

Myths and Facts about Unions

Myth: Unions are outside, special-interest groups.

Fact: Workers are the union. A union is simply a democratic organization of working people standing up for their rights on the job and in society. Unions also bring people together in the community to stand up for issues that matter to all working people.

Myth: Unions mean more conflict in the workplace.

Fact: Unions can make the workplace a more harmonious place to work. A union contract allows the company and workers to sit down as equals and discuss problems as they come up. Without a union, workers' lives are often in more turmoil because they have to deal with more favoritism and less economic security.

Myth: Unions force workers out on strike often.

Fact: Workers vote whether or not to strike in most unions. Ninety-seven percent of contract negotiations are settled without a strike. No one ever wants a strike.

Myth: Companies close due to unions.

Fact: Companies close for economic reasons—and the vast majority of companies that close are nonunion. Some companies, however, like to keep this myth alive. Half of employers illegally threaten workers who form a union by saying the plant will close, though only 1 percent of newly organized plants do close, according to Cornell scholar Kate Bronfenrenner. Studies have shown that, in fact, unions help decrease employee turnover and can increase efficiency.

Myth: Unions just want workers' dues.

Fact: Money that workers pay in dues goes back into running the organization—unions are not for-profit organizations. The improvements workers win in pay, benefits and fair treatment through their unions are far greater than the cost of dues. Dues levels are set by each union through a democratic process.

Myth: Most union bosses are corrupt.

Fact: It's a tragic situation when a trusted leader betrays the membership in any kind of organization. However, for every high-profile story that is in the media about a corrupt union leader, there are tens of thousands of regular, honest leaders who are never profiled. During a union organizing campaign, the employer drags out stories of corruption, never telling the whole story. It's all part of its campaign of deception.

Myth: Unions are quickly shrinking.

Fact: Actually, the number of union members has stayed steady for the past 50 years, but the workforce itself has grown. Sixteen million working men and women in the United States are union members. Since 1995, unions began to reach out more, and there's been a slight growth in the percentage of the workforce—about 13 percent of the workforce—that has a union. But unions recognize that even more outreach is needed.

Myth: Unions used to be effective, but they're not anymore.

Fact: Unions are still by far the best way for working people to win economic security and have a voice on the job. The numbers tell the story: Union members make 25 percent more in wages than workers who don't have a union. Women and African American workers with a union make 30 percent more, and that union difference rises to 45 percent for Latino workers. Union members are much more likely to have a defined-benefit pension plan and health care than workers without unions. Unions also curb discrimination on the job, keep the workplace safe and give workers a much-needed voice.

Myth: Unions are political organizations that elect Democrats.

Fact: Unions do a lot more than politics. Most of unions' work involves fighting for good contracts, helping workers improve their lives and standing up for all working families. Through their unions, workers support candidates who support working families' issues and who work for good laws. Unions' political work is not about electing Democrats or Republicans—it's about electing people who stand up for working people.

