GLOSSARY

The world of unions has its own vocabulary. Some words or phrases are used solely within this world, while others may have a slightly different meaning than when you encounter them elsewhere. Here is a list of some of the more important parts of the union vocabulary. For a more comprehensive guide to labor terms see *The Lexicon of Labor* by R. Emmett Murray (New York: The New Press, 1998).

*AFL-CIO*: the national federation that includes most American labor unions, resulting from the 1955 merger of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

*agency fee*: a fee, usually somewhat lower than the full dues amount, that nonmembers are required to pay to the union. The payment is calculated to cover the costs of the representation services that the union provides.

*agency shop*: see union shop

*arbitration*: the process by which a neutral outside party acts as a "judge," taking evidence and issuing a binding ruling on a contract grievance or other dispute.

*bargaining*: the process of face-to-face meetings, exchange of proposals, and give and take that produces a union contract.
**enabling legislation:** a law that grants the right to unionize to public sector employees.

**Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC):** the federal agency that implements many discrimination laws. Many states and localities have equivalent agencies.

**Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA):** the law governing most private employers’ pension and welfare benefit plans.

**Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA):** the federal law setting the minimum wage and establishing standards for overtime pay. Many states and localities also have laws applicable in their jurisdictions.

**Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA):** the 1993 law creating an entitlement to unpaid leave connected with family emergencies and medical situations.

**Federal Labor Relations Authority:** the equivalent of the National Labor Relations Board for federal sector employees, administering the federal labor law as it applies to those employed by the federal government.

**good cause:** see just cause

**grandfathering:** when there is a change in a workplace rule or job benefit, but employees already on board are permitted to remain under the old rule.

**grievance procedure:** a series of steps set forth in a union contract for attempting to resolve disputes between the employer and employees/the union.

**impasse:** a deadlock in contract negotiations.

**interest-based bargaining (IBB):** an alternative form of negotiations, premised on jointly identifying problems and then finding solutions that benefit both sides.
**bargaining team:** the union or employer group of individuals that goes to the bargaining table for formal negotiations.

**bargaining unit:** the group of employees represented by a particular union, and usually covered by a single union contract.

**Beck decision:** a United States Supreme Court decision setting forth the financial rights (and obligations) of agency fee payers.

**branch:** see union local

**Central Labor Councils:** the AFL-CIO-sponsored collection of the local unions in a particular city or other geographical area.

**chapter:** see union local

**collective bargaining:** see bargaining

**collective bargaining agreement:** the document produced as a result of negotiations between a union and an employer, constituting the set of binding workplace rules.

**constitution and bylaws:** the governing documents of a local union or higher up union body.

**contract:** see collective bargaining agreement

**corporate campaign:** a multifaceted pressure campaign waged by a union, designed to exploit an employer's legal weaknesses, public relations vulnerabilities, or business bottom line.

**dues:** the money paid by union members to finance the costs of running the union.

**duty of fair representation (DFR):** the union's obligation to act diligently and fairly in the interests of members of the bargaining unit. This flows from the union's role as the exclusive representative of all those in the bargaining unit.
**International**: usually refers to the national level of an American union, as in International Brotherhood of Teamsters, so named because of members in Puerto Rico, Canada, or elsewhere.

**International Trade Secretariats**: the international organizations that coordinate the efforts of the various unions worldwide that represent employees in particular industries or types of work.

**just cause**: the usual standard for discipline, requiring sufficient and fair grounds before punishing an employee.

**Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA)**: a federal law containing the Bill of Rights of Members of Labor Organizations, guaranteeing the right of union members to participate in union meetings, to vote in union elections, and so on.

**lodge**: see union local

**lockout**: a refusal by an employer to allow employees to report to work, designed to force the union to accept the employer's position in a bargaining dispute.

**mediation**: the process by which a neutral person attempts to help the union and an employer resolve a bargaining or other dispute.

**mutual-gains bargaining**: see interest-based bargaining

**National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)**: the federal agency that administers the National Labor Relations Act, the labor law that applies to most private sector employees. See also Wagner Act.

**negotiated agreement**: see collective bargaining agreement

**negotiating team**: see bargaining team

**negotiations**: see bargaining
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA): the federal agency that administers the basic health and safety law, the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

open shop: a workplace where union membership and payment of dues or other fees to the union are voluntary.

organizing: “external organizing” refers to acquiring union rights for unrepresented employees; “internal organizing” means persuading nonmembers to join the union that already represents them.

past practice: a procedure or workplace custom that can acquire binding effect.

private sector: privately owned companies and their employees.

public sector: government employment at all levels, including state, county, city and other localities.

Railway Labor Act: the labor law covering the transportation industry, with rules on organizing and bargaining that differ substantially from those of the National Labor Relations Act.

rank and file: the members of a union; not the leaders, just you and your co-workers.

ratification: the procedure in which union members vote to accept or reject a negotiated contract settlement.

receiverships: see trusteeships

redcircling: see grandfathering.

retaliation: punitive action taken against an employee for exercising a contractual or legal right.

“right to work”: legislation prohibiting various types of union security arrangements. In jurisdictions covered by such laws, unions cannot require nonmembers to make a financial payment to cover any of the union’s costs of operation.
**steward:** the front-line union representative, usually a volunteer, who is responsible for giving guidance on workplace rights, filing grievances, and other representation and organizing tasks. Sometimes called “the union’s eyes and ears.”

**seniority:** a worker’s length of service with an employer relative to the length of service of other workers. Contracts frequently use seniority to determine layoffs, promotions, recalls and transfers.

**strike:** a collective refusal to work, designed to pressure an employer to accept the union’s position in a bargaining or other dispute.

**trusteeship:** placing the day-to-day running of a union local in the hands of a higher union body, usually as a result of financial irregularities or mismanagement.

**unfair labor practice (ULP):** a labor law violation, committed by either an employer or a union. Common employer violations include making changes in the workplace without going through the union, and interfering with employees’ rights to engage in union activity.

**union contract:** see collective bargaining agreement

**union local:** the lowest level in a union’s formal organizational structure, usually consisting of employees in a particular workplace or city.

**union shop ("agency shop"):** workplaces where new employees are required either to join the union or to pay a “fair share” fee to the union to compensate it for direct representation and other services.

**Wagner Act:** the 1935 federal statute, subsequently amended, that set up the framework for union representation for most private sector employees. Formally, the National Labor Relations Act, named for U.S. Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York (1877–1953).