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## MERIT BADGE SERIES



**WORKERS'  
RIGHTS**

# AMERICAN LABOR



## Requirements

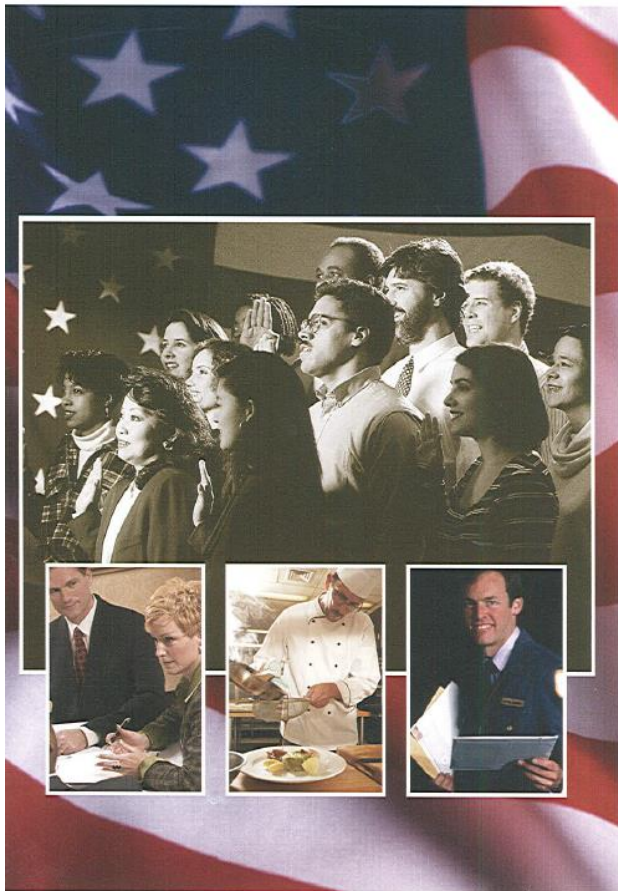
1. Using resources available to you, learn about working people and work-related concerns. List and briefly describe or give examples of at least EIGHT concerns of American workers. These may include, but are not limited to, working conditions, workplace safety, hours, wages, seniority, job security, equal-opportunity employment and discrimination, guest workers, automation and technologies that replace workers, unemployment, layoffs, outsourcing, and employee benefits such as health care, child care, profit sharing, and retirement benefits.
2. With your counselor's and parent's approval and permission, visit the office or attend a meeting of a local union, a central labor council, or an employee organization, or contact one of these organizations via the Internet. Then do EACH of the following:
  - a. Find out what the organization does.
  - b. Share the list of issues and concerns you made for requirement 1. Ask the people you communicate with which issues are of greatest interest or concern to them and why.
  - c. Draw a diagram showing how the organization is structured, from the local to the national level, if applicable.
3. Explain to your counselor what labor unions are, what they do, and what services they provide to members. In your discussion, show that you understand the concepts of labor, management, collective bargaining, negotiation, union shops, open (nonunion) shops, grievance procedures, mediation, arbitration, work stoppages, strikes, and lockouts.
4. Explain what is meant by the adversarial model of labor-management relations, compared with a cooperative-bargaining style.
5. Do ONE of the following:
  - a. Develop a time line of significant events in the history of the American labor movement from the 1770s to the present.
  - b. Prepare an exhibit, a scrapbook, or a computer presentation, such as a slide show, illustrating three major achievements of the American labor movement and how those achievements affect American workers.
  - c. With your counselor's and parent's approval and permission, watch a movie that addresses organized labor in the United States. Afterward, discuss the movie with your counselor and explain what you learned.
  - d. Read a biography (with your counselor's approval) of someone who has made a contribution to the American labor movement. Explain what contribution this person has made to the American labor movement.
6. Explain the term *globalization*. Discuss with your counselor some effects of globalization on the workforce in the United States. Explain how this global workforce fits into the economic system of this country.

7. Choose a labor issue of widespread interest to American workers—an issue in the news currently or known to you from your work on this merit badge. Before your counselor, or in writing, argue both sides of the issue, first taking management's side, then presenting labor's or the employee's point of view. In your presentation, summarize the basic rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, including union members and nonunion members.
8. Discuss with your counselor the different goals that may motivate the owners of a business, its stockholders, its customers, its employees, the employees' representatives, the community, and public officials. Explain why agreements and compromises are made and how they affect each group in achieving its goals.
9. Learn about opportunities in the field of labor relations. Choose one career in which you are interested and discuss with your counselor the major responsibilities of that position and the qualifications, education, and training such a position requires.

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## Introduction

The Declaration of Independence inspired many workers to demand their rights as people “created equal” to business owners. Just as the Colonists had united to name their *grievances* (complaints about wrongs suffered) against the British king, George III, and declare themselves independent of his control, American workers in specific trades came together to demand a *redress* (the setting right of unjust situations) of their grievances about low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions.

You might be surprised to learn that the Boston Massacre in 1770 began as a labor dispute between an off-duty British soldier seeking a job to supplement his wage and a Colonial rope maker who resented having to compete with the soldier for scarce employment opportunities. Yet this event ignited a long fuse leading to the American Revolution, independence, and individual rights.



In time, these workers—particularly the “organized” labor force—demanded a voice in the workplace and *equity*, or a fair distribution of the benefits of economic prosperity. What they discovered is that democracy and capitalism, although they reinforce each other at many levels, often are at odds. The concept of *equal rights* clashes with *individual rights*. The *entrepreneur*, a person who starts a business and assumes the risks, wants to make a profit for his or her efforts. In fact, that person wants to make more profits than competitors.

What is “equal” about that? Should the people who work for the entrepreneur share the profits? These issues are at the core of the American labor movement.



## Us and Them: The Struggles Between Labor and Management

The economic development of the United States occurred in three stages. It began with settlers staking claims to land, then trying to raise crops and livestock to sustain their families. People worked to produce what they needed and could consume. In time, as trade developed, planters exported crops and artisans made items to sell.

The increased demand for products created an increased demand for labor—as well as an increased demand for higher profits. The invention of labor-saving machines, periods of prosperity and economic depressions, waves of immigration, and worker discontent led to critical changes in society. The majority of American workers were no longer independent and self-sufficient. Instead they had become employees, dependent on others for employment.

The pressure for ever-higher profits in a competitive economy resulted in management strategies to increase productivity by lowering wages and raising workday hours. Company owners spent money for machines instead of improvements to working conditions. Workers united to protest and protect their interests, including their health and safety. The labor movement began because of frustration with management and continues in the 21st century, as workers strive to maintain the gains they have made and work for resolutions to new conflicts.

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Factory workers often included children, who worked long hours under unsafe working conditions and were paid very little—sometimes nothing—for their work.

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### Agricultural Revolution and Slave Labor

When the founding fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution in 1787, they avoided addressing the issue of slavery in the document. The plantation system produced important cash crops for export, but it depended on the labor of enslaved African Americans.

In 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, which removed cottonseeds quickly and cheaply. Now cotton could be grown profitably anywhere in the South, which encouraged planters to acquire more land by moving westward.

Through the 1850s, slaves produced most of the raw cotton for textile mills in Great Britain and in the northeastern part of the United States. Whether or not people supported the idea of slavery, they knew that slave labor was profitable.



Eli Whitney's cotton gin

### Industrial Revolution and Free Labor

Industrial growth took off in the first half of the 19th century because the opportunities for trade expanded and new machines increased productivity. Canal systems and railroads allowed freight to move around the country more easily and cheaply. The invention of the steam printing press led to the widespread circulation of many different newspapers; the telegraph sent information instantly over long distances. The transportation and information networks knitted regional and national markets together.

Rural families started producing surplus crops and other goods for the market. They became less isolated and more aware of employment opportunities for their children. Young men often went west to buy and work their own land. Young women moved to towns and cities to work in the new textile mills and factories.

The rise of commercial agriculture and industries drastically changed the labor force. For centuries, most men learned a craft by working as an apprentice to a master craftsman, who owned his business. After years of training, the apprentice became a journeyman, or skilled craftsman. After more years of working for the master (and saving money), the journeyman started his own business as a master. The relationships were unequal, but the understanding that everyone had to spend time in training and the promise of becoming a master made the system work.





The factory system soon undermined the master-journeyman-apprentice arrangement. The availability of inexpensive and high-quality products shifted the demand to mass-produced items. Master craftsmen had to compete with mills and factories. Many furniture makers, shoemakers, hatters, and tailors hired more apprentices, changed work methods, and increased production. Those who could not compete lost their businesses and worked as journeymen for other masters or took jobs in factories.

Employers determined that they could break down expensive skilled work into simple tasks that could be done for a lower cost in a centralized workshop under supervision. This *division of labor* into small, specialized operations allowed the employer to replace skilled journeymen with semiskilled workers, some of whom were women and children.



The dangerous working conditions factory workers endured for many years eventually led to laws and labor unions that helped protect workers.

Factory workers put in 12 hours a day, six days a week. Conditions in the factory and boarding houses where they lived seemed tolerable until the arrival of several million European immigrants during the mid- to late 1800s. These newcomers joined the ranks of the semiskilled employees, increasing the competition for a limited number of factory jobs and driving wages down. More factories opened, so company owners competed with each other while trying to protect profits.

By increasing production and lowering the piece rate, the employers effectively froze the workers' wages and increased their own profits. The workload of the average worker more than doubled, but only the owner benefited.

The hostility toward immigrants grew in different areas of the country during in the mid-1800s. A famine in China and the discovery of gold in California brought many Chinese

Employers cut costs by using several tactics.

1. **Speed-up**—Workers had to increase the rate at which the machines operated.
2. **Stretch-out**—Workers had to increase the number of machines they tended.
3. **Piece-rate reduction**—The employer lowered the price paid per piece produced.

Native-born workers resented their employers' actions as well as the immigrants who were willing to work for less money and often took their jobs.

people to the West Coast. By 1860, more than 35,000 Chinese immigrants worked in California mining camps. In 1848, the U.S. victory over Mexico in the U.S.-Mexican War resulted in the acquisition of land from Texas to California. Nearly 80,000 people, mostly of Spanish-Indian descent, would provide the low-paying labor to make agriculture, mining, and ranching profitable in that region. Native-born Americans resented having to compete for work with the people of Spanish-Indian descent. They also feared that the abolition of slavery would flood the labor force with freed slaves, threatening more jobs and driving wages even lower.



Thousands of Chinese immigrants helped build the transcontinental railroad during the 1860s.

### Birth of the Labor Movement

The labor movement began in the 18th century with local crafts organizations known as *benevolent societies*. These groups provided financial assistance to a worker or his family in case of debt, illness, or death. Later, journeymen in specific crafts united on a temporary basis to protest wage reductions and long workdays.

Eventually, different unions tried to win *recognition* from management to be the sole bargaining agent for all workers in a particular *bargaining unit*, or group. Some unions demanded *closed shops* where only union members were hired. Employers tried to avoid dealing with unions by hiring nonunion workers and appealing to the courts to declare unions illegal. Courts prosecuted the unions as "criminal conspiracies in restraint of trade." Later, the courts decided that unions were legal but challenged the methods unions used to make gains, such as strikes and boycotts.

**agency shop.** A workplace where nonunion employees of the bargaining unit (group covered by collective bargaining) must pay the union a sum equal to union dues as a condition of continuing employment.

**closed shop.** A workplace where only union members may be hired. Workers must join the union before being employed.

**open shop.** A company that hires workers regardless of union membership. This prevents unions from securing the right to represent the workers at that workplace.

**union shop.** A workplace where every member of the bargaining unit must become a member after a specified amount of time.

A new social class emerged as more and more workers became wage earners. Unions organized for the economic benefit of the members and got involved in independent political activity. In the 1820s, political labor parties such as the Workingmen's Party brought attention to the social and economic problems of workers. Their efforts led to legislation that prohibited imprisonment for debt and established a 10-hour workday for women and children. They also laid the groundwork for the establishment of the free public school system.

Workers tried to organize local unions of different crafts into citywide groups called *city central groups*, or *trades unions*. In the second half of the 19th century, they concentrated on forming national unions of workers in the same crafts. Two important federations of national unions—with different agendas—developed after the Civil War.

"An injury to one is an injury to all."  
—the slogan for the Knights of Labor

The Noble and Holy Knights of Labor, organized in 1869 as a secret society of tailors, went public in 1879. Led by **Terence V. Powderly**, the *inclusive union* accepted workers of all skill levels and trades (except lawyers, politicians, and liquor dealers). The union encouraged men and women of all races and national origins to become members. Powderly's broad social vision, which focused on reforms and political issues, alienated many members who wanted the leader to concentrate on economic concerns.

In 1886, skilled workers in craft unions organized the American Federation of Labor. **Samuel Gompers**, the leader of this loose confederation of *autonomous* (self-ruling) unions, ran the AFL as a *business union*, focusing on bread-and-butter issues such as securing better wages and working conditions and mandating the eight-hour workday.

Key leaders in the labor movement are mentioned in **bold print** in this pamphlet. To learn more about any one of them, read one of the biographies listed in the resources section.



"To be free, the workers must have choice. To have choice, they must retain in their own hands the right to determine under what conditions they will work."

—Samuel Gompers



While workers organized large national labor organizations, industrialists merged with competitors to create huge, powerful companies. Big business fought union efforts to have any influence in the workplace. Management used the court injunction, private armies, and federal troops to put down labor activity. Employers also contracted with prisons to hire convicts as strikebreakers. Trade unionism grew in fits and starts in response to the success or failure of strikes, boom-and-bust business cycles, and union militancy.

*Racketeering is making money through illegal activities, such as extorting money for providing "protection."*

### The Labor Movement in the 20th Century

Labor leaders promoted the ideas of union *solidarity* (a spirit of unity based on common interests) and democracy in the workplace. However, deep-rooted prejudice and fear often exerted a stronger influence on union members than idealism. High unemployment and competition for jobs during economic depressions contributed to the following problems:

- Discrimination against foreign-born workers, minorities, and women
- Splits between skilled and unskilled workers
- Power struggles between supporters of business unionism and radical labor activists such as members of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party

### Labor Day

For more than 100 years, the first Monday in September has been designated Labor Day, a holiday that recognizes the contributions of workers to the economic strength and social well-being of the United States. The first Labor Day celebration was held on September 5, 1882, in New York City and was organized by the Central Labor Union. Highlights of the celebration included a parade attended by about 10,000 workers, picnics, concerts, and speeches.

As the labor movement gained ground, Labor Day celebrations grew in popularity. In 1894, Congress passed a bill that made Labor Day a national holiday. Early Labor Day celebrations followed the model of the first Labor Day and usually featured parades, family entertainment, and speeches. Today, many people take the victories of the labor movement for granted, but government offices, banks, and many private businesses still close in recognition of the holiday, giving workers a chance to enjoy a day off from their labors.

The disunity within the rank and file weakened the unions and allowed *racketeers* to infiltrate and corrupt some labor organizations. Employers publicized charges of union corruption to turn public opinion against labor's organizing efforts.

As a result of worker unrest, new unions formed. In 1900, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) formed in response to the horrible conditions in *sweatshops*—workplaces where employees labored for long hours and low wages in unsanitary and dangerous conditions. A strike in 1909 by 20,000 (mostly women) members resulted in a compromise with manufacturers that provided for preferential hiring of union members and prohibited employers from contracting with outside workers to do *homework*—sewing tasks performed at home at the worker's expense.



In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City's garment district killed 146 women workers. The women were unable to escape because the factory doors were locked. In the aftermath of the fire, labor unions and other social and political groups rallied to protest the conditions that had led to the tragedy.

In 1905, *socialists* and other workers formed a radical labor organization, the Industrial Workers of the World. The goal of the IWW was to create One Big Union—a single union for all workers—and overthrow the industrialists. The IWW, led by **William D. “Big Bill” Haywood**, used controversial tactics, but it was one of the few unions to champion the rights of immigrant workers in the West. The IWW opposed U.S. participation in World War I for ethical and political reasons and encouraged strikes to disrupt the war effort. As a result, Haywood was convicted of treasonous crimes. After a brief

*Communism* advocates the collective ownership and distribution of goods and does not recognize the concept of private property. In 1848, **Karl Marx** and **Friedrich Engels** defined the concepts of this theory in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx believed that throughout history social classes have struggled for control of labor and production. He thought that business owners oppressed the workers and predicted that the laborers would revolt and overthrow the capitalists.



In 1925, **A. Philip Randolph**, a radical labor leader and civil rights activist, organized African American railroad employees (excluded from most railroad unions) into the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. He crusaded for higher wages and the improvement of working conditions for all workers.

Educator and advocate of democracy, freedom, and civil rights, **Albert Shanker** served as president of the American Federation of Teachers for 23 years, until his death in 1997. During his tenure at the AFT, Shanker succeeded in raising national academic standards and improving classroom teaching.

stint in prison, he fled the United States to lend his support to the socialist revolution in Russia.

The AFL's failure to organize the semiskilled and unskilled workers in the mass production industries provoked **John L. Lewis**, president of the United Mine Workers of America, and seven other AFL union leaders in 1935 to organize the Committee for Industrial Organization. The AFL expelled the CIO unions, which then formed a permanent independent federation renamed the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The CIO used the new tactic of a sit-down strike to win union recognition in unorganized industries and the right to engage in collective bargaining.

The Great Depression of the 1930s caused widespread unemployment and a severe decline in union membership. In an attempt to revitalize the economy and put people back to work, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt offered the American people a New Deal and pushed through social-reform programs and pro-labor legislation to help the working class. Reforms included unemployment insurance and Social Security, which required workers and employers to pay a tax to the federal government in order to provide a pension to retired employees.

Thanks to favorable labor laws and successful organizing drives, union membership rapidly increased. Roosevelt recognized labor's growing influence and appointed many labor representatives to federal agencies. In return, the unions pledged not to strike while the country was at war. Most unions honored the pledge and enjoyed a high rate of employment.

When the war ended in 1945, unions went on strike. They brought out all the grievances they had shelved during the war and demanded their share of the country's economic prosperity. Labor scored many successes, which caused concern in business and government that the unions were becoming too powerful. New legislation, such as the Labor-Management Relations Act, reversed many of labor's gains from Roosevelt's New Deal.

The American Federation of Labor, led by **George Meany**, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, led by **Walter Reuther**, recognized that support for labor was changing. The two rival organizations decided to merge to protect union strength. In 1955, George Meany became the first president of the AFL-CIO.

**We Can Do It!**



### Rosie the Riveter

During World War II, the female labor force grew by more than 5 million workers as women stepped into jobs vacated by the men who had gone to fight. The women joined unions, proved they could build planes and automobiles as well as men, and demanded equal pay for equal work.

### Connect the Dots

Historical dates do not mean much unless you understand the circumstances that affect certain occurrences. If you decide to make a time line of the American labor movement or an exhibit or presentation, try to make connections between the economic climates, social and political attitudes, and the significant event or achievement.

For example, the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959 (Landrum-Griffin Act) calls for government supervision of a union's financial affairs. If you put that on a time line, give some background information by explaining that at the time the law was enacted the government had discovered that racketeers controlled some of the unions and were using union dues for their own purposes. The law was intended to protect union members from corrupt leaders.

The new organization set about ousting racketeers from the unions. It expelled the powerful International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which was riddled with corruption. The negative publicity fueled an effort to keep unions out of business and gave additional support to state right-to-work laws, which prohibit closed shops.

Despite public opinion and new labor laws, unions negotiated much higher wages for their members than those of nonunion workers as well as a variety of employer-paid fringe benefits. The economy prospered. Big labor (unions), big business, and the government developed a *social compact*—an unspoken agreement to work with each other as long as everyone was making money.

The economy sputtered during the 1970s, and millions of workers lost high-paying industrial jobs. The least-skilled and least-educated workers were the first to go. Many of these people found work in low-paying service jobs. Membership in those unions that represented the big manufacturers decreased but increased in unions representing service industries and government workers. The Industrial Revolution had ended.

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, where he had come to support a sanitation workers' strike.

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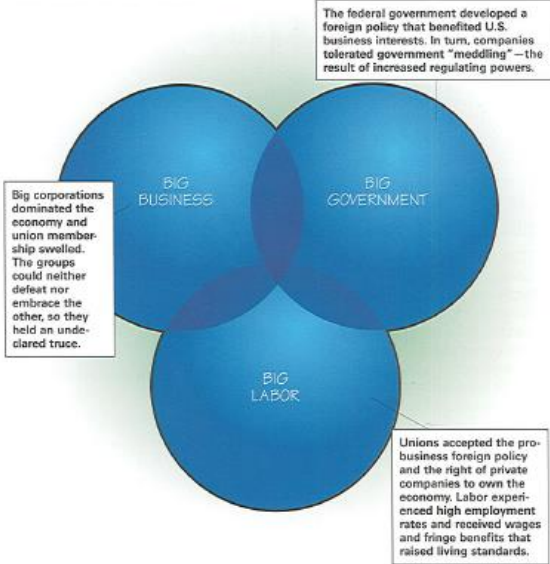
Union members call people who cross picket lines and work during a strike "scabs."

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## The Social Compact

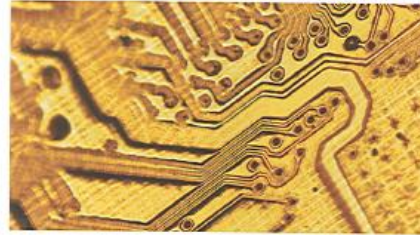
Post-World War II to 1960s



The civil rights movement in the 1960s raised the issue of discrimination and challenged the unions' predominantly white male leadership. In 1963, A. Philip Randolph (the labor activist who had organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters) led the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where he and 250,000 people heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. give his "I Have a Dream" speech.

## Information Revolution and Global Labor

During the 1980s and 1990s, the semiconductor and microchip changed everything. With personal computers, global communications satellites, and the Internet, people could instantly transfer information, ideas, and money around the world. Many jobs became available for people who understood information technology. Top executives and highly skilled IT workers made a lot of money. However, many industrial jobs for skilled and educated people were lost. These workers were forced to compete with the unskilled for low-paying service jobs.



Manufacturing companies restructured, laying off employees who had earned enough to support a family on one salary. Middle management and lower-level workers who had little hope of getting their jobs back scrambled for work as millions of women entered the labor force to help maintain family incomes.

Where the Jobs Are . . . And Were*			
	2004		1979
Wal-Mart	1,400,000	General Motors	853,000
McDonald's	418,000	Ford Motor Company	494,579
United Parcel Service	355,000	General Electric	405,000
Ford Motor Company	327,500	International Telephone & Telegraph	368,000
		International Business Machines	337,119

\*This table compares total employment at the five largest companies in the Fortune 500 rankings in 1979 and 2004.

**Globalization**

For more than 200 years, the United States participated in an international economy. Trade took place between nations, and governments set the rules. Commerce in the 21st century involves a global economy. Corporations, investment bankers, and traders treat the world as one big market. Global business is changing so rapidly that democratic governments are losing their ability to protect national interests and their labor force.

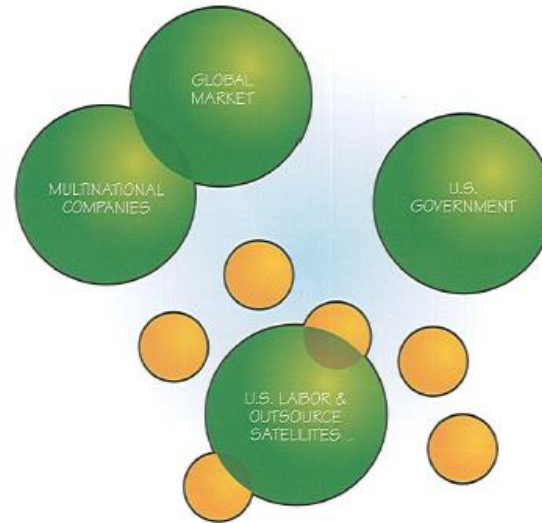
Multinational corporations (companies that operate in different countries) use technology to create *comparative advantage*, the economic principle that each nation should produce what it makes best and most cheaply and then trade those goods with another nation for what that nation makes best and most cheaply. Multinational corporations set up factories in several countries to make parts or components wherever the costs are lowest, union control is weakest, labor laws are most relaxed, and tax rates are most advantageous. Using computers and communications satellites, the companies send manufacturing specifications to plants around the world. Then they ship the parts to another country for assembly.



"Made in America" doesn't mean what it once did. An American car has parts made all over the world; many Japanese cars are assembled in the United States. Much of world trade today is not between countries, but between different parts of global companies.

**The Social Compact . . . Unlinked**

21st Century

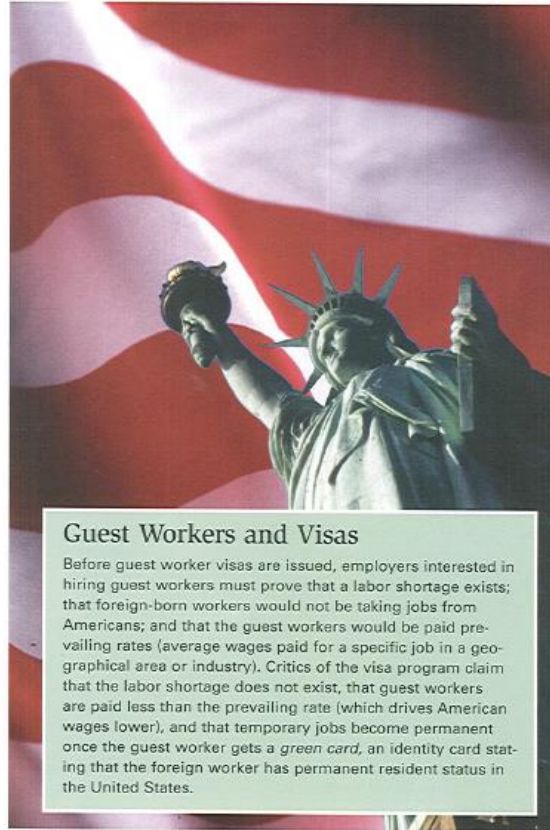


*Outsourcing* is the practice of subcontracting jobs to outside workers, especially to foreign or nonunion companies and individuals. This practice often cuts costs because the company does not pay benefits to the outside workers. Outsourcing has produced a new group of temporary and part-time employees, including freelancers, contract laborers, and consultants, who work without benefits on a by-project basis.

Corporations are sending manufacturing jobs and service jobs offshore. Jobs in data entry, customer service, claims processing, telemarketing, software engineering, and business analysis are some examples of the positions that have moved overseas.

Computerized trading and instant access to current information about foreign currencies allow a global financial market to operate day and night around the world. Traders invest not only in money, but also in companies worldwide. They want a maximum return on their investments, so they look for businesses that use *best practices*, that is, the most economical, efficient, and profitable way to do or produce something. Companies that keep costs down and productivity up generate the biggest profits and get the traders' money. Corporations seeking investment capital have to make hard decisions about restructuring the company, cutting wages and benefits, laying off employees, and outsourcing or eliminating positions.

The American labor force feels threatened. Many workers believe they have lost jobs to *guest workers*, nonimmigrants admitted into the United States on special visas to work for specific employers for a limited period of time. Guest workers are particularly prevalent in the high-tech and agricultural industries. American workers also feel that they have lost jobs to workers in Third World countries (less economically developed nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America) who will work for a much lower wage. Some Americans believe it is difficult to compete without giving back gains the labor movement has made. What frustrates many American workers is that some workers in the Third World (including children and convicts) labor long hours in terrible conditions for low wages—the same conditions that unions fought to change.



### Guest Workers and Visas

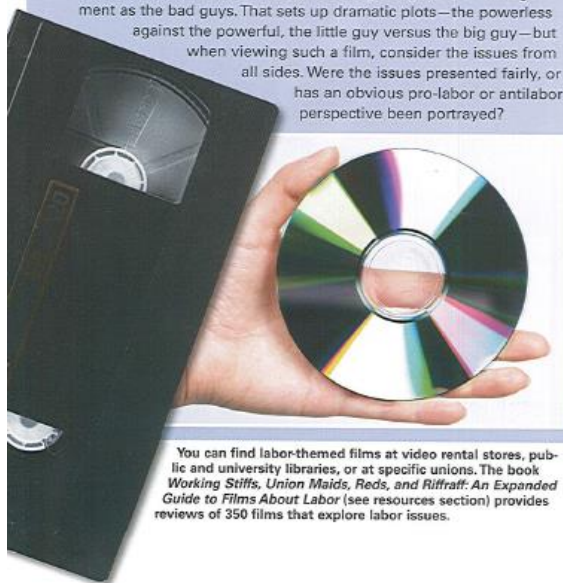
Before guest worker visas are issued, employers interested in hiring guest workers must prove that a labor shortage exists; that foreign-born workers would not be taking jobs from Americans; and that the guest workers would be paid prevailing rates (average wages paid for a specific job in a geographical area or industry). Critics of the visa program claim that the labor shortage does not exist, that guest workers are paid less than the prevailing rate (which drives American wages lower), and that temporary jobs become permanent once the guest worker gets a *green card*, an identity card stating that the foreign worker has permanent resident status in the United States.



## Now Showing: Organized Labor in the United States

Clashes between workers and employers—often brutal—have been depicted in movies and in television documentaries. Many films are accounts of violent strikes, racketeering within unions, robber barons and corporate greed, plant closings, mysterious deaths of labor leaders and whistle-blowers, and union activity in textile mills, coal mines, and other industries. Whether fictionalized or not, these stories often reflect working-class history; the immigrant experience in the United States, extended periods of unemployment, low wages and long hours, civil rights and labor struggles, class-gender-race wars, and radical politics.

Generally, workers are portrayed as the good guys and management as the bad guys. That sets up dramatic plots—the powerless against the powerful, the little guy versus the big guy—but when viewing such a film, consider the issues from all sides. Were the issues presented fairly, or has an obvious pro-labor or antilabor perspective been portrayed?



You can find labor-themed films at video rental stores, public and university libraries, or at specific unions. The book *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Expanded Guide to Films About Labor* (see resources section) provides reviews of 350 films that explore labor issues.

## Famous Strikes

**1877:** The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad slashed wages and touched off a railroad strike that spread coast to coast. This uprising was the first industrywide strike and the first time a U.S. president called in federal troops to protect the interests of big business. Workers in other industries staged sympathy strikes in support of the railroad workers. By the time the strike was put down, 100 people were dead. The railroad strike polarized the social classes and forced Americans to side either with labor or with management. The strike also led to a new unity among workers and a revitalization of the labor movement.



George Pullman

**1894:** The American Railway Union called a strike against the Pullman Palace Car Company because **George Pullman**, owner of the railroad passenger car company, kept raising rents in his *company town* while reducing wages. (A company town is a community whose economy is dominated by one employer. The company owned all the land, buildings, houses, and stores.) Pullman closed his plants, so the union authorized a boycott. No ARU member would work on any train that included Pullman cars. The railroad companies refused to detach the cars, so the boycott became a general strike, which resulted in the shutting down of 11 railroad lines. For the first time, a federal court issued an *injunction*, or order to

stop, on the basis that the strike "damaged interstate commerce and was a criminal conspiracy to obstruct postal service." President Grover Cleveland sent federal troops to enforce the court order. **Eugene V. Debs**, the leader of the ARU, ignored the injunction and was jailed for six months. The use of the injunction became management's major weapon against labor for the next 40 years.

**1902:** Anthracite coal miners who were members of the United Mine Workers called a strike against coal companies that lasted more than five months. President Theodore Roosevelt ordered arbitration, which ended in a compromise that increased wages. This was the first time a U.S. president intervened as a neutral third party to end a strike.

**1936:** The United Rubber Workers called a strike against the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Akron, Ohio, after the company announced layoffs. This strike was important for several reasons:

- It was the first major labor conflict to use the sit-down strike as a tactic.
- It was the first strike by a union belonging to the newly formed Committee for Industrial Organization.
- It combined efforts by rank-and-file activists with support from Akron's central labor council and CIO headquarters.

**1936–37:** United Automobile Workers of America staged sit-down strikes against General Motors and then Chrysler. The strikes ended months later after the auto companies recognized the UAW as the sole bargaining agent for all employees.

**1945–46:** A wave of militant and successful strikes in as many as 44 states by the United Automobile Workers; United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers; and the United Steelworkers Union showed that American labor wanted its share of postwar prosperity. The UAW strike against General Motors was the first, largest, and longest postwar strike. For the first time, a union demanded that the company increase wages without passing on the cost to consumers. General Motors increased the autoworkers' wages but refused to negotiate on the prices of products. Two years later, the UAW did get the first cost-of-living escalator clause, which guaranteed that some pay increases would keep pace with rises in consumer prices.

**1965:** To help striking Filipino grape workers, **Cesar Chavez**—leader of the National Farm Workers Association (later to become the United Farm Workers)—called for a national grape boycott. The grassroots organizing effort led to a union contract with the growers that gave workers increased pay, employer-funded health care, housing, job-training programs, and union hiring halls. It also established a ban on the use of toxic pesticides such as DDT.

**1960s–70s:** Although strikes by public-sector employees were generally outlawed, many occurred as teachers, hospital and sanitation workers, and firefighters went on strike to win union recognition and collective-bargaining rights. In 1970, New York postal workers started what became the first national walkout (strike) by federal employees. Their wildcat strike for higher pay spread to other cities, despite federal injunctions. President Richard Nixon called in the National Guard to move the mail. The strike ended when the government agreed to negotiate substantial pay increases for the postal workers.

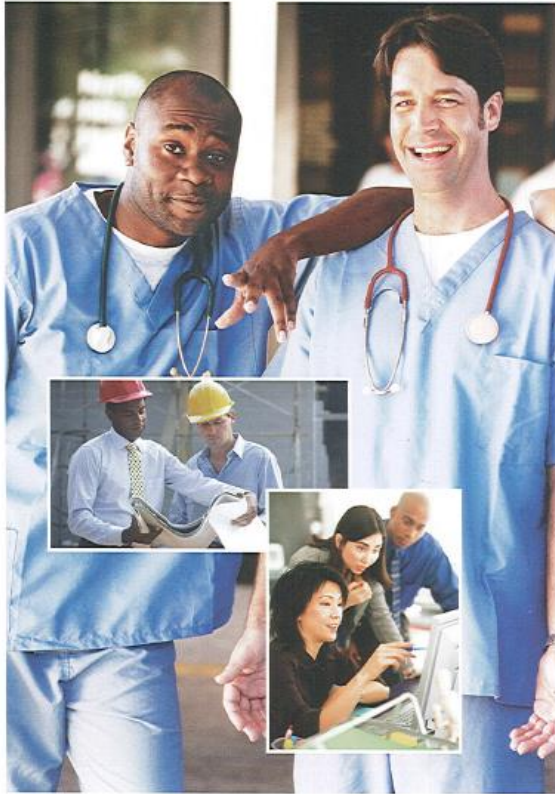
**1981:** The Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization had complained for years that air traffic controllers suffered from stress because of a lack of staff and equipment to keep up with increased flight traffic. When they illegally went out on strike, President Ronald Reagan immediately warned the controllers to return to work or lose their jobs. When strikers did not return, he dismissed them. Within a month, replacement controllers were able to restore 75 percent of air service. Reagan's response signaled a new antilabor position.

**1997:** The International Brotherhood of Teamsters struck United Parcel Service to protest the company's strategy to subcontract work to non-union and part-time employees. A 15-day strike ended with a victory for the Teamsters when a federally mediated agreement forced UPS to create 10,000 new full-time jobs.



More than 180,000 Teamsters went on strike in 1997 to win concessions from UPS.





## The American Labor Force Today

The American civilian labor force includes employed and unemployed people over 16 years old, except those in prisons, mental-health institutions, and nursing homes and people serving on active duty in the military. *Blue-collar workers* generally perform manual or physical work in construction, manufacturing, transportation, agricultural, and service industries. *White-collar employees* usually work in offices and schools and are not required to do heavy physical labor. Their occupations range from professional, technical, and managerial to clerical and sales positions.

Certain crafts such as electrical work and tool and die making demand a high level of skill and years of experience. Many professional and technical occupations require advanced levels of education. Other positions require little or no skill and just days or weeks of training.

**Many welders attend a vocational school or community college to learn their trade and then receive further on-the-job training.**





Craft unions provide training to their members based on the model of medieval craft guilds. A trainee begins as an apprentice, learning a trade at a union-sponsored school and acting as an assistant on the job. After successfully completing a training period of four or more years, the apprentice becomes a fully qualified skilled worker, or journeyman.

The labor force serves two distinct parts of the nation's economy: the *private sector* and the *public sector*. The private sector refers to the aspects of the economy that are under the control of individuals and privately owned businesses. The public sector is under the control of the federal, state, or local governments.

Another way to analyze the workforce is in terms of *unorganized* versus *organized* labor. In unorganized labor situations, the individual employee addresses problems one-on-one with his or her supervisor and the managerial chain of command. In organized labor, a recognized group of workers deals with management as a collective body with one voice. Organized workers believe that all employees would benefit from belonging to a labor group. In fact, one of the main goals of unions is to organize the unorganized.

### Labor Unions

A labor union is an association of workers in a specific craft or industry, with the main purpose of representing those workers in negotiations (collective bargaining) about wages, hours, and working conditions with the employer. Unions take different forms.

- *Craft unions* are horizontal. Members are skilled workers who perform one trade only, such as bricklayers, plumbers, screen actors, or airline pilots.
- *Industrial unions* are vertical. Members are skilled and unskilled workers in all trades within a single industry, such as the automobile, textile, or rubber industry.
- *Independent unions* are craft or industrial unions that are not affiliated with the AFL-CIO, such as those that represent Major League Baseball players and certain groups of teachers.



More than half of the airline pilots in the United States are union members.



*Company unions* were unions formed at a single company. These unions were not affiliated with any other union and were usually controlled or dominated by the employer. Because company unions were considered to be employers' attempts to interfere with workers' rights to organize themselves, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 declared them illegal.