

INFORMATION ON LABOR UNIONS

HOW UNIONS HELP WORKERS:

How do unions help members and their 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 30 percent more than nonunion workers and are more likely to receive health care and pension benefits than those without a union.

*In 2007, median weekly earnings for full-time union wage and salary workers were \$863, compared with \$663 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.

LABOR UNION BASICS

What is a labor union?

A labor union is an organization of workers dedicated to protecting their rights and improving wages, hours and working conditions. Our union is the Health Professionals and Allied Employees, AFT/AFL-CIO. We are HPAE Local 5118. Our national union is the American Federation of Teachers.

Benefits of Union Membership at Cooper

As a union, we have the benefit of negotiating with Cooper as a group. This basic right gives us much more power than if we were to negotiate individually. On average, union employees make 27 percent more than nonunion workers. Ninety-two percent of union workers have job-related health coverage versus 68 percent for nonunion workers. Union workers also have a great advantage over nonunion workers in securing guaranteed pensions.

Cooper is required by law to bargain in good faith with us. Once an agreement is reached through negotiations, a **collective bargaining agreement (CBA)** is signed. A CBA sets our terms of employment and provisions for wages, hours, conditions, vacation, sick days, benefits, etc. After our CBA is signed, Cooper can't change anything detailed in the agreement without the union's approval. Our new CBA expires May 31, 2014.

Each of us as members of our Union is responsible for monitoring that Cooper abides by the contract. If as a union member we believe our CBA has been breached, we can contact our Grievance Chair or a union rep to discuss filing a grievance, which may be ultimately be resolved through a process known as arbitration. Because of our union contract and the grievance and arbitration processes, we are protected from unjust termination. Therefore, we cannot be fired without "just cause," unlike many nonunion employees who are considered "at-will" employees and can be fired at any time and for almost any reason.

National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)

In 1935, Congress passed the **NLRA** to "encourage a healthy relationship between private-sector workers and their employers". Prior to the NLRA, employers were not required by law to recognize a union or to bargain in good faith. By establishing employees' basic rights to join unions and engage in collective bargaining, Congress hoped to reduce work stoppages, strikes and other conflicts between labor and management. The act also created the **National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)** as the organization to enforce the NLRA.

The NLRA accomplished three significant objectives:

1. Allowed workers to have elections to decide if they want to be represented
2. Established laws protecting employees from discrimination based on union or group related activity
3. Created the National Labor Relations Board to enforce the National Labor Relations Act

The act also outlines the basic rights for workers. In addition to the right to union representation and participation, the NLRA allows employees, free from retaliation to participate in **protected concerted activities** that attempt to improve working conditions.