

Say What?! A Glossary of Labor Lingo

Agency Shop: A union security contract clause requiring employees covered by the contract, but who decline to join the union, to pay a service fee to the union equal to, or a percentage of, the union dues. The intent of this fee (sometimes called "fair share") is to compensate the union, which, by law, must give full and equal representation to all bargaining unit members, regardless of membership status (see "Duty of Fair Representation" below).

AFL-CIO: The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which is a federation of over 50 labor unions in the United States, representing over 9 million American workers. www.aflcio.org

Arbitration: See "Grievance Arbitration" and "Interest Arbitration."

Bargaining Unit: A group of employees in a given workplace that has sufficient commonality of interest to constitute a unit for purposes of collective bargaining. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) or similar federal, state or local agency usually defines a bargaining unit.

Card Check: Process through which workers demonstrate their desire to form a union, usually by signing a form; the employer must remain neutral.

Certification: Official recognition by a labor relations board that an employee organization is the exclusive representative for all employees in an appropriate bargaining unit for the purpose of collective bargaining.

Collective Bargaining: A method of determining terms and conditions of employment through negotiation between representatives of the employer and the union representing employees.

Collective Bargaining Agreement or Contract: A formal written agreement over wages, hours and conditions of employment entered into by an employer and the union representing employees in the bargaining unit.

Duty of Fair Representation: The union's obligation, as the exclusive bargaining representative of a group of employees, to represent fairly all employees in the bargaining unit in grievance handling as well as contract negotiations.

Exclusive Representation: The employee organization that, as a result of certification by a labor board, has the right to be the sole collective bargaining agent of all employees in an appropriate bargaining unit.

Free Rider: An employee who fails to join the union that has negotiated the contract over his or her wages and working conditions, all the while benefiting from that contract.

Fringe Benefits: Vacations, holidays, insurance, medical benefits, pensions and other economic benefits that are provided to employees under the union contract; these are in addition to direct wages.

Grievance: A procedure described in the contract to remedy work-related problems such as abuse of employee rights or contract violations.

Grievance Arbitration: A dispute resolution process whereby a neutral third party--the arbitrator-- hears a grievance and makes a decision that is usually both final and binding on both parties.

Interest Arbitration: A procedure used to settle matters in contract disputes between the union and management in some bargaining units covering specific occupation groups that, by statute, are prohibited from striking. These occupations are usually related to public safety (e.g., hospital workers, police, firefighters, etc.).

Labor Board: Quasi-judicial agency set up under national or state labor relations acts. Its duties include defining appropriate bargaining units, conducting elections to determine if workers want union representation, certifying unions to represent employees, and hearing and adjudicating complaints by either the union or the employer charging unfair labor practices.

Pay Equity: A term addressing the idea that female-dominated jobs or professions that have been traditionally undervalued, based on levels of responsibility and required education, should be raised to pay levels of comparable jobs traditionally held by men.

Picketing: Workers carrying signs and/or distributing literature protesting working conditions or actions taken by the employer. Picketing occurs during a strike or as an "informational" picket. The purpose of the tactic is to put pressure on the employer by informing the public and other workers about unfair working conditions.

Representation Election: A vote conducted by an appropriate labor board or agency to determine whether a majority of the workers in a previously established bargaining unit want to be represented by a given union.

Scab: A person who continues to work, or who accepts employment, while workers are on strike. By filling workers' jobs, scabs may weaken or break the strike.

Seniority: Preference accorded employees, based on length of service with an employer, in such areas as layoff, recall, promotion, transfer, vacation accrual, scheduling, shift assignment, etc.

Service Fee: A monetary assessment of non-members in a bargaining unit to help defray the union's costs in negotiating and administering the contract (see Agency Shop).

Strike: A concerted act by a group of employees who withhold their labor for the purpose of affecting a change in wages, hours or working conditions.

Unfair Labor Practice: An employer or union practice forbidden by the National Labor Relations Board, the Civil Service Reform Act (for federal workers) or state and local laws, subject to court appeal. It often involves the employer's efforts to avoid bargaining in good faith. Other examples may include management's failure to provide relevant information the union has requested for either bargaining or grievance handling purposes or management's repeated failure to implement grievance settlements or arbitration awards. Some state laws may use the term "prohibited practices."



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