

IUPAT DC7 Scholarship

June 24, 2023

*“Do you think Unions are still relevant today; if so, would you join a union if given the opportunity”*

The Industrial Revolution took place in the late 1700s and early 1800s and there was a large-scale problem of harsh working conditions in factories. It was during this time that unions were beginning to be formed, these unions were formed to advocate for better wages, shorter hours, and safer working conditions. Nowadays it is unheard of for factories to have conditions comparable to the factories during the Industrial Revolution, this is in part thanks to the standards that were backed by the early unions. However, this does create the question of whether or not unions are still relevant today. Unions are still relevant today in that they still advocate for the fair treatment and compensation of workers.

Unions have the power to change a workplace for the better and they have this power because of the unity of the workers. Unions create a sense of solidarity and support among workers. They offer a platform for workers to come together, share experiences, and support each other in addressing workplace challenges. Unions negotiate with the employer on behalf of the workers to acquire fair wages, benefits, and working conditions and they have the power, if need be, to make sure these are satisfied. These negotiations lead to a contract between the union and the employer and it is when an agreement is not made where their power comes in. An example of this is united actions such as strikes or demonstrations that happen frequently across the nation. Strikes help create pressure on the employer to fix the problems with the compensation or workplace conditions. This unity brings out an environment where the workers' safety and protection of their rights is prioritized.

Unions have also been instrumental in promoting social justice causes and advancing economic equality. By advocating for fair wages and benefits, unions seek to bridge the income

gap and combat wealth inequality. They reduce disparities in compensation and working conditions, particularly for marginalized and low-income workers. Unionized workers are more likely to receive higher wages, better healthcare coverage, and improved retirement benefits. By lifting the standards for workers across industries, unions contribute to a more just society and promote upward mobility for individuals and their families.

Labor unions place a strong emphasis on workplace safety and health, advocating for robust safety regulations and enforcing compliance. Unions promote training programs, advocate for the use of personal protective equipment, and demand safer working environments. Their efforts have led to reduced workplace injuries, improved safety standards, and better enforcement of health and safety regulations. Unions also play a crucial role in protecting workers during public health crises, as demonstrated by their advocacy for essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Labor unions wield considerable political influence and engage in legislative advocacy to shape labor laws and policies that benefit workers. Unions support candidates who champion workers' rights, lobbying for legislation that enhances workplace protections, strengthens labor standards, and expands access to affordable healthcare and social benefits. Their collective voice has the power to influence public opinion and policy decisions, ensuring that the concerns of workers are at the forefront of political discussions and actions.

Contrary to the previous arguments highlighting the relevance of labor unions, some contend that unions have lost their relevance in the contemporary world. They argue that the changing dynamics of the labor market, globalization, technological advancements, and shifting employment patterns have rendered traditional union structures ineffective. Moreover, critics argue that the existing labor laws and regulations already provide sufficient protections for workers, making unions redundant. They claim that unions can hinder economic growth by placing excessive demands on employers, leading to job losses or businesses relocating to more favorable locations. Additionally, the decline in union membership and influence in recent

decades is cited as evidence of their diminishing relevance. Overall, these perspectives argue that labor unions no longer hold the same significance as they once did in addressing the needs and aspirations of workers in today's rapidly evolving labor landscape.

Ultimately, when analyzing the question of whether unions are still relevant today, it becomes apparent that their benefits far outweigh the arguments to the contrary. While some critics may argue that unions have lost their relevance due to changes in the labor market and legal protections, the evidence presented in favor of unions underscores their indispensable role in advancing workers' rights, promoting social justice, and ensuring economic equality. Labor unions remain powerful advocates for workers, negotiating contracts that secure fair wages, improved benefits, and safer working conditions. Due to these reasons if given the opportunity to join a union I would and I have. When I was home during lengthy breaks from school I worked for local 770 on the show floor. During the school year I have started working for IATSE 251 in Madison at the Kohl center and inspired one of my roommates to work with me.