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## INFORMATION SOURCES FOR LABOR: A GUIDED TOUR

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Information resources about the workplace are immense and detailed, reflecting the concern we all have about our jobs. The vastness of this subject area is matched by an equally vast array of reference books, periodicals and other resources. Many of these are easy to use and bring satisfactory results to most information searches. Still, whenever we set out upon a new information search, even the most seasoned researcher may need help getting started; this is where the a reference librarian's short cuts can come in handy.

The following tour of labor information resources offers a variety of starting points for researchers. While it is by no means exhaustive, it will help researchers work through their questions. The tour focuses on core resources available in print at most libraries, and is followed by a bibliography. Later in 1994 *The Labor Center Reporter* will feature a second tour of the electronic information resources that librarians and other researchers frequently use.

### Getting Started

At the Institute of Industrial Relations Library, we have found that the majority of labor-related questions can be tackled using three basic resources: *The Labor Relations Reporter*; *The Daily Labor Report*; and any of three indexes to periodical literature, *ABI/INFORM*, *Public Affairs Information Service Bulletin (PAIS)*, and *Work Related Abstracts*. The *Labor Relations Reporter* covers labor law, while the *Daily Labor Report* and periodical indexes give broad access to news, management research and other related areas. Researchers who need a quick but reliable overview can start with these

tools and expand outward, using library public access catalogs to locate material by subject, author or title.

*The Labor Relations Reporter (LRR)* wins the labor lawyers' first prize for most dreaded and cursed-at legal treatise, yet it must be mentioned first. It is published by the Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. (BNA), a private publisher with a high profile in labor literature. Sprawling over two library shelves, this collection pulls together the multiple black holes of labor statutes and regulations, new federal and state developments, and summaries of court and arbitration decisions. LRR offers thorough indexing to its many parts, sometimes frustrating the researcher by requiring many moves between indexes and text volumes. But despite its arduousness, LRR can deliver results which can save lots of time. The subject indexing pulls together local and national developments and related court cases, speeding the research substantially.

*The Daily Labor Report (DLR)* is also published by BNA. DLR is truly a one-stop shop for the wayward or lost researcher, and it is known for its kindness to strangers. It is skillfully indexed in two month increments, and its subject headings trigger both logical and intuitive thinking. DLR reports on all news of interest to labor researchers, ranging from federal developments to court cases. It also takes note of publications by academics, private think tanks, news, survey research and other key developments. Librarians hold DLR editors in particular esteem because they always cite names, addresses and phone numbers for survey authors and publishers, opening the door up for telephone inquiries, schmoozing, or networking with authors and commentators.

Periodical literature addresses a broad spectrum of information needs. Three indexes provide excellent coverage of labor, although there are many others. *ABI/INFORM* is a CD-ROM

index that is widely available in business libraries. Although this tour focuses resources in "print format", ABI/INFORM must be mentioned because it offers very complete coverage of business periodical literature and is easily searchable. PAIS is reminiscent of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. It covers both books and periodicals, and gives a thorough treatment of labor relations. Indexing in PAIS follows the Library of Congress Subject Headings. It is important for researchers to learn how to use subject headings, and PAIS offers an easy way to become familiar with them.

*Work-Related Abstracts* has a bum reputation as the index "everyone loves to hate". Not so at the Institute of Industrial Relations Library! It's an index-and-abstract guide that requires an initial scan of subject headings, followed by a review of brief abstracts. Too much work for a small payoff, right? Wrong. Unlike other most other guides, *Work-Related Abstracts* indexes trade union publications, the general press and other important sources for timely news on key labor issues such as temporary workers, sexual harassment, and NAFTA. Several business librarians we know roll their eyeballs when we mention this index, but we urge labor researchers to become familiar with it.

If you have a topic in mind, such as plant closures, you will want to look at *Labor Research Review*, the journal of the Midwest Center for Labor Research. The editors select specific topics and provide informative and in-depth analysis that can save lots of time.

## Union Information Sources

Many trade unionists in places of authority seem to share a sentiment that people trying to do research on unions are gathering information that will be used against them. Whether this is true or false, it makes the information search challenging. Still, there are a few sources to get you started.

BNA's *Union Labor Report* is a looseleaf set that reports on the environment that trade unions operate in. It's a helpful overview, although you may not get the specifics you would like to know more about. BNA also publishes *Collective Bargaining: Negotiations and Contracts*, a two volume looseleaf set that defines contract language and provides at least one sample bargaining agreement for many major industries.

Researchers interested in public employee issues turn first to BNA's *Government Employee Relations Report*, a looseleaf set modeled after the Labor Relations Reporter. In California, public sector collective bargaining is exhaustively analyzed by the Institute of Industrial Relations' *California Public Employee Relations (CPER)*. CPER is indexed annually, and is extremely useful for developments in California. CPER also publishes "pocket guides" that are subject specific.

There are two especially helpful directories of labor: BNA's *Directory of U.S. Labor Organizations*, and Gale Research's *American Directory of Organized Labor*. The BNA directory offers brief entries but gives a thorough listing of international offices and labor councils around the country. Gale Research's guide is much larger; it provides union operating budgets and some salary data.

Librarians recall with fondness a now out-of-date resource called *Union Sourcebook: Membership, Structure, Finance, Directory*. Its was published in 1985, but despite the stale date, this volume still is useful in providing historical data on union membership, budgets, et cetera.

## Labor Law

Got a legal problem having to do with work? You need information and you don't know where to start? Take heart: you have a lot in common with the average American. And the good news is that whenever lots of citizens find themselves lost, there's bound to be a reference book or two for the lay person.

While labor law has many useful guides, legal information searches take patience, perseverance and counsel. What's more, legal liability restricts the amount of advice or opinions you will receive at the library. Be prepared for frequent disclaimers such as: "Reference assistance does not constitute legal advice. For legal advice, consult an attorney." Attorney advice will cost you. Therefore it is advisable to find some general guides even before looking for a lawyer, if just to be able to ask smarter questions. A few suggestions follow to bolster your sleuthing.

Bruce Feldacker's *Labor Guide to Labor Law* is a helpful overview of the law of the American workplace. It is written for the layman and does a good job of side-stepping "legalese". Nolo Press, the leading proponent of "law for people, not lawyers", publishes an excellent guide titled *Your Rights in the Workplace*. Author Dan Lacey lays out, step by step, what your basic rights are and how to respond to many difficult scenarios.

There are some very handy desktop tools that are targeted lawyers; these can be helpful for the layperson, too. Legal publishing juggernaut West Publishing Co. (the publisher of all those spiffy volumes that line the corridors in "L.A. Law"), publishes many legal textbooks, including a quick-reference series called the "nutshell" series. Go to a law library or legal bookstore to look at some of these; they are written by leading specialists. One example is *Federal Law of Employment Discrimination in a Nutshell*. The "in a nutshell" part of the title is maintained throughout the series.

BNA publishes a primer series that is very much like the nutshell series—summaries of key issues in readable english. Titles like *A Primer on ERISA* (the Employee Retirement Income Security Act) are commonplace around lawyers' offices; when confronted with a new case outside their specialty, lawyers turn to series like BNA primers or West's nutshells to get up to speed.

William B. Gould IV, President Clinton's recently confirmed appointee to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), is more popular in the library than he was during Senate confirmation hearings. His important handbook, *A Primer on American Labor Law* (third edition: 1993), is an informative one-stop description of labor law.

None of these guides will teach you all you need to know about legal research. Look to the library profession's literature for additional guides, reference tools and finding aids. Two of

the best treatises on legal research are *How to Find the Law*, and *Practical Approaches to Legal Research*. The authors (including UC Berkeley's Robert C. Berring) are accessible and pragmatic, and write from the librarian's viewpoint.

## Statistics

If we live in an "information economy," then statistics are the fuel we stoke into the digital furnace. The U.S. government collects huge amounts of data, and with practice, researchers can learn where to find the right answers with dispatch.

Most searches for statistical data are best begun with the reference librarian's "fill 'em fast!" bible: the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Published annually, the *Statistical Abstract* pulls together summary data from every imaginable source in the government, and offers surprisingly satisfactory answers to many arcane questions. Research libraries retain past volumes of the *Statistical Abstract* in order to create a quick history of statistics over the years. The *Statistical Abstract* is organized in numbered tables, with a good subject index. Each table cites its sources, such as *Employment and Earnings*, the *Monthly Labor Review*, *The CPI Detailed Report*, and so on. Nearly every statistical search should start here.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes the *Handbook of Labor Statistics*, a one volume summary of many linear feet of printed volumes. Interested in how all this data is gathered? Take a look at the *BLS Handbook of Methods*, which describes how BLS compiles and analyzes its data.

The Department of Commerce is another big statistics collector. Commerce's Bureau of the Census publishes ongoing studies of employment issues in its Current Population Reports series. Series no. P-23 (Population Characteristics) is of special interest, as it examines occupations in detail. The census itself includes a wealth of information about employers and employees. In print form, the 1980 census covers several hundred linear feet of shelving; despite its daunting size, it is not too difficult to use. The 1990 census is available on CD-ROM disks that allow searching and downloading of information in ways not previously possible except by computer tape or commercial database.

Labor Movement publications can also be a big help. *LRA's Economic Notes* (published by the Labor Research Association) provides very useful analysis of workplace trends. *Free Labour World* offers an international focus that includes both statistics and commentary.

## Strategic Business Information

Business research is essential for both trade unions and individuals workers who wish to know more about what's happening with their employers and career prospects. The reference tools of business are many and varied, reflecting broad interest in the flow of money and power by just about

everybody. The following resources are just a few of the many excellent reference books available.

**Business Information:** *How to Find It, How to Use It* is a selective guide. The author describes business information, finding aids, and the organizations that provide data. Gale Research's *Encyclopedia of Business Information Sources* takes the dictionary approach, sorting guides by industry and also by type, such as books, periodicals et cetera. Those who prefer to walk into a business library and scan the shelves should take a look at *How to Use the Business Library, with Sources of Information*. Written by business school faculty for the unsophisticated researcher, it demystifies library classification and other necessary standard arrangements of the literature.

Folks who want the "scoop" on a particular company often turn to publications by Washington Researchers, a private information brokerage and publisher. These include *Business Researcher's Handbook: The Comprehensive Guide for Business Professionals*, and *How to Find Information About Companies: The Corporate Intelligence Sourcebook*.

## Summary

People interested in finding out about labor issues and related subjects, such as business and government information will find many resources to choose from. Some of the reference books listed here will hold more appeal than others, depending on your personal style. Explore what works best for you by trying a variety of resources, and remember that flexibility and creative thinking can sometimes bring fast results. The flexible workforce of the future will require sound fact-finding and research skills; this will be a survival skill for self-motivated workers. Let this overview of library resources about labor be a stimulus to your program of lifelong learning, not only for work-related concerns, but for every occasion when you find yourself searching for ways to get started on an information search.

Lastly, it is never a bad idea to contact your local public library (including public college and university libraries) for advice, guidance, or just to get a sense of things. You may find that the staff cannot always meet demand; in such cases, consider hiring an information broker. The Data Center [(510) 835-3017] will perform research on demand and also offers subsidies in certain instances. For further information about information brokers, call your public library.

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