

Unions and the Professional



The following are frequently asked questions about unions for professionals. For further information, write or call:

**Council of AFL-CIO Unions
for**

Professional Employees

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Q. Is it unprofessional to join a union?

A. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, over 3,000,000 professional and technical employees are already participating in collective bargaining organizations. This constitutes approximately 50% of those professional employees eligible for union membership, i.e. neither managerial nor self-employed. Represented are such varied practitioners as musicians, doctors, actors, school teachers, college professors and engineers and scientists.

A union helps preserve professionalism. An employee of a large corporation frequently loses his professional autonomy. He is not always free to offer independent judgements based solely on professional considerations. Indeed, without a proper contract and a union to police it, an employed professional, like any unorganized individual employee, may be fired or penalized for pushing a view at odds with that of his supervisors. Nothing could be less professional.

Q. Wouldn't a union stifle individual achievement? Wouldn't raises and promotions be determined solely by seniority?

A. Salaries and promotion mechanisms are *bona fide* subjects for collective bargaining. Without a union, management makes these decisions unilaterally, usually without any peer input. Through collective bargaining, management and union must agree on the mechanisms to be used, and that agreement is included in a legally binding contract. There are no preconditions. The employees through their elected union representatives may bargain for any viable system they believe best suits their profession and employment condition. For example, a contractual annual cost of living increase plus a pool for merit increases would assure minimum equity while providing for recognition of individual achievement.

Seniority need not be the only criterion for promotion. A formal procedure could be devised which would include ratings by both supervisors and peers, credit for advanced education and training programs, and anything else that is deemed relevant by the professional group. A formal promotion and layoff procedure with rules known by all is preferable to one in which management plays favorites and rewards yes-men. But such a system can only be devised and implemented by a union of, by, and for the employee.

Q. What guarantees do I have that my union leadership won't commit me to follow rules with which I don't agree?

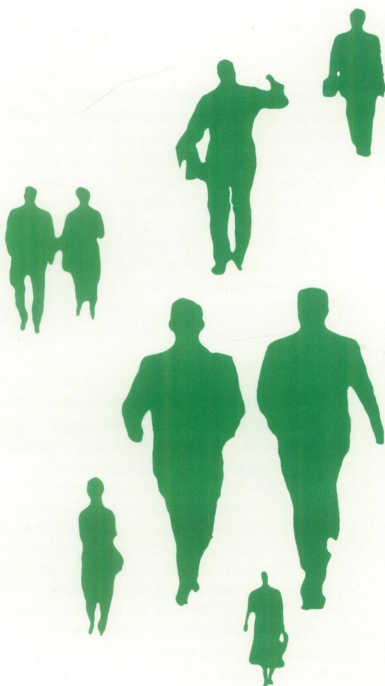
A. Union officers are elected by the membership of the union. Federal law requires that secret ballot procedures be used, and that elections for local officers be held at least every three years. Indeed, the right of the individual to affect policy in a union is far better protected by law and otherwise than in any other private organization.

Q. If my lab or plant is organized, wouldn't the numerically superior production and clerical people outvote the professionals?

A. No. Federal law provides that professional employees have the right to form their own separate unit and many have done so. Other professionals find there are benefits to participating in the larger group; that there is strength in numbers and their role is more meaningful vis-a-vis the employer. The important thing is that by law you and your professional colleagues have the right to vote on whether your unit will be separate or not for bargaining purposes.

Q. What can a union do for me?

A. By joining with your colleagues in a union organization you benefit in many ways. At the work place your union brings together the collective strength of your group to insure meaningful negotiations for an equitable contract. Through watchdog activities, it sees to it that the provisions of the contract are carried out. Some areas that can be negotiated include: cost of living raises, proper pension plans, vacations, equitable promotion systems and transfer policies, and a workable grievance system. During the life of the contract, the union is there to help individuals who have been wronged, if necessary going to third party impartial arbitration. Outside of the work place, the union works for you. The status of a profession and the well-being of the individual practitioner are not only affected by employing institutions but by government as well. Union organizations have proven extremely effective in pleading the cause of their members in the halls of government. Through unions the professional lengthens his shadow. He can have lawyers, economists and statisticians working for him and his interests as a professional and as an employed person.



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