help to get more people interested in and concerned about your campaign.

## **How do I stage a teach-in?**

■ Teach-ins can range from hundreds of people being spoken to by important local leaders in the struggle to organize to much smaller group discussions. We will back you up and provide all of the materials needed for the action that works for you.

■ We will help you identify a worker from a local organizing campaign who can speak firsthand about his or her experiences with employer abuse.

■ Also, we will aid in selecting elected officials, union leaders or even faculty who would be excellent speakers or panel members.

■ We will provide you with a packet of resources that allows students to learn what workers go through while trying to form a union.

**Contact** Sarah McKenzie at 202-639-6289 or Smckenzi@aflcio.org for information and help with resources.

## **Other Educational Tactics**

**Class raps:** Ask professors if you can give a short rap during class time. This tactic has several advantages. First, you have a captured audience. It is one of the few times you can speak to hundreds of pupils at once and let them know about what you are doing. Secondly, this is a great place to recruit volunteers to help you. Class raps are best done by two people. While one person is giving the rap, the other person is passing out fliers and collecting interest sheets from the audience. Class raps rarely work as a turnout tactic, though. Doing a class rap a couple of days before an event is not a substitute for organizing support. However, if you know of a supportive professor, suggest that he or she offer extra credit for students who participate, especially if the action matches with the curriculum.

**Tabling:** Tabling is another good tactic to keep your campaign visible and recruit volunteers. Tabling is best done in high-traffic areas. Tabling allows you to engage potential supporters. The table should serve as your prop and should hold all of your fact sheets and information, but it should not be used to sit behind. Tablers should be in front

of the table engaging people and talking to them about workers' rights. Avoid having extended arguments with those who disagree with your position.

**Doorknocking:** This is the most effective tactic, but it is also the most time consuming and the hardest to get your volunteers to do. It has been proven not through any fancy survey but years and years of good, old-fashioned organizing that there is no tactic more effective than doorknocking. Door-knocking allows face-to-face interaction, which is the most successful way of getting support for your event and finding new volunteers.

**Involve other student organizations:** Many other student organizations have a stake in supporting workers' rights. Meet with the leadership of many student organizations

on campus and create roles for folks in mobilizing students for the event. Ask to speak to their members at the group's next meeting.

**Involve student government:** Try to get a resolution of support passed in your student government. But do not stop there. Get someone to speak at the local event. See if there are any committees that could sign on in support or co-sponsor an event. Ask your student government to sponsor buses, especially if your event is off campus.

**Utilize campus media:** This is important. In addition to sending op-eds to your campus newspaper outlet, consider taking out an ad. Do not forget about the radio and the television. On most college campuses, you can run a television or radio ad at relatively little cost if you are a student.

## RESOURCES

# Discussion Questions

- 1.** Why might a group of workers want to form a labor union and engage in collective bargaining? What are the connections between unionization, collective bargaining and the likelihood that a worker will earn a living wage or have health insurance coverage and a guaranteed pension? What difference would having a union and a collective bargaining agreement make on the job and in other aspects of their lives?
- 2.** Having the freedom to form a union might be important to workers directly affected, but why should the rest of us care? If workers are denied the freedom to form unions, does this impose any costs or consequences on society? How might the economy, political system and quality of life be affected for everyone? What might be the consequences for economic inequality and for the economic status of the most vulnerable workers in society (women, people of color, immigrants, gays and lesbians, etc.)? What might be the consequences for the strength of safety net programs such as unemployment insurance and workers' compensation insurance?
- 3.** A public good is something that benefits everyone, but the free market—left on its own—does not provide adequately. Clean air, clean water, public parks and education are obvious examples of public goods. Do you think collective bargaining is a public good? Why or why not?
- 4.** What does it mean to call something a human right? What are some examples of human rights? If something is a human right, what obligations does this impose on major institutions in society, including governments and businesses?
- 5.** Is the freedom to form unions and bargain collectively a human right? Should it be? Why or why not?
- 6.** What typically happens to working people in the United States today when they try to form a union? Is this a violation of their human rights? What are the costs and consequences of suppressing workers' freedom to form unions, for the workers directly affected and for society as a whole? Are workers' rights to form unions better protected in other countries? How, and where?
- 7.** What typically happens to employers who harass, intimidate or fire workers when they try to form unions? Are these employer tactics legal in the United States? Are employers likely to be caught if they break the law? If they are caught, what penalties do they face? Are the penalties strong enough to deter illegal employer conduct?
- 8.** How could we make a difference in the struggle to win the freedom for workers to form unions and bargain collectively in the United States? What, specifically, should we do?
- 9.** What is the Employee Free Choice Act and how would it protect workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively?

## RESOURCES

# Suggested Answers

**1.** *Why might a group of workers want to form a labor union and engage in collective bargaining? What are the connections between unionization, collective bargaining and the likelihood that a worker will earn a living wage, have health insurance coverage and a guaranteed pension? What difference would having a union and a collective bargaining agreement make on job and in other aspects of their lives?*

**A:** Workers form trade unions to aggregate their power and deal collectively with employers. If you have ever worked for a living, you know about the inequality of power between employers and employees. Constitutional protections that Americans hold dear often stop at the workplace door. Inside that door, the employer's word is law unless there is a countervailing force. The employer hires and fires, and apart from governmental regulations that are minimal in the United States, the employer sets the terms and conditions of employment. Employees can quit, but often this imposes heavy personal costs and carries no guarantee the situation will be better at the next place of employment.

When workers have strong unions, employers no longer unilaterally set the terms and conditions of employment. Instead, these critical decisions are made via collective bargaining between employers and workers' democratically elected union representatives. Workplace democracy replaces workplace autocracy.

The benefits of having a union are substantial. Union members earn 27 percent or \$161 per week more than nonunion workers. They are also much more likely to have health insurance coverage and guaranteed pensions.<sup>1</sup>

Unions are also vital for justice in the workplace. In 99 percent of unionized workplaces, workers can be disciplined or fired only for a reasons related to work performance.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, in virtually all nonunion workplaces in the private sector, workers are employees at will who can be disciplined or discharged, in the classic legal formulation, for a good reason, a bad reason or no reason at all.

**2.** *Having the freedom to form a union might be important to workers directly affected, but why should the rest of us care? If workers are denied the freedom to form unions, does this impose any costs or consequences on society? How might the economy, political system and quality of life be affected for everyone? What might be the consequences for economic inequality and for the economic status of the most vulnerable workers in society (women, people of color, immigrants, gays and lesbians, etc.)? What might be the consequences for the strength of safety net programs such as unemployment insurance and workers' compensation insurance?*

**A:** The freedom to form unions is important not only to workers directly affected but also to all workers and indeed to all of society. According to a new report from the Economic Policy Institute, unions raise wages in the aggregate almost as much for nonunion workers as they do for union workers.<sup>3</sup>

Stronger unions—as measured by higher levels of unionization—help raise living standards and improve quality of life for everyone, union and nonunion workers alike. In the 10 states where unions are strongest, there is less poverty and higher household income than in the 10 states where unions are weakest. Fewer people lack health insurance in states

where unions are stronger. Per pupil education spending, weekly unemployment benefits and weekly workers' compensation benefits are all higher in the states where unions are stronger. Thus, it is clear that social safety-net policies favorable to the vast majority of people are more likely to be won when more workers have the freedom to form unions. In the 10 states where unions are strongest, public policies that serve people's needs and interests—such as education, unemployment insurance and workers' compensation—are better for everyone, union members and nonunion workers alike, than in the 10 states where unions are weakest.<sup>4</sup>

For workers in low-wage occupations—many of whom are women, workers of color and immigrants—union membership and collective bargaining often make the difference between living in or out of poverty.<sup>5</sup> Most people don't know it, but collective bargaining is the most effective anti-poverty program our nation can pursue. The benefits of union representation are especially important to women and workers of color, who are often victims of discrimination in the workplace: The union wage advantage is 33 percent for women workers, 35 percent for African American workers, 51 percent for Latino workers and 27 percent for all workers.<sup>6</sup>

Unions also have a big positive impact on political participation. Political scientist Benjamin Radcliff has estimated that each percentage point decline in union density triggers a 0.4 percentage point decline in voter participation.<sup>7</sup> According to Radcliff, if union density in 2000 was as high as it had been in 1955 (35 percent), an additional 17 million Americans would have voted in the 2000 presidential election. So the suppression of workers' freedom to form unions is an important cause of the alarming long-term decline in voter participation in the United States. Voter participation is higher in states where unions are stronger.<sup>8</sup>

According to a draft of Rutgers Professor Paula Voos's Industrial Relations Research Association January 2004 presidential address:

Labor unions make a crucial contribution to political democracy. Labor unions play a vital role in making the U.S., and other advanced nations, more democratic than they would otherwise be. Indeed, a major reason why we are beset with the gnawing suspicion that America today may be drifting in a less democratic direction is the weakness of the American labor movement. Unions are essential vehicles of democracy in contemporary societies and when they are weak, democracy suffers.

How do unions enhance democracy? Unions encourage both voting and other forms of political participation on the part of their members and other social groups who are not union members but who have economic interests similar to the working families who constitute the labor movement. Unions register voters. Unions disseminate information about the economic positions of candidates. Unions mobilize members and staff to assist friendly candidates. Unions provide members with political experience and the confidence needed to be effective political participants, and so forth. Union members are more likely to vote, as are those nonmembers who live in union households; in the last presidential election, about a quarter of all voters lived in union households. Richard Freeman, based on his analysis of National Elections Studies data, reports that union members also are more likely to make political donations; more report attempting to influence the votes of others; and more report attending political meetings or rallies.

**3.** *A public good is something that benefits everyone, but the free market—left on its own—does not provide adequately. Clean air, clean water, public parks and education are obvious examples of public goods. Do you think collective bargaining is a public good? Why or why not?*

**A:** Yes—collective bargaining is a public good. It is good for workers—union members and nonunion workers alike—and it is good for all of society. It raises wages, increases health insurance and guaranteed pension coverage, reduces race and gender pay gaps and reduces economic inequality. Where unions are stronger and collective bargaining is widespread, safety-net programs and public education are stronger and political participation is higher.<sup>9</sup>

**4.** *What does it mean to call something a human right? What are some examples of human rights? If something is a human right, what obligations does this impose on major institutions in society, including governments and businesses?*

**A:** According to labor relations scholar Roy Adams, “Human rights are rights possessed by all human beings by virtue of their humanity....They are rights that all governments have a responsibility to uphold and promote, and which all individuals and employers have a responsibility to respect.”<sup>10</sup> Freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech are examples of human rights. Calling something a human right “means that it is a moral right that prevails over considerations of convenience or efficiency, and gives way only to other moral rights,” according to labor relations scholar Hoyt Wheeler. If something is a human right, Wheeler writes, “then it trumps mere economic interests of employers or the public.”<sup>11</sup>

**5.** *Is the freedom to form unions and bargain collectively a human right? Should it be? Why or why not?*

**A.** YES, it is a human right. Workers’ rights are an integral part of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states unequivocally that “everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association,” and “everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.” The declaration recognizes the freedom of workers to organize and bargain as fundamental human rights, on par with and deserving of the same protection as others such as freedom of speech and religion. The declaration forms the cornerstone of the modern human rights movement. It sets forth the inalienable economic, social, civil and political rights of every human being. The UDHR serves as both benchmark and beacon. It measures how well human rights are respected and protected, and it lights the path to a better world. The UDHR was adopted on December 10, 1948, by delegates from over 80 percent of United Nations member states, with leadership from Eleanor Roosevelt.

A number of subsequent international human rights declarations also make it clear that workers’ freedom of association—the right to form unions and bargain collectively—is a fundamental human right. Particularly noteworthy is the International Labor Organization’s (ILO’s) 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. This declaration was adopted with unanimous support from all U.S. delegates to the ILO, including the employer representatives. According to the declaration, all ILO member countries have an obligation “to respect, to promote, and to realize...fundamental rights [including]...freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.”

The freedom to form unions and bargain collectively is also recognized as a fundamental human right in many religious traditions. For example, according to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 1986 pastoral letter, *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, “The Church fully supports the right of workers to form unions...to secure their rights to fair wages and working

conditions...No one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity.”

The reason collective bargaining is a fundamental human right follows directly from the dignity and worth of every human being. As such, human beings are entitled to participate in making important decisions about their lives—including decisions in the workplace. Collective bargaining allows that participation. That’s why it is a fundamental human right.<sup>12</sup>

To learn more about workers’ rights as human rights, see James A. Gross, “A Human Rights Perspective on U.S. Labor Relations Law: A Violation of Freedom of Association,” *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal*, 1999, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 65–103; Roy Adams, “Labor Rights are Human Rights,” *Working USA*, July/August 1999; James A. Gross (ed.), *Workers’ Rights as Human Rights*, Cornell ILR Press, 2003; and Hoyt Wheeler, “Viewpoint: Collective Bargaining Is a Fundamental Human Right,” *Industrial Relations*, July 2000.

**6.** *What typically happens to working people in the United States today when they try to form a union? Is this a violation of their human rights? What are the costs and consequences of suppressing workers’ freedom to form unions, for the workers directly affected and for society as a whole? Are workers’ rights to form unions better protected in other countries? How, and where?*

**A:** When America’s workers seek to exercise the right to form a union, they nearly always run into a buzz saw of employer threats, intimidation and coercion. Here are some of the most common employer tactics:<sup>13</sup>

- Captive-audience meetings
- One-on-one meetings with supervisors
- Threats to close or move the workplace if workers vote to unionize

- Hiring professional consultants (union-busters) to coordinate anti-worker campaigns

- Fire workers for union activity

According to a report from Human Rights Watch, one of the world’s most respected human rights organizations, this treatment of workers by employers and the failure of the U.S. government to prevent it constitutes a serious violation of human rights.<sup>14</sup> The report says “Many workers... are spied on, harassed, pressured, threatened, suspended, fired, deported or otherwise victimized in reprisal for their exercise of the right” to choose a union. According to Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth, “Loophole-ridden laws, paralyzing delays and feeble enforcement have led to a culture of impunity in many areas of U.S. labor law and practice. Legal obstacles tilt the playing field so steeply against workers’ freedom of association that the United States is in violation of international human rights standards for workers.”

The consequences have been devastating, not only for the more than 40 million nonunion workers who independent researchers say want union representation but for all of American society. Collective bargaining is a vital public good that makes for a more just, equal and democratic society. When it is suppressed, wages lag, inequality and poverty grow, race and gender pay gaps widen, society’s safety net is strained, civic and political participation is undermined and a crucial counterweight against unbridled corporate power is weakened. The bottom line is millions of U.S. workers want collective bargaining but are denied it in a wholesale violation of human rights that leaves them and the nation worse off.

In many other industrialized countries, workers’ rights to form unions and bargain collectively are protected much better than they are in the United States. The proof is in

the pudding: Collective bargaining coverage is far higher in virtually every other industrialized country than it is in the United States. Other countries leave the decision about whether to form a union up to the workers—without employer interference. Still others actively encourage collective bargaining to establish a wage floor and force companies to compete with each other on the basis of quality and efficiency rather than lower labor costs.

**7.** *What typically happens to employers who harass, intimidate or fire workers when they try to form unions? Are these employer tactics legal in the United States? Are employers likely to be caught if they break the law? If they are caught, what penalties do they face? Are the penalties strong enough to deter illegal employer conduct?*

**A:** Many of the most potent tactics employers routinely use to suppress workers' freedom to form unions are perfectly legal under U.S. law. Others, such as firing workers for union activity, are technically illegal but are penalized so lightly or enforced so poorly that the law is no deterrent. Captive-audience meetings are an example of a potent tactic for suppressing workers' rights that is perfectly legal. A captive-audience meeting is a meeting on company time during which a strong, one sided anti-union message is presented. Workers who support the union can be forbidden to attend. Workers can be fired for refusing to attend. No equal time—or, indeed, any time—is allowed during working hours for workers seeking union representation to make their case. Captive-audience meetings take place during 92 percent of all private-sector worker campaigns to form unions. There is an average of 11 such meetings per campaign!<sup>15</sup>

Another increasingly common employer tactic is to threaten or predict the workplace will close or move if the workers vote to form a union. Though threats to close or move if the workers vote for a union are illegal, employers

have become adept at wording them instead as legal “predictions.” Penalties for making threats, furthermore, are so trivial that they are not a deterrent: The worst that can happen to employers is months or even years after making the threat, they might have to post a notice in the workplace promising not to do it again.

Firing workers for union activity is illegal, but the penalties are so minor that they are not a deterrent. The worst that can happen to employers is years after their illegal conduct they might have to offer reinstatement to workers who were fired illegally and pay them back pay for the time they were out of work—minus earnings on other jobs they held meanwhile. With penalties so minor, it is not surprising many employers treat them as a cost of doing business. As a result, illegal reprisals against workers attempting to exercise their right to freedom of association have reached epidemic proportions. These illegal reprisals numbered fewer than 1,000 per year in the 1950s. That figure has grown exponentially by the decade, reaching more than 23,000 in 1998.<sup>16</sup>

A recent 5–4 Supreme Court decision—*Hoffman Plastic Compounds v. NLRB*—removed even the law's minor back-pay penalties for employers who illegally fire undocumented workers.

**8.** *How could we make a difference in the struggle to win the freedom for workers to form unions and bargain collectively in the United States? What, specifically, should we do?*

**A:** Students can make a difference in the struggle for workers' rights. They can:

- Hold more and better teach-ins on their campus and other campuses.
- Learn more about the high price we are paying for suppression of workers' rights in the United States (see reading list on page 34).

■ Persuade the university or college administration to adopt a tough, enforceable code of conduct on workers' rights (see Codes of Conduct for Universities, page 45).

■ Support workers' organizing struggles on their campus and in their community.

■ Turn the 2004 congressional and presidential elections into a referendum on workers' freedom to form unions. Candidates must realize a strong economy depends on workers having a voice on the job. It is up to us to let the candidates know where we stand—on the side of the workers whose fundamental rights are being denied.

■ Find out more about the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute and Union Summer programs to gain the skills to participate more effectively in the long-term struggle for workers' rights.

■ Educate and agitate in support of the Employee Free Choice Act.

9. *What is the Employee Free Choice Act and how would it protect workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively?*

A. The Employee Free Choice Act would protect workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively by enabling workers to form unions without going through the meat-grinder of anti-union campaigns, marked by threats, surveillance and intimidation. It would stiffen penalties for employer misconduct, and protect access to collective bargaining by means of first contract arbitration. (For details, see fact sheet on page 37.) With a new bill in Congress, the Employee Free Choice Act (S. 1925 and H.R. 3619), now is the time to support workers' freedom to form unions. Our senators and representatives must realize that public opinion requires them to co-sponsor and support the bill and to stand clearly for the rights of workers.

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, "Employment and Earnings," January 2004; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employee Benefits in Private Industry, 2000."

<sup>2</sup>"Basic Patterns in Union Contracts," 37, Bureau of National Affairs, 14th ed., 1995.

<sup>3</sup>Economic Policy Institute, *How Unions Help All Workers*, August 2003. Available at [www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers\\_bp143](http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers_bp143).

<sup>4</sup>AFL-CIO, *The Silent War: The Assault on Workers' Freedom to Choose a Union and Bargain Collectively in the United States*, June 2002, p. 15 and pp. 21–23. Available at [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw\\_issuebrief.pdf](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw_issuebrief.pdf). Also see p. 42 of this toolkit.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, "Employment and Earnings," January 2004; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employee Benefits in Private Industry, 2000."

<sup>7</sup>Benjamin Radcliff, "Organized Labor and Electoral Participation in American National Elections," *Journal of Labor Research*, Spring 2001.

<sup>8</sup>*The Silent War*, op. cit., pp. 21–23 and *Teach-In Toolkit*, op. cit. p. 33.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Roy Adams, "Labor Rights Are Human Rights," *Working USA*, July/August 1999.

<sup>11</sup>Hoyt Wheeler, "Viewpoint: Collective Bargaining Is a Fundamental Human Right," *Industrial Relations*, July 2000.

<sup>12</sup>For an excellent discussion and further explanation of this point, see James A. Gross, "A Human Rights Perspective on U.S. Labor Relations Law: A Violation of Freedom of Association," *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal*, 1999, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 65–103. Also see Roy Adams, op. cit., and Hoyt Wheeler, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup>See "Employer Interference by the Numbers" on p. 40 of this toolkit. To learn more about what workers encounter when they try to form unions, see John Logan, "Consultants, Lawyers and the 'Union Free' Movement in the U.S.A., 1970–2000," *Industrial Relations Journal*, Fall 2002, and Martin Jay Levitt and Terry Conrow, *Confessions of a Union-Buster*, New York, Crown Press, 1993.

<sup>14</sup>Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States Under International Human Rights Standards*, 2000. Available at [www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor).

<sup>15</sup>Kate Bronfenbrenner, *Uneasy Terrain: The Impact of Capital Mobility on Workers, Wages and Union Organizing*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University, Sept. 6, 2000, table 8, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup>*Unfair Advantage*, op. cit., p. 8.

## RESOURCES

# Workers' Rights Reading List

AFL-CIO, *The Silent War*, June 2002. Available at [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw\\_issuebrief.pdf](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw_issuebrief.pdf).

Roy Adams, "Labor Rights Are Human Rights," *Working USA*, July/August 1999.

Kate Bronfenbrenner, *Uneasy Terrain: The Impact of Capital Mobility on Workers, Wages and Union Organizing*, report for the U.S. Trade Deficit Review Commission, September 2000. Available at [www.ustdrc.gov/research/bronfenbrenner.pdf](http://www.ustdrc.gov/research/bronfenbrenner.pdf).

James A. Gross, Ed., *Workers' Rights as Human Rights*, Cornell ILR Press, 2003.

James A. Gross, "A Human Rights Perspective on U.S. Labor Relations Law: A Violation of Freedom of Association," *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal*, 1999, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 65–103.

Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States Under International Human Rights Standards*, 2000. Available at [www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor).

Martin Jay Levitt and Terry Conrow, *Confessions of a Union Buster*, New York, Crown Press, 1993.

John Logan, "Consultants, Lawyers and the 'Union Free' Movement in the USA, 1970–2000," *Industrial Relations Journal*, Fall 2002.

Larry Mishel, "How Unions Help All Workers," Economic Policy Institute, August 2003. Available at [www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers\\_bp143](http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers_bp143).

Hoyt Wheeler, "Viewpoint: Collective Bargaining Is a Fundamental Human Right," *Industrial Relations*, July 2000.

## RESOURCES

# Resource Guide

### Resources for Students

**American Rights At Work (ARAW):** New national organization devoted to the struggle for workers' rights—especially the freedom to form unions and bargain collectively. For excellent fact sheets, research reports, workers' stories and more, check out ARAW's website at [www.americanrightsatwork.org](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org).

**United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS):** USAS is an organization of students and community members at over 200 campuses. USAS is part of a movement that supports the struggles of working people and challenges corporate power. We work to build power on campuses and develop solidarity with workers. For more information about USAS, check out <http://nate.clar47.rhno.columbia.edu/usas>.

**Student Labor Action Project (SLAP):** In 1999, Jobs with Justice and the United States Students Association joined together to create the Student Labor Action Project to support, advise and solidify the student-labor work that is energizing campuses and communities across the country. See [www.jwj.org/SLAP/slap.htm](http://www.jwj.org/SLAP/slap.htm) for more information.

**Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions (CGEU):** CGEU is a loosely knit coalition of labor unions in the United States and Canada that represents graduate students employed as teachers, researchers and administrative staff. For more information see [www.cgeu.org](http://www.cgeu.org).

**AFL-CIO Organizing Institute:** The Organizing Institute recruits, trains and places talented and committed people in full-time positions helping workers form and join unions in the American union movement. For more information, see [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/oi](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/oi).

**Union Summer:** Union summer is a five-week educational internship that enables young people to participate in and develop skills useful for union organizing drives and other campaigns for workers' rights and social justice. For more information see [www.unionsummer.aflcio.org](http://www.unionsummer.aflcio.org).

**Law Student Union Summer:** Law Student Union Summer is a unique and exciting 10-week internship for law students that provides a combination of legal and organizing work in support of union organizing or first contract campaigns. See [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/unionsummer/law\\_student.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/unionsummer/law_student.cfm) for details.

**Seminary Summer:** Seminary Summer is a 10-week internship being sponsored by the AFL-CIO and the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. It gives seminarians, novices, rabbinical students and other future religious leaders the opportunity to witness worker struggles for a voice in the workplace, and work with religious, community and union activists to build support for workers organizing unions. See [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/unionsummer/seminary.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/unionsummer/seminary.cfm) for details.

## **Online Materials for Teach-Ins**

Check out American Rights At Work's website for lots of excellent materials for your teach-in: [www.americanrightsatwork.org](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org).

For the latest information about the Employee Free Choice Act, including fact sheets, questions and answers and current co-sponsors, check out the AFL-CIO's website at [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/voiceatwork/efca.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/voiceatwork/efca.cfm).

***The Silent War:*** Available at [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw\\_issuebrief.pdf](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/howjoin/upload/vatw_issuebrief.pdf). This report would make a good handout or literature table item for your teach-in. It is also essential background reading for teach-in speakers.

***"This Is America, Where We Have Freedom,"*** by Laureen Lazarovici, *America@work*, August 2003. Available at [www.aflcio.org/aboutaflcio/magazine/0803\\_freedom.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutaflcio/magazine/0803_freedom.cfm).

**Another great resource for teach-in materials** is the *Labor Day Toolkit for Academics Who Support Workers' Rights*, [www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=20366](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/joinunions/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=20366). Many of the materials in this Labor Day toolkit are good for handouts, literature tables and as background readings for teach-in speakers.

# Support the Employee Free Choice Act

## How Students Can Help Workers Win the Freedom to Form Unions

On Nov. 21, 2003, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) introduced the **Employee Free Choice Act (S. 1925, H.R. 3619)**. This landmark bill when passed will protect the fundamental human right of America's workers to join unions and negotiate first contracts without employer interference.

The **Employee Free Choice Act** guarantees employee free choice through democratic majority-verification procedures, facilitates initial labor agreements through mediation and arbitration and provides more effective remedies for workers when employers violate the law.

■ **Democratic majority verification:** The freedom of association is a fundamental right of Americans. People can join most organizations, whether they are religious denominations, book clubs or amateur sports teams, simply by signing up. The **Employee Free Choice Act** provides for the certification of a union when a majority of the employees at a workplace has signed written authorizations stating the wish to be represented by a union. Workers would no longer be forced into the meat grinder of National Labor Relations Board election process—which expose them to weeks and months of employer threats, surveillance, coercion, firings and intimidation, orchestrated by professional anti-union consultants—in order to exercise their fundamental human right to form a union.

■ **First-contract arbitration:** Even after workers jump through all the hoops under current law and succeed in forming a union, employers refuse to agree to initial collective bargaining contracts one third of the time. In most cases the failure to reach agreement results from employer delaying tactics and unwillingness to bargain in good faith. There is no real remedy under current law for this serious abuse of workers' rights. The **Employee Free Choice Act** would address this problem by giving both parties access to mediation and, if necessary, binding arbitration in order to reach an initial collective bargaining agreement on a timely basis.

■ **Remedies:** Under current law penalties for illegal employer conduct are so negligible that employers routinely violate worker's rights. As a result, employer misconduct has skyrocketed: According to Human Rights Watch, in 1998 the National Labor Relations Board found that 24,000 workers were illegally disciplined or fired for exercising their right to freedom of association in the workplace, up from 6,000 in 1969 and fewer than 1,000 per year in the 1950s. The **Employee Free Choice Act** would stiffen penalties for illegal employer conduct.

**Here's what you can do:** ask your senators and representative whether they are co-sponsoring the **Employee Free Choice Act**. If they are, thank them. **If they aren't, urge them to become a co-sponsor TODAY!**

## FACT SHEET

# Workers' Rights Are Human Rights

**THE FREEDOM TO JOIN A UNION** is recognized internationally as a fundamental human right, deeply rooted in international and U.S. law, like other basic freedoms such as freedom of religion and the right to work free from discrimination based on race, gender or age. The freedom to join a union is an important aspect of the freedom of association, which the United Nations recognized as a human right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But when workers try to form or join a union in the United States today, employers nearly always violate workers' fundamental human

rights with tactics designed to suppress the freedom to organize, according to an August 2000 report by Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage*. "Many workers who try to form and join trade unions to bargain with their employers are spied on, harassed, pressured, threatened, suspended, fired, deported or otherwise victimized in reprisal for their exercise of the right to freedom of association," the report says. The report points to the "culture of near-impunity" that pervades U.S. labor law and practice and notes, "Human rights cannot flourish where workers' rights are not enforced."

### **Human Rights Watch report finds employer interference in U.S. workplaces.**

- Firing or otherwise discriminating against a worker for trying to form a union is illegal but commonplace in the United States.
- Almost without limits, employers can legally force workers to attend closed-door meetings against the union on work time.
- Under U.S. law, employers have refined methods of legally "predicting"—as distinct from unlawfully threatening—workplace closures, firings, wage and benefit cuts and other dire consequences if workers form or join a union.
- There are long delays—often taking years—in the National Labor Relations Board and court procedures.

- Even after workers form a union and bargaining begins, some employers continue to thwart workers' choice by bargaining in bad faith—going through the motions of meeting with the workers and making proposals and counterproposals without any intention of reaching an agreement.
- Millions of workers in the United States are not covered by laws that are supposed to protect the right to organize and bargain collectively, such as some temporary and contractual workers.
- Employers use subcontracting arrangements and temporary employment agencies to avoid any obligation to recognize workers' rights of organization and collective bargaining.

Source: For a copy of the full report, go to [www.hrw.org/campaigns/uslabor](http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/uslabor).

## FACT SHEET

# The Union Advantage by the Numbers

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Union workers' median weekly earnings  | \$760      |
| Nonunion workers' median weekly earnings   | \$599      |
| <b>Union wage advantage</b>  | <b>27%</b> |
|  |            |
| Union women's median weekly earnings   | \$696      |
| Nonunion women's median weekly earnings  | \$523      |
| <b>Union wage advantage for women</b>  | <b>33%</b> |
|  |            |
| African American union workers' median weekly earnings   | \$665      |
| African American nonunion workers' median weekly earnings  | \$491      |
| <b>Union wage advantage for African Americans</b>  | <b>35%</b> |
|  |            |
| Latino union workers' median weekly earnings   | \$632      |
| Latino nonunion workers' median weekly earnings  | \$419      |
| <b>Union wage advantage for Latinos</b>  | <b>51%</b> |
|  |            |
| Asian American union workers' median weekly earnings   | \$759      |
| Asian American nonunion workers' median weekly earnings  | \$681      |
| <b>Union wage advantage for Asian Americans</b>  | <b>11%</b> |
|  |            |
| Union workers with guaranteed (defined-benefit) pension  | 69%        |
| Nonunion workers with guaranteed (defined-benefit) pension   | 14%        |
| <b>Union members are four times more likely than nonunion workers to have guaranteed pensions</b>    |            |
|  |            |
| Union workers who get health benefits  | 75%        |
| Nonunion workers who get health benefits   | 49%        |
| <b>Union members are 53% more likely than nonunion workers to have health benefits</b>               |            |
|  |            |
| Union workers who get short-term disability coverage   | 69%        |
| Nonunion workers who get short-term disability coverage  | 30%        |
| <b>Union members are more than twice as likely than nonunion workers to have disability coverage</b> |            |
|  |            |
| Union workers who get life insurance coverage  | 82%        |
| Nonunion workers who get life insurance coverage   | 51%        |
| <b>Union members are 60% more likely than nonunion workers to get life insurance coverage</b>        |            |

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, *Employment and Earnings*, January 2004; Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employee Benefits in Private Industry*, 2000.

## FACT SHEET

# Employer Interference by the Numbers

(Private-Sector Employers)

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Employers that illegally fire at least one worker for union activity during organizing campaigns:                                     | <b>25%</b>    |
| Employers that hire consultants or union-busters to help them fight union organizing drives:  | <b>75%</b>    |
| Employers that force employees to attend one-on-one meetings with their own supervisors against the union:                            | <b>78%</b>    |
| Employers that force employees to attend mandatory closed-door meetings against the union:  | <b>92%</b>    |
| Employers that threaten to call the immigration officials during organizing drives that include undocumented employees:               | <b>52%</b>    |
| Companies that threaten to close the plant if the union wins the election:  | <b>51%</b>    |
| Companies that actually close their plants after a successful union election:   | <b>1%</b>     |
| Workers in 1998 who won cases proving they had been illegally discriminated against for engaging in legally protected union activity: | <b>24,000</b> |
| Percent of elections in which workers vote to have a union but still have no contract two years after the election:                   | <b>32%</b>    |
| Proportion of public who says laws protecting the freedom to join unions are important:   | <b>71%</b>    |
| Proportion of public who knows what happens in America's workplaces when workers try to form unions:                                  | <b>35%</b>    |

### **If employers allowed a fair process for choosing a voice, millions more workers would have a voice on the job today.**

|  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Nonunion workers who say they want to join a union:                          | <b>More than 40 million</b> |
| Share of U.S. workers who belongs to unions:                                 | <b>13.5%</b>                |
| Share of U.S. workers who would be in unions if workers could choose freely: | <b>47%</b>                  |

Sources: Kate Bronfenbrenner, *Uneasy Terrain: The Impact of Capital Mobility on Workers, Wages and Union Organizing*, Cornell University, Sept. 6, 2000; Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States Under International Human Rights Standards*, 2000; Membership survey for the AFL-CIO, Peter Hart Research, 1999 and 2001; Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, *What Workers Want*, ILR Press, 2002, updated figures from authors, June 2002; Peter Hart Research, February 2003.

# Unions 101

## A Quick Study of How Unions Help Workers Win a Voice on the Job

**What is a union?** A union is a group of workers who form an organization to gain:

- Respect on the job,
- Better wages and benefits,
- More flexibility for work and family needs,
- A counterbalance to the unchecked power of employers, and
- A voice in improving the quality of their products and services.

**How do people form a union?** When workers decide they want to come together to improve their jobs, they work with a union to help them form their own local chapter. Once a majority of workers shows they want a union, sometimes employers honor the workers' choice. Often, the workers must ask the government to hold an election. If the workers win their union, they negotiate a contract with the employer that spells out each party's rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

**Does the law protect workers joining unions?** It's supposed to—but too often it doesn't. Under the law, employers are not allowed to discriminate against or fire workers for choosing to join a union. For example, it's illegal for employers to threaten to shut down their businesses or to fire employees or take away benefits if workers form a union. However, employers routinely violate these laws, and the penalties are weak or nonexistent.

**What kinds of workers are forming unions today?** A wider range of people than ever before, including many women and immigrants, is joining unions—doctors and nurses, poultry workers and graduate employees, home health care aides and wireless communications workers, auto parts workers and engineers, to name a few.

**How do unions help working families today?** Through unions, workers win better wages, benefits and a voice on the job—and good union jobs mean stronger communities. Union workers earn 27 percent more than nonunion workers and are more likely to receive health care and pension benefits than those without a union. In 2003, median weekly earnings for full-time union wage and salary workers were \$760, compared with \$599 for their nonunion counterparts. Unions lead the fight today for better lives for working people, such as through expanded family and medical leave, improved safety and health protections and fair-trade agreements that lift the standard of living for workers all over the world.

**What have unions accomplished for all workers?** Unions have made life better for all working Americans by helping to pass laws ending child labor, establishing the eight-hour day, protecting workers' safety and health and helping create Social Security, unemployment insurance and the minimum wage, for example. Unions are continuing the fight today to improve life for all working families in America.

**What challenges do workers face today when they want to form unions?** Today, millions of workers want to join unions. The wisest employers understand that when workers form unions, their companies also benefit. But most employers fight workers' efforts to come together by intimidating, harassing and threatening them. In response, workers are reaching out to their communities for help exercising their freedom to improve their lives.

**FACT SHEET**

# Communities Do Better When Unions Are Stronger

## 10 STRONGEST UNION STATES COMPARED WITH THE 10 WEAKEST

**STATISTICS SHOW** that states in which more people are union members are states with higher wages, better benefits and better schools.

While unions are just one of the factors that affect the quality of living, the pattern indicates that when workers have a voice over time, the community benefits. And when employers interfere in workers' decision about having a union, the community loses—living standards decline and income inequality grows.

**10 states with strongest unions** (based on percentage of workforce with a union): New York, Hawaii, Alaska, Michigan, New Jersey, Washington, Illinois, Rhode Island, Ohio, Minnesota.

**10 states with weakest unions** (based on percentage of workforce with a union): North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, Arizona, South Dakota, Arkansas, Florida, Utah.

|  | <b>10 States Where Unions Are Strongest</b> | <b>10 States Where Unions Are Weakest</b> |
|--|---|---|
| Average hourly earnings, 2000 <sup>1</sup>   | \$15.61                                     | \$12.49                                   |
| Average household income, 2000 <sup>2</sup>  | \$46,378                                    | \$38,854                                  |
| Percent of population with no medical insurance, 1999–2000 <sup>3</sup>  | 11.8%                                       | 15.1%                                     |
| Public education spending per pupil, 2000–2001 <sup>1</sup>  | \$8,265                                     | \$5,774                                   |
| Percent of eligible voters who voted in presidential election, 2000 <sup>4</sup>   | 55.2%                                       | 49.2%                                     |
| Crimes per 100,000 people <sup>1</sup>   | 4,114                                       | 4,694                                     |
| Percent of population in poverty, 1999 <sup>1</sup>  | 10.6%                                       | 13.3%                                     |
| <sup>1</sup> O'Leary, Kathleen and Scott Morgan, <i>State Rankings 2001</i> .<br><sup>2</sup> <i>Income of Households by State in 2000</i> , U.S. Census Bureau.<br><sup>3</sup> <i>Percent of Uninsured, 1999–2000</i> , from Kaiser Family Foundation State Health Facts Online.<br><sup>4</sup> Voter turnout in 2000 from <a href="http://www.fairvote.org/tourout/treturnstate.htm">www.fairvote.org/tourout/treturnstate.htm</a> . |   |   |

**FACT SHEET**

# Young Workers Want to Form Unions

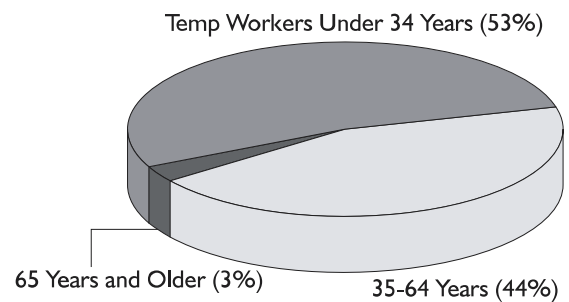
**YOUNG WORKERS** often say they don't trust their employers, feel they're treated differently and see that union members are better off. That's why a majority of young workers aged 16-35 say they would vote to form a union if a union election were held tomorrow in their work place.

**One in six young adults will be a temporary worker before they turn 35.**

Young adults earn 16.5 percent less as temps than if they worked regular jobs. Only 5 percent of young temporary workers have employer-provided health insurance.

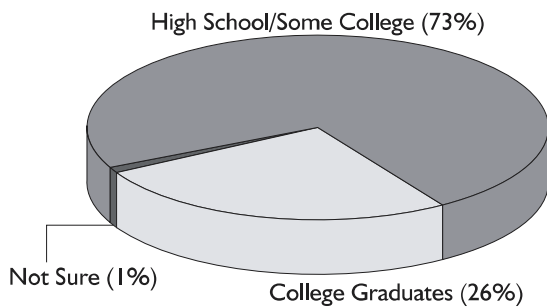
**Despite hype of a techno-savvy, highly educated workforce, three-fourths of young workers have not graduated from college.** Roughly half of workers who have not graduated live paycheck to paycheck, and only 34 percent earn at least \$20,000 per year. In contrast, 68 percent of young college graduates make at least \$20,000.

Average Age of Temporary Workers



Source: 2030 Center, 1999

Most Young Workers Do Not Finish College

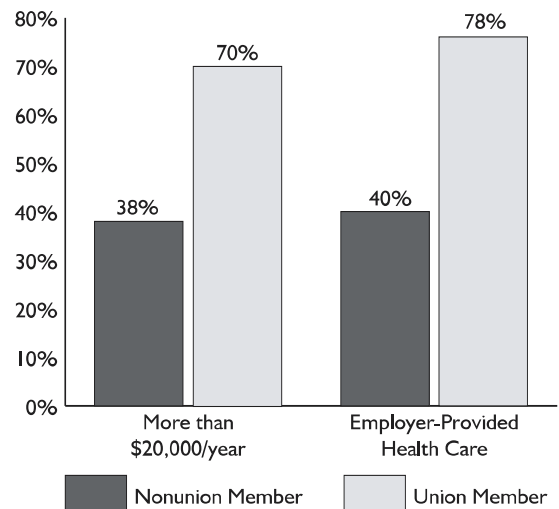


Source: Peter Hart Research, 1999, 2001.

**Young union members fare better than young workers without unions.**

Young workers who have formed a union are nearly two times more likely to have employer provided health care than workers without a union. Young union members also earn more in wages and are more likely to have an employer provided pension.

Young Union Members Have More Financial Security

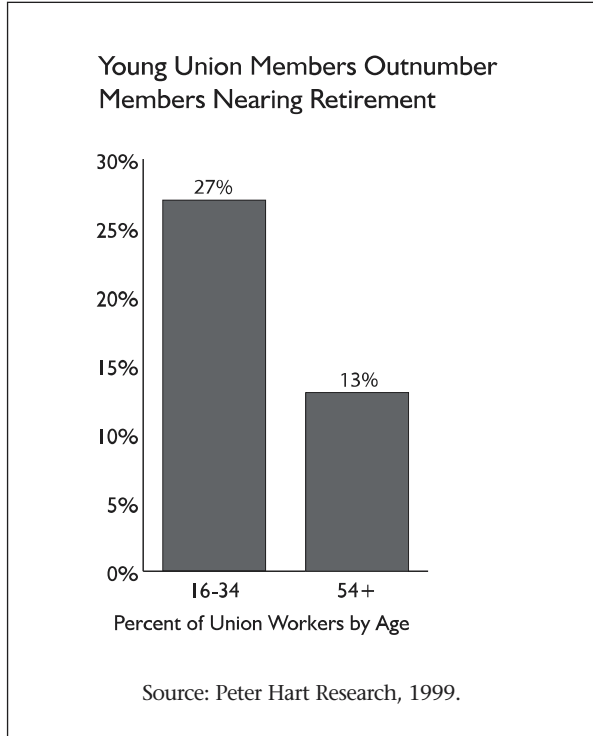
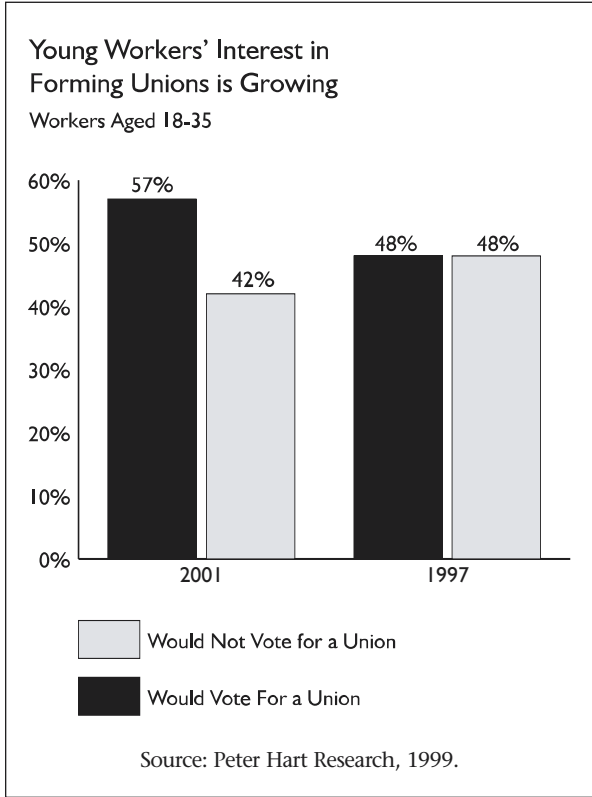


Source: Peter Hart Research, 1999.

**An increasing amount of young workers say they would either probably or definitely vote to form a union.**

Fifty-seven percent of young workers who don't already have a union say they would join a union tomorrow if given a chance.

**More than 4 million young workers are union members.** Young union members outnumber union members nearing retirement age by nearly two to one. Roughly one-fourth of union members are 34 years old or younger.



# Codes of Conduct for Universities

**ONE WAY TO WIN RESPECT** for workers' freedom to form unions is through a campaign to persuade the university or college administration to adopt a tough, enforceable code of conduct on workers' rights. In response to pressure from student anti-sweatshop activists, many leading universities have adopted or subscribed to codes of conduct upholding the rights of licensee or supplier employees to form unions and bargain collectively without employer interference. Yet many of the same universities fail to respect the exercise of the very same rights by their own employees. This hypocritical conduct must be exposed and stopped.

It is important not be hoodwinked by university administrators who defend their campaigns and legal maneuvers to suppress the formation of unions by campus employees by claiming that these tactics are permitted under U.S. law. As we have seen, according to no less an authority than Human Rights Watch, U.S. law fails miserably to protect the fundamental human right of America's workers to form unions and bargain collectively. "Adhering to the law" far too often has become employer-speak for carrying out an aggressive campaign to snuff out workers' attempts to form unions, complete with repeated, coercive captive-audience meetings, one-on-one anti-union sessions with supervisors and leaflets, letters and videos chocked full of misinformation and thinly veiled threats. If these don't work, universities as employers can and do avail themselves of

lengthy and debilitating appeals and other delaying tactics. Often they even employ the same union-busting consultants and law firms used by private corporations to stifle workers' organizing campaigns.

A code of conduct can be an important tool for ensuring universities truly respect the freedom of employees—including contractor employees—to form unions. Such a code can:

- Require universities to affirm they will remain neutral when employees seek to form a union.
- Require universities to affirm they will recognize employee unions based on signed authorizations—so that workers aren't forced into the meat grinder of the National Labor Relations Board election process, complete with threats, intimidation, surveillance and other coercive and abusive tactics, or lengthy administrative procedures and delaying appeals.
- Require universities to affirm they will bargain in good faith with employees' unions and submit disputes about the terms of initial collective bargaining agreements to binding arbitration if no contract has been reached within a reasonable time.
- Require universities to affirm they will submit disputes about whether the university is complying with the code of conduct to a distinguished impartial panel, empowered to impose remedies with teeth.







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