

## The Steps of a Union Campaign

Each work place is different. But when workers build a union, there are basic steps that they go through.

Workers can win if they get ready by:

- learning about building their union;
- understanding the differences they can make at work;
- finding support among all work areas and kinds of workers.

When a boss finds out that you are going to take away some of her power, some bosses will do everything possible to stop you. It is usually a bad idea to start by leafleting the worksite or signing union cards, since it gives management early warning about union activity. If a union leaflets or hands out union cards before you have prepared for the campaign, you may want to ask why this makes sense.

Before signing union cards, workers need to decide that this is the union that they want to represent them. Some unions have "no raid" agreements with other unions. "No raid" means that once a group of workers is organizing with a union, some other unions will not try to organize the workers. Not all unions have no-raid agreements. Overall, "no raid" agreements are a good thing - it stops unions from arguing over the same group of workers instead of helping many workers. But, if a group of workers decides they want to organize with a different union, they may not be able to switch if they already signed union cards for another union.

Remember that a union is only as good as you make it. YOU are the union. A union can't solve problems for you, but you can use the union to solve workplace problems.

**1. Do workers want a change?** Workers talk among themselves to see if most people have issues that they want to change. The first step to building a union is figuring out if your co-workers want a union. Typically, a small group of workers who trust each other start to talk about what's going on at work, what they can do to build a union, and what union they want to represent them. Workers need to be discreet - it's too early for the boss to find out that workers are starting to think about getting union protection and a voice.

**2. Gather information about your work place.** It's important to map out all of the departments and where people work. Posted lists of workers and schedules will disappear when the company knows about the campaign, so collect them now. Home addresses are especially important, so workers can talk freely away from work.

**3. Call a union, or a couple, to find one** that you feel comfortable with. Ask union members in your community if their union would be a good fit. Don't worry too much about the name of the union - some unions represent workers who are in many different jobs. You can also decide to build a union that is "independent" - not affiliated with any national union (although it is often more difficult when workers don't have support and resources from a national union).

4. **Find the leaders who workers respect.** The union committee has to represent all of the workers (from each department, shift, job, and group) to be able to keep workers together during the campaign.

5. **Learn how having a union can help** with your problems. Workers also need to know what to expect from the company during the union campaign.

6. **Sign union cards** when workers have enough information about the union and are ready for everything the company will do to try to stop them. To win a union campaign, workers need to be strong and unified, with a big majority supporting the union. Signing a union authorization card means the worker wants the union to represent him or her to bargain with the company. The labor board will run an election when 30% of workers sign cards, but usually workers have a large majority before they ask for an election.

7. **Workers show that they want a union.** A company can agree to have a neutral person from the community review the cards to see if a majority of workers want the union ("card check"). More often, the cards are used to have the National Labor Relations Board (or other agency) run a secret ballot election. The workers and the company have to agree on which workers will be able to vote and be represented by the union. Sometimes the company delays the election with labor board hearings. Once the bargaining unit (who is eligible to be represented) is decided, the labor board sets the date for the election, usually a month later.

8. **The company tries to stop the workers** from having a voice. Companies want to keep all the power and don't want to have to deal with workers who have protections, rights, and a voice. The time before a union election can be unpleasant – but it doesn't last forever. Workers can overcome the company's tricks if they stick together and keep talking among themselves.

9. **Election day!** The labor boards runs the election and makes sure that the rules are followed. Workers vote in secret. The ballots are counted in front of the workers and company as soon as the election is over.

10. **Negotiations.** This was what the whole campaign was about – for workers and union representatives to be able to sit down with the boss and negotiate for fair rules and better working conditions. Workers decide what to negotiate for. For the union to be strong, the company must see that workers support the negotiations. Workers vote to approve the contract before it becomes final. Sometimes, workers ask community members, like religious leaders, to be observers during contract negotiations.

11. **Protecting your rights on the job.** After there is a contract, workers have to make sure that the rules are followed. Active union members know that they have to be involved for their union to work.