

**la·bor un·ion** *noun* an organized association of workers, often in a trade or profession, formed to protect and further their rights and interests.

Everyone remembers their history lessons regarding working conditions, right? No? Here's a little reminder.

Prior to the early 1900s and the growing influence of the American Federation of Labor, workers worked more than the standard 40-hour work week in unhealthy and unsafe conditions. They had little or no protection from harassment and discrimination because of their gender, age, race or religion. Women were not paid equally for the same work as men. Raises were unheard of. Conditions did not have to meet any standard, making it difficult if not impossible for people with disabilities to work. If you were unlucky enough to get hurt on the job, you were not compensated and in fact would likely lose your job as well. Many workers died as a result of the unsafe conditions.

In their plight, workers realized that a single voice may not have much of an impact, but many voices together could be heard and could force a change. In their unity, willing to speak out for fairness and equality, conditions for all workers have improved. In our fight, we continue to work for our efforts to be valued.

The Contract is an agreement between the company and the Union, creating the framework for a healthy, productive workplace. Federal law mandates certain workers' rights be guaranteed, but much is left to the will of the company.

There is an image of the Union as a faceless entity with a goal of excessive pay for as little work as possible. The company uses the Union as a scapegoat to explain why they HAVE to do something or why they CAN'T do something else. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Let's get this out of the way – the Union's goal isn't to force the company to keep workers who don't do their job. It isn't to hinder the growth and success of individuals or the company as a whole. The success of the company is ALWAYS the main goal. A successful company cannot exist without successful employees. Employees are not merely materials in the creation of the product...they are the generators of that product. Without the talents, skills and creativities of the employees, the product does not exist. Why then is the wealth generated by the employees not shared with them?

But the Union just costs me money, right? All I get out of it [are Seabreeze and Amerk] ticket[s].

No way. With a Union contract you have paid vacation, holiday time, sick leave, and employer-paid health care insurance benefits to name a few. The company is not required to provide these benefits, and certainly not at the levels we enjoy.

The cost of everything is going up. Rent, gas, taxes, milk...but not our pay. Without a contract, there is no requirement for the company to provide any wage increase at all. What about merit?

That sounds like a great idea – I do a good job and I’m sure I would get a merit raise if only the Union would allow it. Newsflash – the Union DOES allow it. In fact, we welcome it! The Union contract only ensures a minimum be paid; they can give you as much as they want!

How would you like to leave work at midnight and have to return to work at 6am on a regular basis? Do you enjoy having two days off in a row to enjoy your family? Would you like to have to worry each day that today might be the day you are fired for no reason? You don’t have to worry about these things because your Union has provided a process by which you have protections and a voice.

The contract is not all about money and the wage increase. It is a set of guidelines that govern both the company and the employees allowing each to be productive, working toward the common goal of a successful product.

Did you know that your Union also provides professional learning opportunities, a political voice, legal representation, and support for its members?

You and me are WE, the UNION. In order for our individual whispers to become a roar that cannot be ignored, YOU must be involved. So...you have a choice. You can sit there and have your rights taken from you, or you can join with your coworkers and your Union to defend the broadcast profession. Decide.