



The Arizona Correctional Peace Officers Association

Check and Mate Newsletter No. 17



A bi-weekly newsletter to inform Union members on important grievance results, trends, procedures and important information relevant to a better quality of work life.

In This Issue:

-Labor Unions- A brief history



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Labor Unions - A brief history

Excerpt by Mark P. Cussen

Labor unions have been around in one form or another in the United States since the birth of the country. They were created in an effort to protect

the working population from abuses such as sweatshops and unsafe

Origin of the First Labor Union

The first hundred years of U.S. history saw relatively little in the development of labor unions. A few were organized in scattered fashion, but many of those simply disbanded after they had achieved their goals, such as when the printers briefly unionized in New York City in 1778. The first successful strike in building trades took place in 1791 when Philadelphia carpenters campaigned for a 10-hour workday. The need for both skilled and unskilled labor bloomed during the Industrial Revolution and the Civil War and the subsequent discontinuation of slavery helped to illustrate the right of workers to receive a fair wage for their labor.

Protecting Worker Rights

The National Labor Union was created in 1866 to convince Congress to limit the workday for federal employees to eight hours, but the private sector was much harder for unions to

penetrate. The continual flood of immigrants coming into the country further diluted the workforce, and the price of labor declined as a result. Poor pay and working conditions in the 1890s led the Pullman Railroad workers and United Mine workers to lay down their tools in protest, but both strikes were broken up by the government. The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions was formed in 1881, and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was founded five years later. Congress became more sympathetic toward the labor force as time passed, which led to the creation of the Department of labor. The Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914 allowed employees to strike and boycott their employers and was followed by the Public Contract and the Fair Labor Standards Acts. which mandated a minimum wage, extra pay for overtime work and basic child labor laws.

Wartime

Labor unions grew in power and number from the Civil War through World War I, as the need for factory workers and other laborers continued to increase. They lost ground during

the Roaring '20s, however, when the economy grew so much that the need for unionization seemed irrelevant. But the Great Depression quickly reversed this trend and unions grew more stronger than ever under Roosevelt's New Deal policies. Union membership grew enormously as the depression wore on and workers sought employment and Protection through their local trade unions.

The power of the labor unions was somewhat curtailed during World War II, however, as some unions, such as those in the defense industry, were forbidden by the government to strike due to the impediment that it would present to wartime production. But the end of the war saw a wave of strikes in many industries and it was at this point that union power and membership reached its zenith. The unions were a controlling force in the economy during the late '40s and '50s, and the AFL merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) at this point to spearhead the American labor force.

Decreasing Power

But the strength of the unions during this era led many union leaders into corruption and complacency, and the power of the unions began to decline in subsequent decades. As additional laws were passed outlawing child labor and mandating equal pay for equal work regardless of race or gender, unions became less important to workers who were able to rely on federal laws to protect them.

Despite the erosion in their power and influence, labor unions continue to prove their importance, as they were instrumental in getting President Obama elected in 2008 and reelected in 2012. The unions hoped that Obama would be able to pass the Employee Free Choice Act, a measure of legislation intended to streamline and shorten the process that unions must use to bring in new members. This act would have shifted the balance of power in the workplace in the unions' favor and allowed their memberships to grow rapidly but failed when Democrats were unable to collect the necessary votes.

Union membership ended up decreasing during this time, which many say led members to switch their support to Trump in the 2016 election. Although the effect the Employee Free Choice Act could have had on the economy is unclear, there's no question that unions will continue to play a role in the U.S. labor force for decades to come.

The above excellent article by Mark P. Cussen provides, in a nutshell, my favorite exposé on the history of unions in the United States of America.

There is a lot of pageantry, Esprit-De-Corps, honor and pride involved in any union body and AZCPOA is no exception but it is up to the members themselves, to make this happen.

I have included in the cover of this edition a picture of a Civil War era American War Eagle simply because it is beautiful and captures the spirit of what a union ought to be and not because I embrace one side or another of that great conflict that seems to still linger in the American memory. There was a lot of separateness and sorrow surrounding that era when

unity was sought, perhaps in a “not to correct” manner, but strived after nevertheless.

We must therefore embrace the spirit of unity, pride and freedom if we are to survive as a union.

I am therefore invoking a “call to arms” sort of speaking and asking that we, as members of AZCPOA, acknowledge and embrace this spirit of freedom and unity and stand as one, now and always, henceforth in all we do and speak.

Yours in Solidarity,

The Arizona Correctional
Peace Officers Association

Deeds not words!

