

THE GROWTH OF LABOR UNIONS

More and more factories appeared in Europe in the 1700's and 1800's. The owners of the factories required their employees to work long hours for little pay. Buildings were poorly lighted, heated, and ventilated. First aid facilities and proper fire exits were lacking. Men, women, and children worked six days a week at jobs that were repetitious and boring. The typical day was 12 to 14 hours long with no rest periods.

If a worker complained about the low wages or miserable working conditions, he was quickly replaced by one of the many people who had moved to the cities in search of employment. As time went on, however, some workers decided to join together and make demands as a group. It would be harder for the factory owner to replace a group of workers than a single worker. These groups were called "labor unions." Gradually, unions were able to win higher wages, shorter hours, and improved working conditions.

Today, many workers belong to labor unions. Representatives of "labor" (the workers) meet periodically with representatives of "management" (the owners) to draw up a new "contract." The contract is an agreement that specifies wages, hours of employment, vacation time, medical insurance, and other fringe benefits.

The discussion between labor and management over a new contract is called "collective bargaining," or "negotiations." If a new contract cannot be reached through collective bargaining, workers may decide to go on "strike," meaning they refuse to work until an agreement is drawn up and ratified by the union.

Writing a New Contract for the Manchester Textile Company

Assume that it is the early 1800's and that the contract at the Manchester Textile Company, a clothing manufacturer, is about to expire. Labor and management must get together and negotiate a new agreement.

The class will be divided into groups of four students. Two people in each group will represent management (wealthy owners of the textile company) and two will represent labor (the garment workers). The two sides must discuss and finalize terms of a new contract to replace the one that is running out. The old agreement says:

- (1) Workers must be on the job 12 hours per day, Monday through Saturday.
- (2) Weekly wages are \$5 for men, \$3 for women, and \$2 for children.
- (3) All employees may take one week off a year for vacation, but will not be paid for that week.
- (4) Management is not responsible for medical bills resulting from job-related injuries or illnesses.
- (5) There are no paid sick days.

Representatives of labor should try to get management to make improvements in the old contract. Labor should also try to convince management to do something about inadequate heating and lighting, an insufficient number of fire escapes, the hiring of very young children, and the absence of dining and recreational facilities. Meanwhile, management should try to put into the new contract as many provisions of the old one as possible. Management will save money by holding down wages and fringe benefits while agreeing to few improvements in working conditions.

Each group member must list the terms of the new contract they negotiate on the next page. Contracts will be submitted to the teacher, who will then decide whether labor or management has out-bargained the other in each group. In some cases, a settlement might be negotiated that is "fair" to both sides -- that is, it gives neither labor or management a significant advantage. Such agreements are often the result of successful collective bargaining sessions.

The Manchester Textile Company

WORKING CONDITIONS	OLD CONTRACT	NEW CONTRACT
Hours of Employment	Workers must be on the job 12 hours per day, Monday through Saturday.	
Weekly Wages	The amount of pay per week is \$5 for men, \$3 for women, and \$2 for children.	
Vacation Time	All employees may take one week off a year, but will not be paid for that week.	
Medical Insurance	Management is not responsible for medical bills resulting from job-related injuries or illnesses.	
Sick Days	Employees will not be paid for days missed because of illness.	
Other Working Conditions	The factory is poorly heated and lighted and lacks dining and recreational facilities. There is only one fire escape. Management can hire children of any age.	