

UNIONS: **A voice for the 99%**

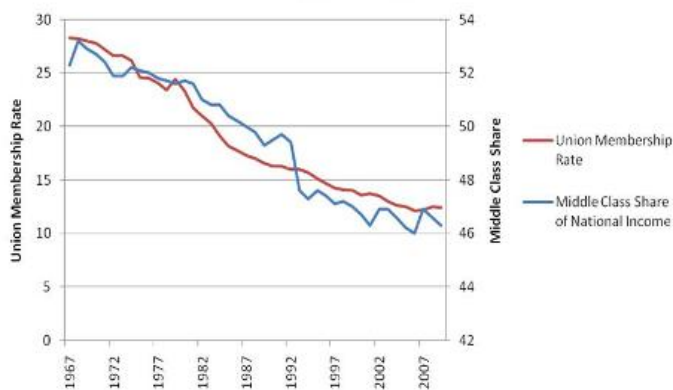
What is a Union?

A union is an organization of two or more employees who band together as a single entity to address hours, pay, and working conditions with their employer. Unions negotiate and enforce collective bargaining agreements. Unions are democratic institutions with leadership at the national, regional, and local levels elected by members. Unions are guided by constitutions that were drafted and ratified by their members. The constitutions govern how a union operates, detailing everything from leadership compensation to processes for settling internal disagreements.

Unions Reduce Income Inequality and Help Build the Middle Class

As the chart makes clear, unions are essential to building a strong middle class. Unions provide a counterbalance to the rich and powerful to help ordinary workers get a fair shake. In the marketplace, unions help ensure that workers receive a share of the gains they help create. And in our democracy, unions help give workers the strong voice they need to represent their interests. Unions help create a strong middle class, *something that is sorely needed at this moment.*

As union membership decreases, middle class income shrinks



Unions Help Workers Win Better

Wages, Benefits, and a Voice on the Job

Union workers earn 28 percent more than nonunion workers and are more likely to receive health care and pension benefits than those without a union. In 2010, median weekly earnings for full-time union workers were \$917, compared with \$717 for their nonunion counterparts.

Unions are the only way for workers to have a collective bargaining agreement, which is a legally enforceable contract that holds employers and employees to mutually agreed-to workplace rules and processes. Such contracts provide a fair and just workplace by clarifying and outlining clear expectations for employees. Without a contract, employees have almost no rights in U.S. workplaces. Employers can make up work rules, arbitrarily decide on disciplinary procedures, and fire an employee without cause.

Unions Make Life Better 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. Unions continue to lead the fight today for expanded family and medical leave, improved safety regulations and fair-trade agreements that lift the standard of living for workers all over the world. And the labor movement is leading the charge against corporate greed and continued tax breaks for the rich.

Support Unions in North Carolina. Subscribe to AFLCIONC.org or call the NCAFL-CIO at 919-833-6678 to find out how you can get involved. Follow us on Twitter @ncstateaflcio. Like us at facebook.com/ncstateaflcio.