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Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Department of Social Sciences

Sociology of Labor Movements

**A pedagogical handout presented to the requirements of first-year master's
students in sociology.**

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1. مدخل تاريخي لتطور الحركة العمالية.
2. مفهوم النقابات العمالية.
3. سوسيولوجية الحركة العمالية والاستراتيجية النقابية
4. وظائف العمل النقابي
5. نماذج من الحركات العمالية.

المراجع:

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This work is intended for first-year Master's students at Larbi Ben M'hide University, Oum El Bouaghi, as well as for all undergraduate students.

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Introduction

The labor movement represents one of the most significant forms of collective action in modern societies. Born out of the economic and social transformations triggered by industrialization, labor movements have continually evolved, reflecting broader struggles over power, justice, and equity in the workplace and beyond. Understanding the labor movement from a sociological perspective provides critical insight into the dynamics of class conflict, the organization of labor, and the pursuit of workers' rights within different historical, economic, and cultural contexts.

This course packet, designed for first-year Master's students in sociology, provides a comprehensive and analytical overview of the major aspects of the labor movement. It combines historical, conceptual, and empirical approaches to explore the emergence, evolution, and impact of labor organizations worldwide. The polycopié is structured into five thematic units:

1. **A Historical Introduction to the Development of the Labor Movement** – Traces the origins and growth of labor struggles from the industrial revolution to the present day.
2. **The Definition of Labor Unions** – Provides a conceptual framework for understanding trade unions, their structure, and their societal roles.
3. **The Sociology of the Labor Movement and Union Strategy** – Explores the theoretical foundations and strategic dimensions of labor organizing.
4. **The Functions of Union Work** – Examines the multiple functions unions serve, from collective bargaining to political advocacy.
5. **Examples of Labor Movements** – Presents international case studies highlighting the diversity of labor movements across different historical and geographical settings.

Each chapter is grounded in sociological theory and supported by references in APA style, drawing from classical and contemporary scholarship. The objective is not

only to transmit knowledge but also to develop students' analytical skills and critical thinking regarding the role of labor in shaping society.

In an era marked by globalization, technological disruption, and the growth of precarious work, the study of labor movements remains highly relevant. Through this course, students are invited to engage with key debates, reflect on contemporary challenges facing workers, and consider the future of labor organization in a rapidly changing world.

1st Cours : A Historical Introduction to the Development of the Labor Movement

Introduction

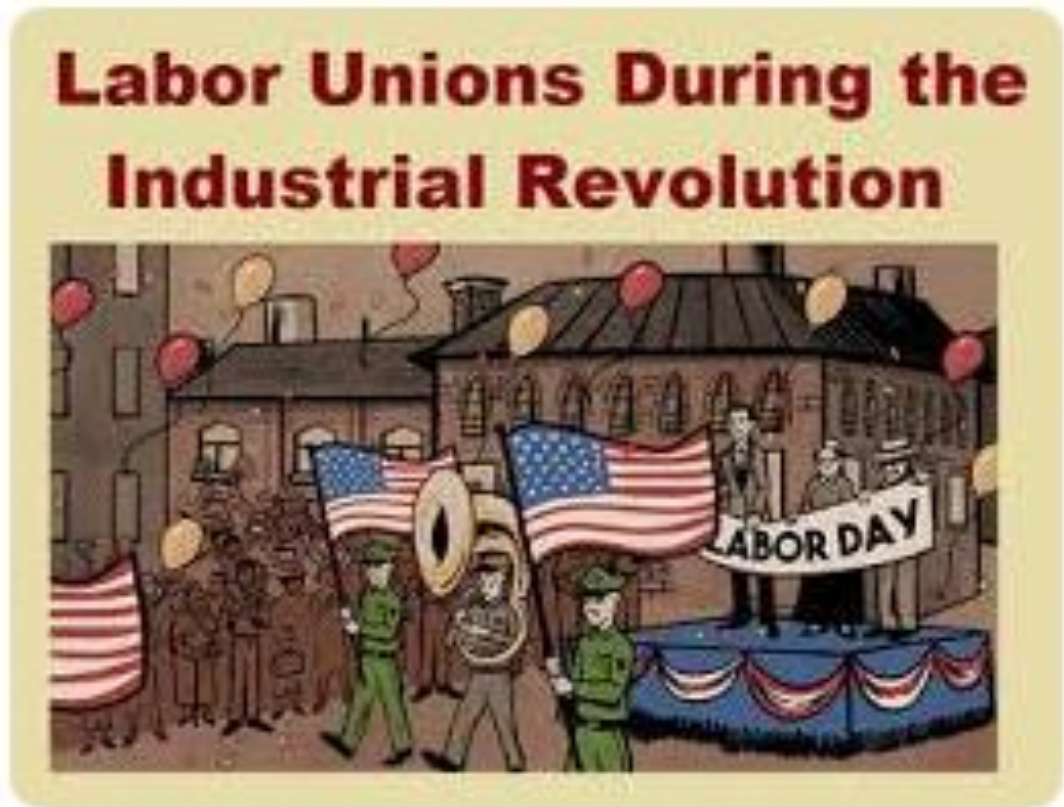
The labor movement, one of the most significant social and political movements in modern history, arose in response to the profound economic and social transformations brought about by industrial capitalism. It represents the collective organization of working people to achieve common goals such as improved working conditions, better wages, and greater political representation. Understanding the historical trajectory of the labor movement provides essential insight into the development of industrial society, class relations, and modern democracies. This course outlines the key stages in the historical development of the labor movement, beginning with its origins in the early phases of industrialization, through its institutionalization in trade unions and political parties, and up to contemporary transformations in the globalized economy.

1. Origins of the Labor Movement in the Industrial Revolution

The labor movement emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, closely linked to the Industrial Revolution in Europe, especially in Britain. As industrialization progressed, traditional forms of work and social life were disrupted. Workers moved from rural areas to cities, becoming part of a new industrial proletariat subject to harsh labor conditions, long hours, and minimal rights (Thompson, 1963). The earliest responses were often spontaneous and localized forms of resistance, including machine-breaking (Luddism) and strikes.

Early labor protest was frequently repressed by the state, which saw such actions as threats to social order. Laws such as the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 in Britain banned collective bargaining and unionization. However, by the 1820s and 1830s, workers began forming mutual aid societies and early trade unions, such as the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1834.

Fig 01 : Labor Unions in the Industrial Revolution



Source : <https://www.google.com/>, february 04, 2025

Table 1: Timeline of Major Events in Labor Movement History

Year	Event	Location
1799	Combination Acts	Britain
1824	Repeal of Combination Acts	Britain
1869	Founding of Knights of Labor	USA
1886	Haymarket Affair / AFL Founded	USA
1935	Wagner Act Passed	USA
1956	UGTA Founded	Algeria
1980	Solidarity Movement Begins	Poland

Combination Act 1799

The **Combination Act 1799** (39 Geo. 3. c. 81) titled "An Act to prevent Unlawful Combinations of Workmen", prohibited trade unions and collective bargaining by British workers. The act received royal assent on 12 July 1799.

An additional act, the **Combination Act 1800** (39 & 40 Geo. 3. c. 106), was passed the following year.

Background

Under William Pitt the Younger's administration, the Acts of 1799 and 1800 were passed in response to Jacobin activities and the Duke of Portland, who was then Home Secretary, being afraid that workers might go on strike during a disagreement and pressure the government to comply with their demands. These Acts were together referred to as the Combination Acts. According to these Acts, any arrangement involving two or more masters or workers that reduced or increased wages, the number of hours worked, or the quantity of work required was punished as a tort under common law (Rodney, 1999, p. 13).

Significance

Labour organisations were forced underground by the law. The laws were repealed in 1824 as a result of sympathy for the situation of the workers. Francis Place, a radical tailor, lobbied for this repeal. The Working Men's Associations Act of 1825, which authorised trade unions but severely restricted their operations, was passed in reaction to the subsequent wave of strikes.

Fig 02 : Manifestation of ladies workers in New York



2. Institutionalization of Labor Movements: The Rise of Trade Unions and Labor Parties

By the mid-19th century, the labor movement began to consolidate and institutionalize. Trade unions became more permanent and organized, focusing on collective bargaining to secure better wages and working conditions. The British Trade Union Congress (TUC), founded in 1868, exemplifies this process.

Simultaneously, labor movements gave rise to political organizations advocating for workers' rights. The most influential of these was the rise of socialist and labor parties, such as the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), founded in 1875. These parties emerged out of Marxist and socialist thought, which analyzed the labor-capital conflict as a fundamental contradiction of capitalism (Marx & Engels, 1848).

In many countries, labor unions and socialist parties cooperated to push for reforms such as universal suffrage, social insurance, and labor legislation. The Second International (1889–1916) brought together socialist parties and labor movements from different countries, promoting international solidarity.

3. The Labor Movement in the Early 20th Century

The early 20th century saw the labor movement at its most militant and influential. Mass strikes, general strikes, and factory occupations became widespread, particularly in Europe and the United States. In Russia, labor unrest played a crucial role in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, which led to the formation of a workers' state under the Bolsheviks.

The labor movement was also crucial in the New Deal era in the United States, where the Wagner Act of 1935 guaranteed the right to unionize and engage in collective bargaining (Lichtenstein, 2002). The post-World War II period witnessed the golden age of trade unionism in the West, with strong union density and substantial political influence in countries like Sweden, France, and the UK.

At the same time, labor movements in colonized regions began to mobilize, linking their struggles to anti-colonial and nationalist movements. For example, in India and Algeria, trade unions played important roles in the broader movement for independence (Hobsbawm, 1987).

4. Decline and Transformation in the Late 20th Century

The 1970s and 1980s marked a turning point for the labor movement. Economic globalization, deindustrialization, and neoliberal policies led to a decline in traditional industrial employment and weakened the bargaining power of unions. In the Global North, countries such as the UK and the US saw a sharp decline in union membership and influence, particularly under governments led by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Harvey, 2005).

Furthermore, the rise of precarious work, informal labor markets, and the gig economy challenged the traditional model of stable, unionized employment. Labor movements had to adapt to new realities, including representing service sector workers, migrants, and informal workers.

5. Labor Movements in the 21st Century: New Forms of Struggle

Despite challenges, the labor movement has not disappeared; rather, it has transformed. New forms of labor organizing have emerged, including global labor alliances, advocacy for workers' rights in global supply chains, and digital organizing. In countries of the Global South, labor movements have often been at the forefront of broader struggles for democracy, social justice, and environmental sustainability (Waterman, 2001).

Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of labor militancy, including teacher strikes in the US, Amazon and Starbucks worker unionization efforts, and the mobilization of delivery and platform workers worldwide. These movements are often characterized by grassroots leadership, intersectional concerns (e.g., race, gender, migration), and a critique of economic inequality.

The 21st century has witnessed significant transformations in labor movements, characterized by new forms of struggle that extend beyond traditional union activities. These changes are driven by globalization, financialization, and the evolving nature of work, which have collectively reshaped labor relations and social movements. Traditional unions have struggled to adapt to these changes, leading to the emergence of new platforms and movements that address contemporary labor issues in innovative ways. This shift is evident in various global contexts, where labor movements are increasingly incorporating diverse strategies and actors to confront exploitation and advocate for workers' rights.

5-1-New Platforms for Struggle

- Social movements such as Occupy and BlackLivesMatter have emerged as new platforms for labor struggles, engaging people in public spaces like streets and neighborhoods, beyond traditional workplaces(Dufour, 2022).
- The Gilets Jaunes movement in France exemplifies how protests can adapt to changing social and economic conditions, highlighting the evolving nature of labor resistance(Dufour, 2022).

5-2-Broader Definitions of Labor Movements

- The international labor movement, while still crucial, faces a crisis due to low unionization rates. This has prompted a broader definition of labor movements to include informal workers' organizations, social movements, and NGOs(Bieler, 2023).
- This expanded view allows for a more comprehensive understanding of labor struggles, incorporating factors like gender, race, and geography(Bieler, 2023).

5-3-Globalization and Labor Resistance

- Globalization has intensified exploitation, but it has also spurred new labor movements that are both defensive and offensive in nature. These movements compel corporations and political institutions to change(Burgmann, 2016).

- In developing countries, militant labor movements are emerging, while in developed countries, unions are transforming to better confront employer power(Burgmann, 2016).

5-4-Grassroots and Precarious Workers

- New labor movements are forming at the grassroots level among rank-and-file workers and precarious, informal workers. These movements are part of a broader push for global justice and solidarity(Waterman et al., 2012).

While these new forms of labor struggle are gaining momentum, traditional unions still play a role in advocating for workers' rights. However, their effectiveness is often limited by structural challenges and declining membership. The integration of diverse actors and strategies into labor movements may offer a more resilient and adaptable approach to addressing contemporary labor issues.

Conclusion

The labor movement is a dynamic and evolving force that has shaped the modern world in profound ways. From its origins in the factories of 19th-century Britain to contemporary struggles in the digital economy, it has continuously adapted to new economic, political, and technological realities. Understanding its history is essential for analyzing current labor issues and imagining new forms of collective action. For students of sociology, the labor movement provides a powerful example of how social structures, agency, and conflict shape historical change.

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2nd Cours : The Definition of Labor Unions

Introduction

Labor unions are pivotal institutions in the history and sociology of work. They represent a key mechanism through which workers collectively organize to protect and advance their interests within the economic and political spheres. Understanding the definition of labor unions goes beyond a simple descriptive account; it requires an exploration of their functions, forms, legal status, and sociological significance. This course aims to define labor unions through historical, legal, and sociological lenses, while also illustrating how their roles have evolved over time in different national and global contexts.

1. Conceptual Definition of Labor Unions

Often just called a "union," a trade union (British English) or labour union (American English) is an association of workers whose goal is to preserve or enhance their working conditions, including securing better pay and benefits, enhancing safety standards and working conditions, creating grievance procedures, creating regulations governing employee status (such as those governing promotions and conditions for termination for just cause), and safeguarding and enhancing workers' bargaining power.

Union dues are usually used to pay for the union's headquarters and legal department. Typically, union representatives are workplace volunteers who are chosen by their members through internal democratic elections. Depending on the industry, the union negotiates employment contracts (collective bargaining agreements) with employers at various levels of government, which legally binds them to their discussions and operations. The union also negotiates with the employer on behalf of its members, known as the rank and file, through an elected leadership and bargaining committee.

Trade unions can try to organise all workers in a certain industry (industrial unionism), gather together a particular group of skilled or unskilled workers (craft

unionism), or represent a representative sample of workers from several crafts (general unionism). The employer, rank-and-file members, and occasionally non-member employees are bound by the agreements reached during union negotiations. A union's constitution, which legally ties them to their negotiations and operations, typically outlines the governance of their bargaining unit as well as governance at various governmental levels based on the sector.

During the Industrial Revolution, when employment—rather than subsistence farming—became the main source of income, trade unions, which had their start in the United Kingdom, expanded to many nations. Individual employees, professionals, previous employees, students, apprentices, and the jobless can all be members of a union. The Nordic nations have the highest union density, or the proportion of employees who belong to a union (Mayer, 2009, pp. 219-239).

The prevailing historical perspective since the release of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *History of Trade Unionism* (1894) has been that a trade union "is a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving their conditions of employment." According to Karl Marx, the value of labour power is the explicit and conscious foundation of trade unions, and their significance for the working class cannot be overstated. The primary goal of trade unions is to keep wages from dropping below what has historically been maintained in the various industries. To put it another way, they want to keep the cost of labour from declining below its worth. (Page 1069, *Capital*, V1, 1867).

In order to obtain political power, early socialists also believed that unions might democratise the workplace (Mayer, 2009, pp. 219-239). The Australian Bureau of Statistics gave a contemporary definition of a trade union as "an organisation composed primarily of employees, the principal activities of which include negotiating the wages and conditions of employment of its members."

- According to Bob James's recent historical research, trade unions were a part of a larger movement of mutual help societies that also included friendly societies, Oddfellows, Freemasons, mediaeval guilds, and other fraternal organisations. (Alicia 2012, pp. 4-5).

A labor union, also known as a trade union or workers' union, is a formal organization of workers who band together to achieve common goals in key areas such as wages, working hours, safety, benefits, and conditions of employment. According to Freeman and Medoff (1984), unions serve two primary functions: **collective bargaining** (negotiating with employers on behalf of members) and **voice** (providing a means for workers to express concerns and participate in workplace decision-making).

Legally, labor unions are recognized as collective entities with the right to represent workers in negotiations with employers. Their legal status and power vary across countries and legal systems, but in general, they are structured organizations with rules, leadership, and membership procedures.

From a sociological perspective, labor unions are more than negotiating bodies. They are social institutions embedded in class relations and the structure of industrial capitalism. They act as mediators of labor-capital conflict and play a crucial role in shaping labor markets, labor laws, and welfare policies (Kelly, 1998).

Labor unions are organized associations of workers that collectively negotiate with employers to secure better working conditions, wages, and rights. They play a crucial role in advocating for social justice and economic equity, reflecting the collective power of workers in the labor market. The following sections elaborate on the conceptual definition of labor unions, highlighting their principles, functions, and broader implications.

What are trade unions?

Workers' organisations known as unions aim to raise their members' pay and working conditions. Members receive many perks in exchange for paying dues. These advantages may be legal in nature, such as providing funds to hire an attorney. Numerous unions provide their members with a range of financial advantages, including reduced mortgage rates, discounts on vacations, and savings on auto purchases. There are unions in many different professions. Wages and pensions are among the financial matters that a union might discuss with the business. A shop steward, a union

representative, frequently serves as a go-between for employees and management in the workplace. They try to fix any issues that come up.

Fig 03 : Main roles of Trade Union



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqhmjty/revision/3>. february 02, 2025

How can people participate in a trade union?

Voting in union-organized ballots, which occasionally determine whether to take industrial action; electing a new representative, like a shop steward; attending union meetings at work and discussing issues like pay and working conditions; and taking part in industrial action, like a work-to-rule or strike, are all ways that members can get involved in union activities.

Because they think unions are bad for business, some employers do not recognise them, which deters workers from joining. Other employers see the value of positive management-employee connections.

Every day, unions collaborate with management and workers to address workplace concerns. In addition to their rights, unions have obligations to fulfil.

What are trade union rights?

- Carry out union actions to protect workers' rights.
- Hold a secret ballot to determine if a majority of members support the action.
- Attempt to attract new members to the union.

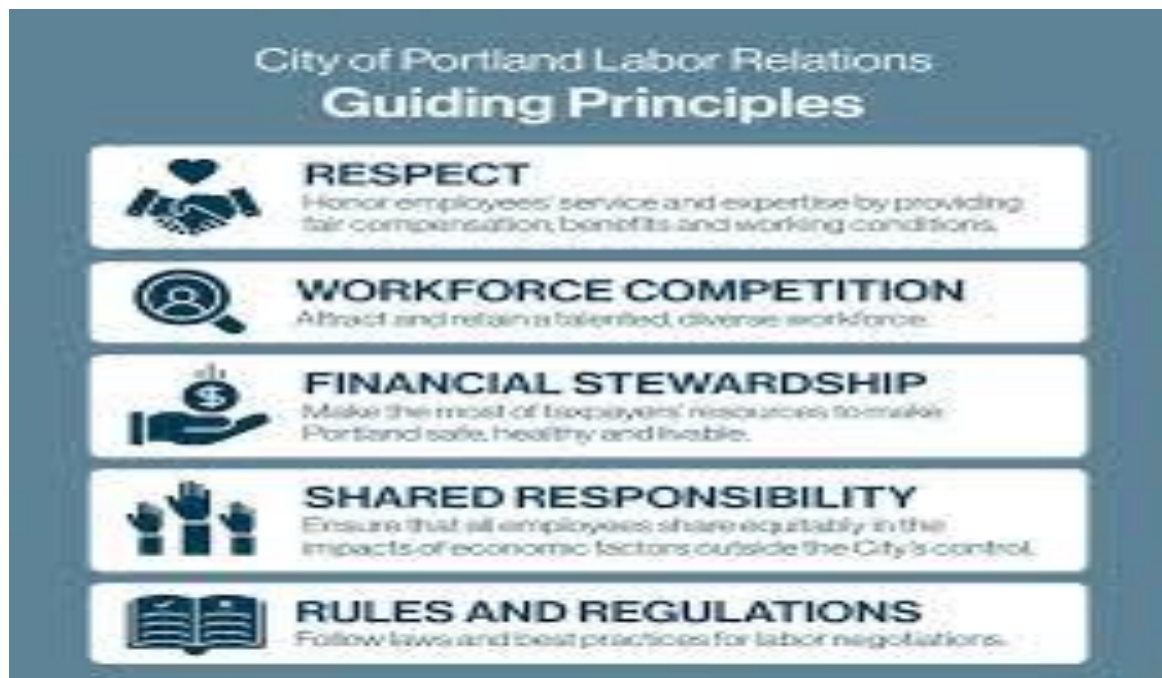
What are trade union responsibilities?

- Do not pressure anyone to join a union.
- Unions may survey their members about changes in the workplace.
- Ensure that all forms of union activity and industrial action are peaceful and in accordance with the law (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqhmjty/revision/3>)

1-1-Principles of Labor Unions

- **Solidarity:** Unions emphasize the importance of workers uniting to amplify their collective voice against employer power imbalances(Dewi, 2023).
- **Collective Bargaining:** This is the primary mechanism through which unions negotiate terms of employment, including wages and working conditions(Farber, 2001).

Fig 04 : Main Principles of Labor Unions



<https://www.google.com>. february 03, 2025

Fig 05 : Principles of Labor- Management relations



<https://www.google.com>. february 03, 2025

1-2-Functions of Labor Unions

- **Negotiation:** Unions negotiate labor contracts that cover wages, work rules, and workplace safety(Williams, 1952).
- **Representation:** They represent workers in disputes and advocate for their rights at various levels(Dewi, 2023).

1-3-Broader Implications

- **Social Responsibility:** Unions are increasingly viewed as entities that contribute to social justice and workplace democracy, influencing corporate social responsibility practices(Dawkins, 2010).
- **Challenges:** Modern unions face declining membership and must adapt to globalization and technological changes(Dewi, 2023).

While labor unions are essential for worker representation and rights, some argue that their influence may be waning in the face of changing labor dynamics and economic pressures, raising questions about their future relevance in a rapidly evolving job market.

2. Historical Evolution of the Union Concept

The definition and role of labor unions have evolved in parallel with the transformation of labor markets and state policies. In the early stages of industrialization, unions were often informal and illegal. Over time, they became formalized and legalized, especially during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Western Europe and North America, the development of labor unions followed a trajectory from marginal opposition to institutional integration within the framework of industrial relations (Hyman, 2001).

In colonial and post-colonial contexts, labor unions often took on nationalist or anti-imperialist roles, advocating not only for labor rights but also for political sovereignty and social justice (Barchiesi, 2011). Thus, the concept of a labor union cannot be isolated from its historical and cultural context.

The concept of union has evolved significantly throughout history, shaped by various political, social, and economic factors. This evolution can be traced through different historical epochs, reflecting the changing dynamics of governance and identity. The following sections outline key aspects of this historical evolution.

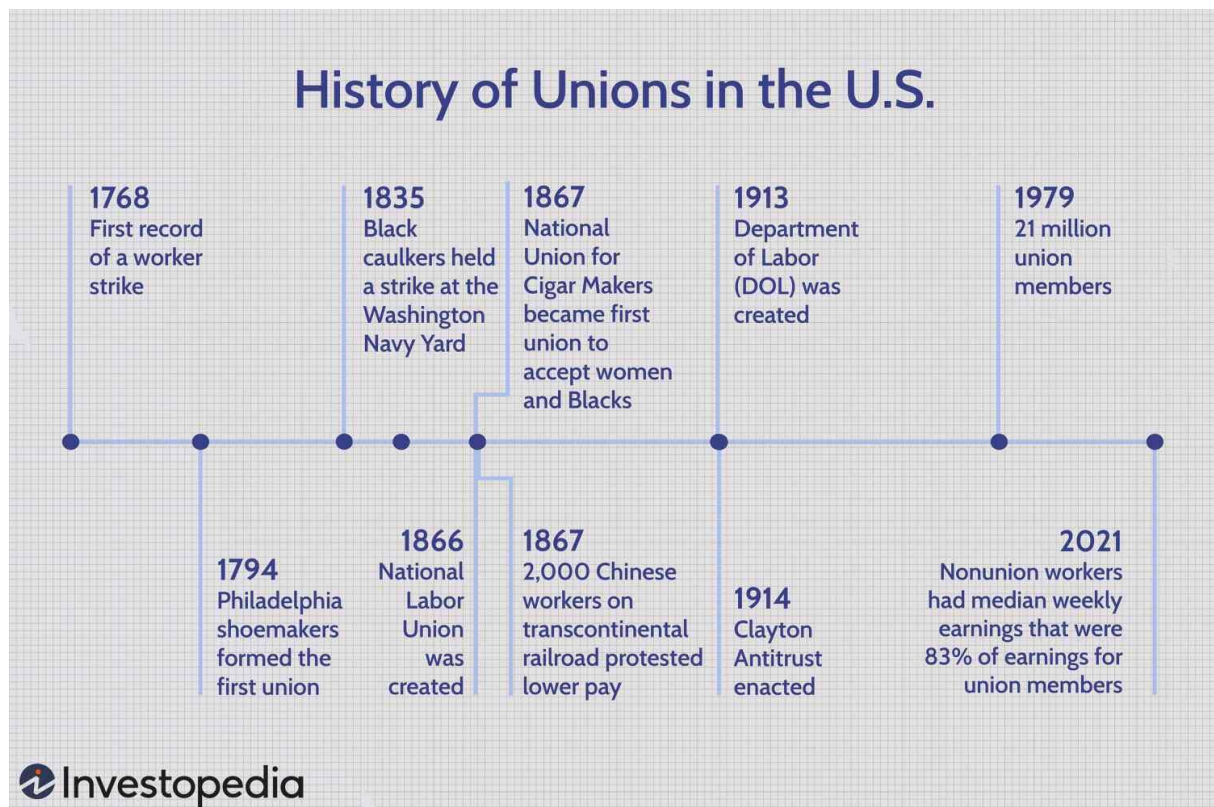
2-1-Historical Context of European Unions

- The idea of a united Europe has transitioned from theological concepts of universal monarchy to modern notions of confederation and federation, emphasizing peace and human rights(Kembayev, 2013).
- The struggle between different forms of governance, such as the union of monarchs versus republics, illustrates the complexity of achieving unity in Europe(Kembayev, 2013).

2-2-American Union Development

- The American Revolution marked a pivotal moment in union concepts, where the Continental Congresses debated the nature of governance, leading to the Declaration of Independence, which synthesized natural law and British constitutionalism(Kubik, 2016).
- The Articles of Confederation established a "Perpetual Union," raising questions about state sovereignty and the right to secede, which became central to the American Civil War(Stampp, 1978).

Fig 06 : History of Unions In The U.S



<https://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/0113/the-history-of-unions-in-the-united-states.aspx>

Since the National Labour Relations Act was passed in 1935, unions have represented American workers in a wide range of industries that are recognised under US labour law. In addition to representing its members in conflicts with management for contract violations, their activities centre on collectively negotiating for their members' pay, benefits, and working conditions. At the state and federal levels, large unions also frequently participate in lobbying and political campaigns.

Most unions in the US belong to one of two main umbrella groups: the Change to Win Federation (also known as the Strategic Organising Centre or SOC), which broke away from the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) in 2005, and the AFL-CIO, which was established in 1955. Both actively participate in politics and support pro-worker laws and policies in the US and Canada. Global trade concerns are of special significance to the AFL-CIO.

- The overall "union density," or the proportion of employees who belong to a union, differs from nation to nation. In the US, it decreased from 20.1% in 1983 to 10.1% in 2022. In the United States, the number of members decreased from 17.7 million in 1983 to 14.3 million in 2022. The private sector's union density has decreased to 6%, which is one-fifth that of the public sector, which has a union density of 33.1% (2022). Of the 36 OECD nations, the United States has the fifth-lowest union density worldwide in 2016 (Stampp, 1978, pp. 5-33).

The biggest unions in the twenty-first century are found among workers in the public sector, including teachers, police officers, civil servants, and municipal employees. The majority of union members are men, older, and from California, the Midwest, and the Northeast. The wage gap between unionised and non-unionized workers in the United States is substantial; research indicates that unionised wage gaps are greater for men than for women, and that they are larger in the private sector than in the public sector. On average, unionised workers earn higher wages than comparable non-unionized workers (controlling for individual, job, and labour market characteristics).

This phenomenon, known as the "union spillover effect," occurs when the strength of private sector unions has a positive impact on the wages of non-unionized private sector workers (after adjusting for general conditions like industry, automation risk, offshoring, public sector union strength, overall employment level, and other factors) (Stampp, 1978, pp. 5-33).

Despite being significantly smaller than when they peaked in the 1950s, American unions continue to play a significant role in politics by organising their own members and forming alliances with other activist groups on topics like living wage campaigns, trade policy, health care, environmental protection, and immigrant rights. States' and towns' attempts to lower pension liabilities for unionised workers who would retire later are especially concerning. According to an analysis of US elections from 1964 to 2004, unions boost both member and nonmember turnout. Members of unions make up a sizable section of the Democratic Party's base, and the two parties have a

long-standing partnership. In contrast, the Republican Party opposed unions and supported a number of anti-union policies, including the repeal of minimum wage laws, the preemption of local minimum wage laws, the enactment of right-to-work laws, and limitations on collective bargaining by public-sector unions (Stampp, 1978, pp. 5-33).

The fact that unions lessen economic inequality is well-established. According to research, there is more than just a correlation between the fall of the labour movement and unionisation and the rise in income disparity in the United States. Additionally, studies have demonstrated that unions can hinder corporate expansion, employment, and profitability.

The Industrial Revolution's social and economic effects prompted the formation of unions in the middle of the 19th century. Following the Civil War, national unions started to emerge. In the late 1880s, the Knights of Labour were a powerful force, but they disbanded because of a lack of competent leadership, inadequate organisation, conflicting objectives, and fierce hostility from the government and employers.

Much more resilient was the American Federation of Labour, established in 1886 and headed by Samuel Gompers until his passing in 1924. A loose alliance of multiple local unions gave rise to it. It subsequently rose to prominence in national politics, typically on the Democratic side, by assisting in the coordination and support of strikes.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives of the 1930s were very beneficial to American unions. In instance, the Wagner Act provided legal protection for unions' ability to organise. From this point on, unions were seen as a key component of the New Deal coalition and developed closer relationships with the Democratic Party (Stampp, 1978, pp. 5-33).

2-3-British and Irish Union Dynamics

- The unions of Britain and Ireland were influenced by global union trends, often characterized by economic motivations and asymmetrical power dynamics, leading to nationalist movements and eventual disillusionment(Jackson, 2023).
- The UK's evolution into a devolved state reflects changing perceptions of unity and governance, highlighting the need for balance between central authority and regional diversity(Mitchell & Convery, 2023).

While the historical evolution of the union concept showcases a trajectory towards greater integration and cooperation, it also reveals persistent challenges, such as national identity conflicts and the struggle for autonomy within union frameworks. These tensions continue to shape contemporary discussions on unionism and governance.

Early in the 19th century, British trade unions were established, but their operations were severely limited by penal laws. In the early 20th century, they forged an alliance with the Liberal Party after starting their political activity in the late 19th century. They lost their legal infirmity, had fast growth between 1900 and 1920, and were well-established by that time. The majority of union members switched to the new Labour Party from the Liberal Party. Ramsay MacDonald, its leader, was temporarily elected prime minister twice, in 1924 and 1929. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative governments in the 1980s reduced union power by making legal strikes more challenging. Most British trade unions are members of the TUC, the Trades Union Congress (founded in 1867) or, where appropriate, the Scottish Trades Union Congress or the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, which are the main national trade union centres in the country.

In 1867, a Royal Commission recommended that trade unions be decriminalised in the United Kingdom, acknowledging that the establishment of these groups benefited both employers and workers. The goal of the trade union movement, which became legal in 1871, was to improve the socioeconomic standing of workers in British industry. The true cornerstone of the modern Labour Party, which continues to have strong ties to

the British trade union movement, was established as a result of this search: a Trade Union Representation Committee. From 13 million in 1979 to about 7.3 million in 2000, membership fell precipitously in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of factory closures. For the first time since the 1940s, membership dropped below 6 million in September 2012. Since then, membership has gradually started to increase again, reaching 6.44 million in 2019 (Moylan, 2012).

3. Core Functions and Roles of Labor Unions

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2013) outlines several core roles of labor unions:

- **Collective bargaining:** Negotiating contracts with employers regarding wages, benefits, and working conditions.
- **Representation:** Advocating for individual workers in disputes or disciplinary processes.
- **Legal and policy advocacy:** Engaging in political processes to influence labor laws and social policies.
- **Education and training:** Providing members with knowledge, skills, and awareness of rights.
- **Solidarity and social movement participation:** Forming alliances with other social movements and participating in broader struggles for equality and justice.

Labor unions also fulfill **expressive functions**, giving workers a collective identity and a sense of belonging (Offe & Wiesensthal, 1980). These roles demonstrate that labor unions are not only economic actors but also social and political institutions.

4. Typologies of Labor Unions

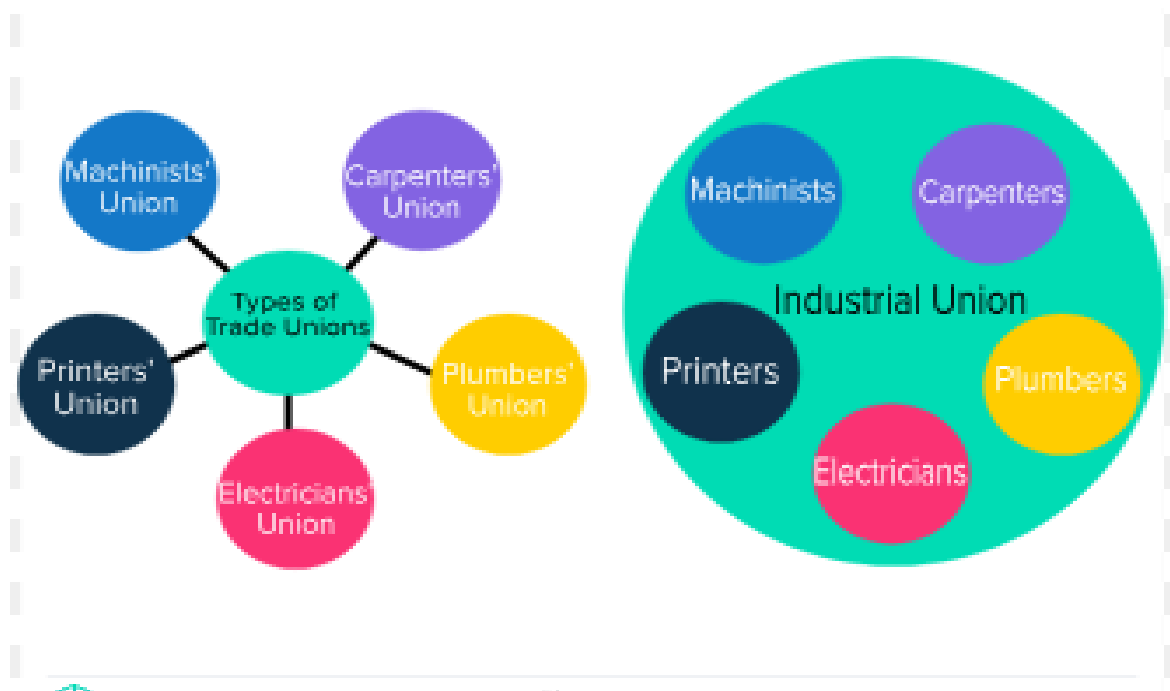
Labor unions vary widely depending on organizational form, ideology, and strategy. Some key types include:

- **Craft unions:** Organize workers based on specific skills or trades (e.g., electricians, carpenters).

- **Industrial unions:** Organize all workers in a particular industry, regardless of specific roles (e.g., automobile or steel industries).
- **General unions:** Open to workers across many sectors.
- **Enterprise unions:** Common in Japan, where the union is specific to one company rather than an industry.
- **National labor federations:** Umbrella organizations that coordinate multiple unions across sectors (e.g., the AFL-CIO in the U.S., CGT in France).

The **ideological orientation** of unions also varies—some are reformist, seeking to improve conditions within capitalism, while others are revolutionary or syndicalist, aiming to transform the economic system itself (Pizzorno, 1978).

Fig 07 : Types of Trade Unions



<https://www.google.com>. February 04, 2025.

5. Legal and Institutional Recognition

The rights of labor unions are protected by national and international legal frameworks. The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** promotes core conventions that guarantee freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining

(ILO, 1996). Most democratic countries include legal protections for unions in their labor codes or constitutions.

However, these rights are often contested. In some authoritarian regimes, unions are either banned or strictly controlled by the state. In liberal democracies, legal recognition does not always translate into practical power, particularly in precarious or informal sectors.

6. Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations

Today, the definition of a labor union is expanding to meet new challenges. Globalization, digitalization, and the rise of the gig economy have undermined traditional union models based on stable, full-time employment. In response, new forms of labor organizing have emerged, such as:

- **Platform worker unions:** Representing Uber, Deliveroo, and other gig workers.
- **Transnational labor networks:** Linking workers across global supply chains.
- **Informal worker organizations:** Especially in the Global South, where informal labor dominates (Chen et al., 2004).

Unions are also increasingly addressing **intersectional issues**, advocating for gender equality, migrant rights, and environmental justice.

Conclusion

Labor unions are complex, multifaceted organizations that serve economic, social, and political functions. While their core definition centers on collective worker representation, their roles and forms are historically and contextually specific. From traditional industrial unions to new movements of platform workers, labor unions remain central actors in the pursuit of workplace democracy, social justice, and human dignity. Understanding their definition requires attention to both structural conditions and workers' agency, making labor unions a crucial subject of sociological inquiry.

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3rd Cours : The Sociology of the Labor Movement and Union Strategy

Introduction

Labor movements and unions are not merely economic institutions but are deeply embedded in the social, political, and cultural fabrics of societies. The sociology of the labor movement focuses on the collective behavior, identities, ideologies, and strategic orientations of unions as social actors. This course aims to analyze labor unions through a sociological lens, emphasizing how unions operate within power structures, how they mobilize workers, and how their strategies evolve in response to shifting social and economic conditions.

Sociologists study labor movements not just as responses to material grievances but as expressions of collective identity, solidarity, and social transformation. Union strategy, therefore, is not purely technical or economic it is inherently political and shaped by historical, structural, and cultural forces.

1. The Labor Movement as a Social Movement

In sociological terms, the labor movement is a type of **social movement**—a collective effort by a group to change or resist changes in society. Like other social movements, it is characterized by :

- **Collective action** based on shared interests.
- **A degree of organization**, whether formal or informal.
- **Ideological framing** that shapes how participants understand their goals and grievances.

Charles Tilly (1978) emphasized that social movements emerge from ongoing power struggles and are shaped by the political opportunities and constraints that groups face. For labor unions, this means their strategies are heavily influenced by the legal, economic, and political environment.

The labor movement is distinct, however, in that it is rooted in the **structural position of workers within capitalist production**, making its struggle both systemic and continuous. According to Karl Marx, class struggle between capital and labor is the engine of historical change, and unions are one of the primary collective expressions of the working class (Marx & Engels, 1848/1976).

Fig 08 : Labor Movement as a Social Movement



<https://buddingsociologist.in/the-role-of-unions-in-modern-labour-movements/>

2. Class, Identity, and Union Consciousness

One of the central concerns in the sociology of labor movements is **how workers develop class consciousness**—an awareness of their shared interests as workers and their opposition to capitalist exploitation.

- **E.P. Thompson (1963)** argued that class is not just a position in the economy but a historical and cultural process of collective identity formation. Unions help forge this identity through rituals, slogans, strikes, and mutual aid.
- **Gramsci (1971)** highlighted the role of unions in building "hegemonic projects" that challenge dominant ideologies and propose alternative visions of society.

In contrast, others like **Weber (1946)** and **Offe and Wiesen­thal (1980)** stress the diversity of interests within the working class and the difficulty in sustaining long-term solidarity.

Union strategy, therefore, is shaped not only by external structures but also by internal dynamics—how unions construct identity, define interests, and mobilize members around those interests.

3. Union Strategies: Mobilization, Negotiation, and Political Engagement

Sociological approaches distinguish between different union strategies, each corresponding to broader theoretical paradigms:

3-1- Instrumental Strategies

These are pragmatic and focused on short-term gains through **collective bargaining, lobbying, and service provision**. Unions in this model operate like bureaucratic organizations that deliver benefits in exchange for member loyalty (Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

3-2- Mobilization Strategies

Rooted in the work of Kelly (1998), this approach emphasizes **activism, participation, and internal democracy**. Mobilizing unions rely on protests, strikes, and grassroots campaigns to build collective power and challenge employers.

3-3- Social Movement Unionism

Popular in the Global South and among progressive unions in the North, this strategy sees unions as part of broader **struggles for democracy, social justice, and equality**. They form alliances with feminist, environmental, student, and racial justice movements (Waterman, 2001).

Each strategy reflects different assumptions about power, change, and the role of unions in society. The sociological challenge is to understand **why unions choose one path over another**, and how those choices reflect broader structural and cultural contexts.

4. Institutional Contexts and Union Strategy

Sociologists of labor emphasize that union strategy is shaped by **institutional environments**, including:

- **Industrial relations systems** (e.g., centralized vs. decentralized bargaining).
- **Legal frameworks** (freedom of association, right to strike).
- **Political regimes** (democratic, authoritarian, corporatist).
- **Labor market structures** (formal vs. informal employment).

Hyman (2001) identifies three models of unionism that reflect these institutional variations:

Model	Focus	Typical Context
Market unionism	Focus on wages and conditions	Liberal economies (e.g., USA, UK)
Class unionism	Emphasis on class struggle	Historically in France, Italy
Societal unionism	Engagement with broader society	Scandinavia, South Africa

In Algeria, for example, the **historical role of the UGTA (Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens)** reflects a hybrid model where the union has both corporatist and nationalist elements—intertwined with the post-independence state-building process.

5. Challenges to Union Strategy in Contemporary Contexts

Labor unions today face significant **structural and ideological challenges** that force a rethinking of strategy:

- **Globalization** has shifted power away from national labor markets to transnational corporations.

- **Neoliberalism** has promoted labor market deregulation, weakening collective bargaining.
- **Technological change** and the **gig economy** have fragmented work and made organizing more difficult.
- **Individualization of work** and **precarity** have undermined collective identities.

In response, unions are experimenting with:

- **New forms of organizing** among informal, migrant, and platform workers.
- **Transnational solidarity networks**, such as the Clean Clothes Campaign.
- **Digital tools** for communication, mobilization, and education.
- **Participatory democracy** to reconnect with members and rebuild trust.

Conclusion

The sociology of the labor movement offers a rich framework for understanding how unions function not only as economic actors but as complex social movements. Union strategy is shaped by institutional constraints, cultural resources, and class dynamics. Whether engaging in negotiation, mobilization, or broader social alliances, unions must navigate a constantly shifting landscape of power and resistance. In an era marked by inequality, precarity, and political uncertainty, the sociological study of labor movements remains more relevant than ever—for both scholars and activists.

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4th Cours : The Functions of Union Work

Introduction

Labor unions are key actors in modern industrial societies, not only as organizations that negotiate wages and working conditions but also as institutions that perform a wide range of social, economic, political, and cultural functions. From a sociological perspective, union work goes beyond collective bargaining to encompass representation, advocacy, identity formation, and even nation-building in certain contexts.

This course explores the multifaceted **functions of union work**, drawing on classic and contemporary sociological literature to understand how unions contribute to both the lives of workers and the broader society. We will examine these functions across different dimensions—economic, social, political, and cultural—and in varied national and historical contexts.

1-Economic Functions of Union Work

The economic functions of union work encompass various dimensions, including enhancing workers' bargaining power, influencing productivity, and shaping labor market dynamics. Unions play a critical role in negotiating better wages and working conditions, which can lead to improved economic performance. By increasing the bargaining power of workers, unions enable them to secure a larger share of economic output, with collective bargaining often resulting in higher wages and better employment conditions that can stimulate consumer spending and economic growth (McDonnell, 2019). Research further indicates that unions can positively affect productivity, although these effects are generally modest and vary across contexts; for instance, in Argentina, unions have been associated with negative productivity outcomes, illustrating the importance of local economic conditions (Rios-Avila, 2017). Additionally, unions can influence investment decisions, as higher union compensation may deter capital investment and research and development efforts (Rios-Avila, 2017). The relationship between unions and economic performance is thus complex, as the

advantages of improved worker conditions must be weighed against potential drawbacks in investment levels. While unions are often viewed as beneficial to workers, critics argue that they may introduce inefficiencies in the labor market, potentially hindering broader economic growth—underscoring the need for a balanced and context-sensitive understanding of union functions in the economy.

1-1- Collective Bargaining and Wage Regulation

At the core of union activity is **collective bargaining**—the negotiation of wages, hours, and working conditions between unions and employers.

- This function is supported by institutional frameworks such as labor laws and industrial relations systems.
- Unions help reduce wage inequality and establish standardized employment conditions across sectors (Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

In sociological terms, this function contributes to **economic justice** by balancing the structural power of capital and labor, and redistributing resources through negotiated agreements.

1-2- Protection Against Exploitation and Insecurity

Unions offer workers a **collective defense mechanism** against arbitrary decisions, layoffs, and workplace hazards.

- In contexts of deregulated labor markets, unions act as **safety nets**, advocating for job security and decent work.
- In developing economies, unions often provide **welfare functions**—healthcare, pensions, and emergency aid—especially where state provision is weak.

This economic function is particularly visible in informal sectors, where union federations or cooperatives may play a protective and organizing role.

The Work of Trade Unions

- To become a member of a union, workers must pay a monthly fee.
- This cost is referred to as a "subscription."
- When they stop paying this charge, their membership expires.
- Advantages of belonging to a union:
 - Collective negotiating.
 - Particular training for a job.
 - Legal assistance in the case of a disagreement.
 - A variety of products and services are discounted.
- If negotiations fall down and collective bargaining doesn't work, unions can use a number of strategies to make governments and businesses continue to interact with them.
- Together, these strategies are known as industrial action and consist of:
 - Attacks
 - Bans for overtime
 - Work-to-rule
 - Waste of time

Table 02 : The Focus of Trade Union Efforts

1. Collective bargaining on wages, working conditions and contractual terms

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Negotiates for acceptable wage levels - often well above the minimum wage | • Negotiates for increased wages when comparative industries receive pay increases |
| • Negotiates for inflation-linked pay rises | • Negotiates for higher wages when firms are making higher profits |
| • Negotiates standard weekly working hours and any overtime payments | • Negotiates for improvements to working conditions and equipment |

2. Protecting the employment of their workers

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Negotiates for the retention and redeployment of workers when | • Negotiates resettlement packages when firms relocate from one region to another |
|--|--|

machinery (capital) replaces labour

and **redundancy** terms for those unable to relocate

- Negotiates to **minimise job losses** when machinery (capital) replaces labour
- Negotiates on a **fair termination process** when firms are struggling in an economic downturn

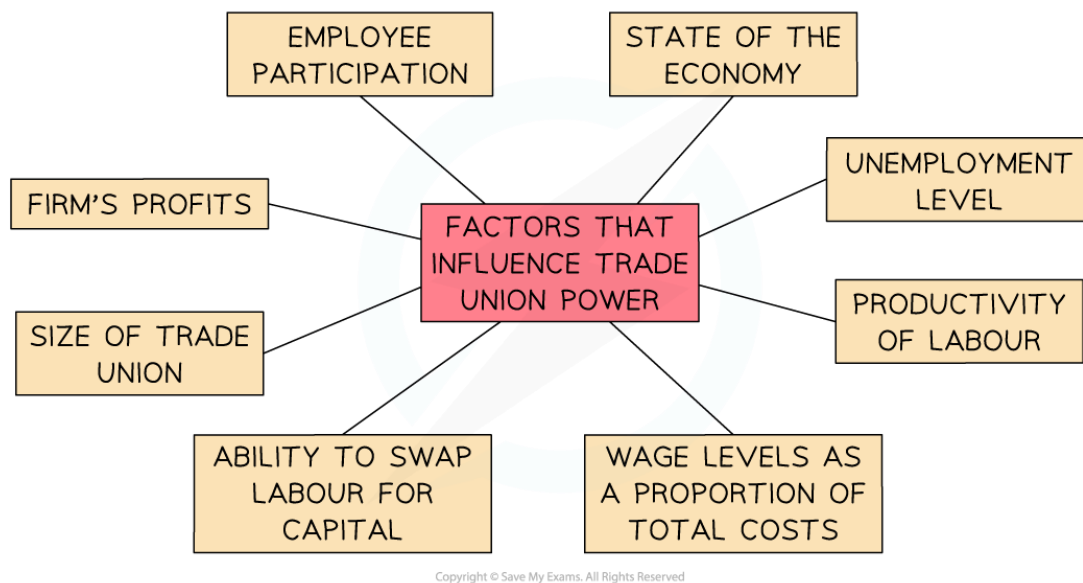
3. Influencing government policy

- Negotiates with government on the creation/maintenance of **minimum wage levels**
- Aims to influence policy through member action such as **strikes**
- Negotiates to **minimise job losses** when machinery (capital) replaces labour
- Negotiates on a **fair termination process** when firms are struggling in an economic downturn

Factors Influencing the Strength of Trade Unions

- A union's collective bargaining power with the employer increases with the proportion of employees in the company who are union members.
- The collective bargaining strength of unions with the government increases with the proportion of workers in an economy that are union members.
- At different periods, a variety of additional factors impact a particular union's collective bargaining power.

Fig 09 : Factors That Influence Trade Union Power



<https://www.google.com>. February 04, 2025.

Factors which influence the collective bargaining power of trade unions

1. Unemployment rate: Because businesses may more readily replace current employees, a greater unemployment rate results in less bargaining strength.
2. salary level in relation to total costs: A firm's bargaining strength increases with a lower salary ratio to total costs.
3. Labor-for-capital exchange: The bargaining leverage of the union is diminished when the cost of substituting labour for capital is near the union's requested cost rise.
4. Profit level: Union demands for greater pay are strengthened by higher profits.
5. Economic situation: In times of robust growth, bargaining leverage is higher, and in times of recession, it is weaker.
6. Total union size: A union's bargaining power increases with its size.

7. Labour productivity: Employees are more valuable to the company and the union has greater negotiating power if they are highly productive, producing large amounts of work with little input.

<https://www.savemyexams.com/igcse/economics/cie/20/revision-notes/3-microeconomic-decision-makers/3-4-trade-unions/3-4-2-the-role-of-trade-unions/>

2. Political Functions of Union Work

The political functions of union work are multifaceted, encompassing representation, regulation, and the shaping of political ideologies. Unions serve as collective entities that empower workers, enabling them to negotiate better conditions and influence political landscapes.

2-1- Representation in Political Arenas

Historically, unions have played a major role in shaping political systems, especially in **democratic representation** and **policy advocacy**.

- In many countries, labor unions are affiliated with political parties (e.g., the British Labour Party, the German SPD).
- Unions advocate for labor laws, social protection systems, minimum wage legislation, and gender equity in employment.

This function shows how unions act as **mediating institutions** between the state and civil society, voicing worker interests in national and international policy processes (Offe, 1985).

2-2- Democratization and Political Socialization

Unions also serve as spaces where democratic norms are practiced and learned:

- Internal elections, debates, and participation help cultivate **civic engagement**.
- In authoritarian contexts, unions can become **arenas of resistance**, challenging repressive regimes and demanding democratic reforms (Hyman, 2001).

In Algeria, for instance, the historical role of the **UGTA** after independence reflected a dual political function—supporting state development and advocating for workers' rights within a socialist framework.

3. Social and Cultural Functions of Union Work

The social and cultural functions of union work are multifaceted, encompassing collective bargaining, advocacy for workers' rights, and fostering community among members. Unions serve as a vital mechanism for workers to unite, negotiate better conditions, and influence broader socio-economic policies.

3-1- Solidarity and Collective Identity

Unions foster a sense of **solidarity and belonging** among workers:

- Through shared struggles, rituals (e.g., strikes, demonstrations), and symbols, unions help construct a **collective working-class identity** (Thompson, 1963).
- Social events, educational programs, and commemorations reinforce community ties and mutual support.

This function is particularly important in fragmented labor markets where workers experience isolation, precarity, or discrimination.

3-2- Education and Consciousness Raising

Many unions engage in **worker education**, offering training, seminars, and awareness-raising programs:

- Topics may include labor rights, political history, gender equality, or financial literacy.
- Educational work contributes to the development of **class consciousness** and **political literacy**, which are essential for long-term mobilization (Gramsci, 1971).

In the Global South, unions often integrate popular education with broader movements for decolonization, women's empowerment, and indigenous rights.

3-3-Collective Bargaining and Advocacy

- Unions negotiate collective agreements that secure fair wages, benefits, and safe working conditions for their members(Dewi, 2023).
- They represent workers in disputes, ensuring that grievances are addressed and resolved effectively(Aris, 1998).
- Unions advocate for labor laws and policies that promote social justice and equitable treatment in the workplace(Dewi, 2023).

3-4-Cultural and Social Cohesion

- Unions foster a sense of solidarity among workers, enhancing their collective identity and social power(Aris, 1998).
- They organize cultural and sports activities that strengthen community ties and improve morale among members(Shuai, 2022).
- By engaging in social and political advocacy, unions contribute to broader societal changes, promoting equality and workers' rights beyond the workplace(Gupta, 2013).

While unions play a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights and improving workplace conditions, some argue that their influence can lead to rigidities in labor markets, potentially hindering flexibility and adaptability in rapidly changing economic environments. This perspective highlights the need for unions to evolve and address contemporary challenges while maintaining their core functions.

4. Legal and Institutional Functions

The legal and institutional functions encompass a range of roles that laws and legal systems play in society, particularly in promoting order, resolving conflicts, and

ensuring social welfare. These functions are critical in various contexts, including human-wildlife conflict resolution, sustainable development, and public health initiatives.

4-1- Dispute Resolution and Legal Aid

Unions help resolve workplace conflicts through **grievance procedures**, arbitration, and legal representation:

- Workers often lack the resources or knowledge to navigate labor law; unions fill this gap.
- This function enhances **procedural justice** in the workplace and strengthens the rule of law.

4-2- Standard Setting and Monitoring

Unions also participate in:

- **Setting industry standards** for health, safety, and fair practices.
- **Monitoring implementation** of labor agreements and laws.

They serve as **watchdogs** ensuring that employers comply with social and legal obligations.

5. Global and Transnational Functions

In an era of globalization, unions increasingly operate beyond the nation-state:

- **Transnational labor networks** such as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) coordinate solidarity actions and global campaigns.
- Unions engage with **global governance institutions** (e.g., ILO, WTO) to influence international labor standards.

This emerging function reflects the need for **global labor solidarity** in a context where capital mobility often undermines national labor protections (Munck, 2010).

6. Union Functions in the Algerian Context

In Algeria, the labor movement—particularly the **UGTA**—has performed a range of functions:

- Participated in **nation-building** after independence by supporting state-led industrialization.
- Acted as a **political ally** of the FLN but also pushed for workers' interests through negotiation.
- Provided **social services**, including housing and healthcare, especially in the early post-independence period.
- In recent decades, faced criticism for lack of autonomy, yet remains an important actor in labor representation.

Other emerging unions, such as those in the education and healthcare sectors, have taken up **mobilization and advocacy roles**, especially around wage reform, gender rights, and working conditions.

Conclusion

Union work encompasses a wide range of interrelated functions that go far beyond negotiating pay. Economically, unions defend workers against exploitation; politically, they represent and socialize citizens; socially, they build solidarity and raise awareness; legally, they enforce justice and set standards; and globally, they advocate for fairer labor regimes. From a sociological perspective, these functions are shaped by broader power relations, cultural dynamics, and institutional contexts.

Understanding the full scope of union work allows us to appreciate their vital role not just in labor markets, but in democratic governance, social cohesion, and economic justice. As labor markets evolve, unions must continue adapting their functions to remain relevant and effective in protecting the rights and dignity of workers.

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5th cours : Examples of Labor Movements

Introduction

Labor movements have emerged globally as a response to exploitative working conditions, economic inequality, and political exclusion. They represent one of the most enduring forms of collective action by workers and have played a transformative role in shaping modern societies. Through strikes, protests, unionization, and political engagement, labor movements have fought for fair wages, decent working conditions, and social justice.

This course examines **notable examples of labor movements** from different historical periods and geographical contexts, analyzing their causes, strategies, achievements, and legacies. By studying these cases through a sociological lens, we gain insight into the dynamics of class struggle, power relations, and collective identity formation.

1. The British Labor Movement (19th–20th Century)

1-1- Historical Background

The British labor movement is one of the oldest and most influential globally. It emerged during the **Industrial Revolution**, when workers were subjected to long hours, poor conditions, and minimal pay.

1-2- Key Milestones

- **The Combination Acts (1799–1800)** outlawed union activity, but workers resisted through underground organization.
- **The Chartist Movement (1838–1857)** demanded political reforms, including universal male suffrage and labor rights.
- **The Trade Union Congress (TUC)** was established in 1868 to coordinate union activity nationally.

- The **Labour Party** was founded in 1900 with strong union backing, linking the labor movement to formal politics.

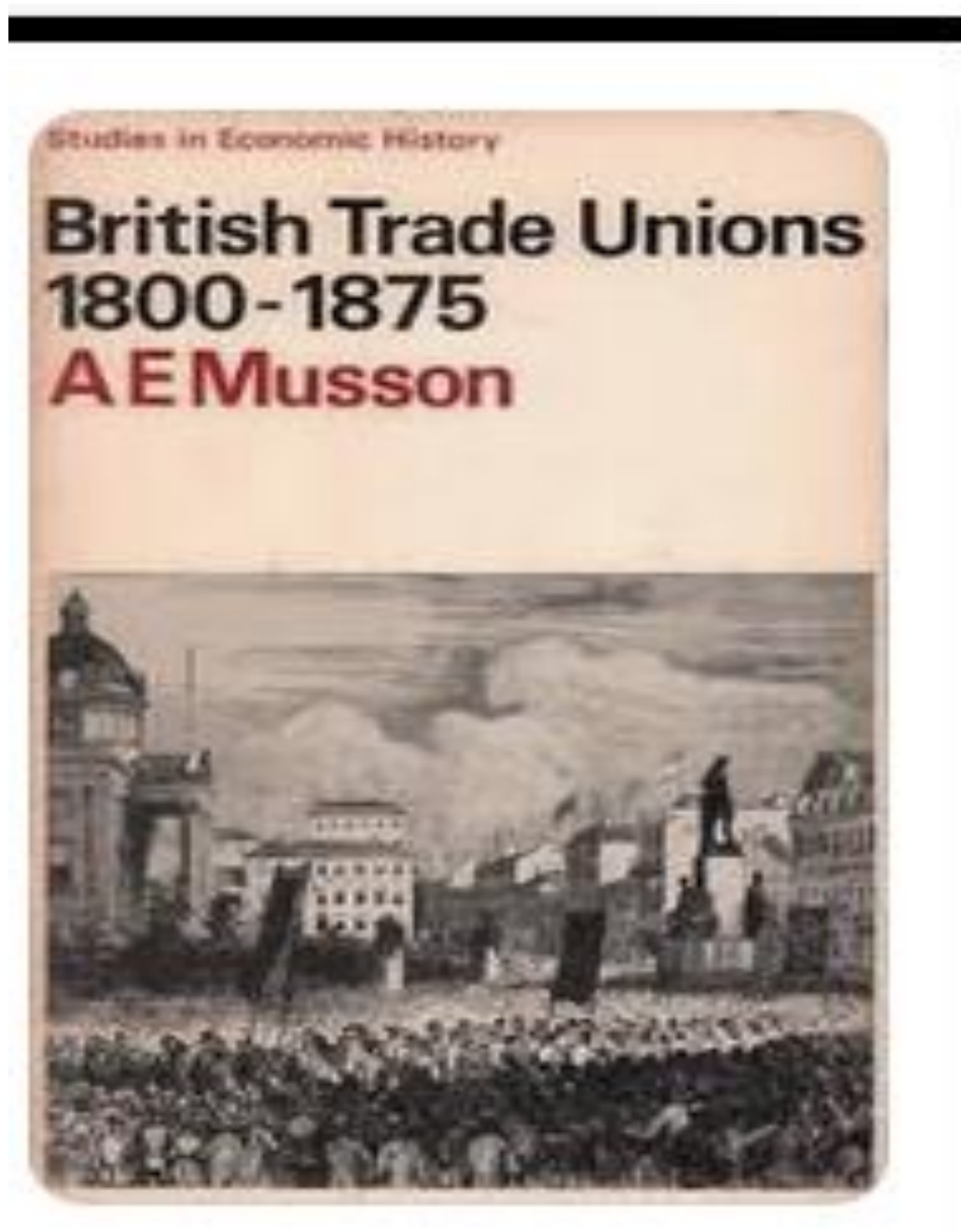
1-3-. Sociological Insights

British labor unions institutionalized class-based identity and became part of the political establishment, influencing policy and the welfare state. This exemplifies the **integration model** of labor movements (Hyman, 2001).

18th–19th centuries

In Britain, trade unions were subject to often severe repression until 1824, but they were already widespread in cities such as London. Trade unions were legalized in 1824, when a growing number of factory workers joined these associations to secure better wages and working conditions. Labor militancy had also manifested itself in the form of Luddism and played an important role in struggles such as the 1820 Scottish Rising, in which 60,000 workers launched a general strike, which was quickly crushed. From 1830, attempts were made to create national general trade unions, notably Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1834, which brought together a variety of socialists, from Owenists to revolutionaries. This organization played a role in the protests following the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Affair but quickly collapsed. A significant event for the trade union movement in Wales was the Merthyr Rising of May 1831. Coal and steel workers employed by the powerful Crawshay family took to the streets of Merthyr Tydfil to demand reforms and protest against falling wages and widespread unemployment. Gradually, the protests spread to neighboring industrial towns and villages, and by the end of May, the entire region was in rebellion. For the first time in the world, the red flag of revolution was raised, a flag since adopted internationally by the trade union movement and socialist groups in general.

Fig 10 : British Trade Unions 1800- 1875



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2. The American Labor Movement

The American labor movement has undergone significant transformations, particularly since the mid-20th century, facing both challenges and opportunities. Historically, it has

been characterized by a commitment to workers' rights and democratic principles, yet it has also experienced a notable decline in influence and membership.

2-1- Rise and Growth (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)

The U.S. labor movement developed amid rapid industrialization, immigration, and corporate power.

- The **Knights of Labor** (1869) aimed at broad labor solidarity but declined after the Haymarket Affair (1886).
- The **American Federation of Labor (AFL)** (1886) focused on skilled workers and economic demands.
- The **Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)** took a radical, inclusive approach, advocating for worker control of production.

2-2- Achievements and Setbacks

- **The New Deal Era** (1930s) saw major gains for labor, including the **Wagner Act (1935)**, which protected collective bargaining.
- Post-WWII, unions helped secure middle-class stability but later faced decline due to globalization, deindustrialization, and political attacks (Moody, 1988).

2-3- Recent Movements

- The **Fight for \$15** campaign, led by service workers, represents a new wave of grassroots labor activism.
- Unionization efforts at **Amazon and Starbucks** signal a revival of labor militancy in the 21st century.

Fig 11: A Brief History of the American Labor Movement



<https://www.google.com>. February 04, 2025.

3. The French Labor Movement

The French labor movement has a rich and complex history characterized by its ideological evolution, strategic challenges, and significant socio-political impacts. From its early roots in the 19th century to its struggles in the late 20th century, the movement has been marked by a persistent tension between radical and reformist approaches. This tension has shaped its strategies and outcomes, influencing both the labor landscape and broader political dynamics in France.

3-1- Historical Development

The French labor movement has always been dynamic, combining revolutionary politics with workplace organizing.

- The **Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT)**, founded in 1895, played a leading role in strikes and protests.
- Influenced by **syndicalism**, French unions emphasized direct action and worker self-management.

3-2- May 1968 and Beyond

- The **May 1968 uprising** united students and workers in a massive general strike, nearly toppling the government.
- Contemporary unions like **Force Ouvrière** and **CFDT** continue to resist neoliberal reforms, especially around pensions and austerity.

3-3- Sociological Aspects

French labor mobilization illustrates **contentious unionism**, where confrontation and public protest are central tactics (Silver, 2003).

Fig 12 : The French Labor Movement



<https://www.google.com>. February 04, 2025.

Fig 13 : No truce for Christmas, more talks on French pension reform in new year



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4. The South African Labor Movement

4-1- Apartheid Resistance

The labor movement in South Africa was crucial in the fight against apartheid.

- **The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)**, founded in 1985, allied with the African National Congress (ANC).
- Unions organized mass strikes and international solidarity campaigns to pressure the regime.

4-2- Post-Apartheid Role

After 1994, COSATU became a key player in governance but also criticized neoliberal policies adopted by the ANC government.

4-3- Sociological Relevance

This case illustrates the **intersection of labor and racial liberation**, showing how labor movements can also be movements for **civil rights and democracy** (von Holdt, 2003).

Fig 14: Powerful Trade Union Group Holds Strikes in South Africa



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5. The Algerian Labor Movement

5-1- Colonial and Independence Struggle

Labor organizing in Algeria dates back to the colonial period but gained momentum during the independence movement:

- **The Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens (UGTA)** was founded in 1956 as part of the FLN's anti-colonial struggle.

- It mobilized workers both in Algeria and in France, supporting liberation and worker rights simultaneously.

5-2- Post-Independence Dynamics

- UGTA became a state-affiliated union under a socialist development model, participating in nation-building.
- In the 1980s–90s, economic liberalization and political crises weakened union autonomy.

5-3- Recent Developments

- New independent unions have emerged, especially in education, health, and public administration, often clashing with the state.
- Labor protests have been part of broader social movements demanding transparency and reform.
- **Fig 15 : members of UGTA**



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- **1) February 24, 1956: Creation of the UGTA (General Union of Algerian Workers)**

The history of Algerian trade unionism before independence is little known and is often written and presented according to the methods and perspectives of the French labor movement. Knowledge of the history of Algerian trade unionism during the colonial period is fundamental to understanding this movement and its evolution from its beginnings to Algerian independence. The first trade unions were created by Europeans in 1890 in the Constantine region, with groups of plasterers, blacksmiths, and book workers. These unions were part of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), created in 1895. Algeria saw: "Its status as a territorial establishment integrated into the metropolis contributes to the circulation of ideas and people." With the influx of migrants, colonial trade union action developed at the turn of the 20th century under the influence of the ideological currents of French trade unionism. The 1920s were marked by significant strike movements, following the upheavals of the First World War and the Russian revolution. The major strike movements of 1936 were followed in Algeria by dockers, tram drivers, railway workers, postal workers, and teachers, who had imposed the right to join and lead unions without incurring the wrath of the Native Code. In September 1939, the CGT, the PCA (Algerian Communist Party), and the Association of Algerian Ulemas of Sheikh Ben Badis were banned by decree. Activists were then thrown into camps in the southern Algerian desert.

- **<https://elwatan-dz.com/double-anniversaire-de-la-creation-de-lugta-et-de-la-nationalisation-des-hydrocarbures-une-victoire-de-la-jeune-generation-du-24-fevrier-1971>**
- **On November 8, 1942, the trade union movement was reestablished following the landing of Allied troops in North Africa.**
- The ordinance of March 7, 1944, granting the right to organize, fostered the growth of the trade union movement. The massacres of May 8, 1945, in Algeria, which claimed 45,000 lives, strengthened activists' strength and consolidated their experience in their workplaces. In this context of union struggle, many demands were met. However, during this period, the representation of Algerian Muslim activists within trade union organizations and their leadership was paltry. For example, there

were 500 Algerian Muslim teachers out of 12,000 of European origin, 500 railway workers out of a total of 14,000, and a few hundred permanent employees out of more than 100,000 civil servants.

- As early as 1944, Messali Hadj's PPA (Algerian People's Party) began organizing embryonic unions among merchants and artisans. Beginning in 1947, genuine unions were created, including those for bakers, greengrocers, butchers, and restaurateurs, led by Ahmed Rihani, known as Saddok, considered the founder of employers' unions. Rihani was, in fact, the Messalist leader of the MNA (Algerian National Movement), responsible for the Algiers region. In 1948, the PPA-MTLD prided itself on having established nine clandestine unions composed solely of Algerian members.
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- The idea of creating the UGTA also responded to another concern of the FLN: to counter the actions of the MNA, whose influence still held great sway among Algerian émigré workers. On February 14, 1956, the USTA (Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Algériens) was formed in Algiers by MNA members, and a request to join the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) was immediately made. The ICFTU refused the USTA's membership, under the influence of the communists and the United States. Ten days later, the FLN was forced to rush into creating its own union on February 24, 1956.
- But the idea of a trade union organization dates back well before the creation of the UGTA. At the first congress of the MTLD (Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties), following the dissolution of the PPA, Hocine Lahouel, in 1947, tasked Aïssat Idir with preparing a report on the creation of a nationalist-leaning trade union section. In his excellent book on Algerian trade unionism, Farès Mohamed quotes the words of Djermene Rabah, a close friend of Aïssat Idir: "Meeting with Abane Ramdane and Ben Khedda, we had to prepare the response... We had to launch the UGTA... It was in Saint Eugène (now Bologhine), at the house of Bourouiba Boualem, where Abane Ramdane, Benyoucef Ben Khedda, Drareni Mohamed and Doctor Pierre Chaulet met, which was to consecrate the creation of the UGTA." From this meeting between February 5 and 7, 1956, the UGTA was unofficially born. Benyoucef Ben Khedda details the event: "A second meeting, on February 16, 1956,

took place in Melaine Mouloud's lemonade shop in Belcourt to take stock; in addition to the activists concerned, there were: Bourouiba Boualem, Aïssat Idir, Attalah Benaïssa, Djermane Rabah who proposed to co-opt Ali Yahia Abdelmadjid. The executive committee was to include 21 members, five of whom would be part of the national secretariat. Aïssat Idir would be proposed as national secretary. The date of the national assembly was again confirmed: February 24, 1956. The clandestine liaison with Ben Khedda would be ensured by Drareni Mohamed, an activist not spotted by the police." Since its creation, the UGTA has registered the membership of 50 unions and has three regional unions: Algiers, Oran, and Constantine. It eclipsed the USTA (Union of Algerian Workers) of Messali Hadj's supporters and the UGSA (General Union of Algerian Trade Unions) of the French CGT. Thousands of Algerian workers left these two trade union centers to join the UGTA, whose newspaper, L'Ouvrier algérien, had a circulation of over 30,000.

Fig 16: The historical founding members of the General Union of Algerian Workers



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6. The Indian Labor Movement

6-1- Diversity and Complexity

India's labor movement is vast and highly diverse due to the caste system, informal economy, and political fragmentation.

- Major national unions include the **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)** and **Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)**.
- Many unions are aligned with political parties and operate in both formal and informal sectors.

6-2- Contemporary Struggles

- Indian labor unions have organized some of the **largest general strikes** in world history.
- They resist neoliberal labor reforms and advocate for better conditions for informal workers and farmers.

6-3- Sociological Perspective

India represents a **pluralistic model** of labor organization, shaped by religion, caste, class, and region (Breman, 2013).

Fig 17: Gandhi and the Indian Labour Movement



<https://www.google.com>. February 04, 2025.

7. Transnational Labor Movements

7-1- Global Solidarity Campaigns

Labor is increasingly mobilizing across borders:

- **The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)** unites national federations to advocate for global labor standards.
- Campaigns target multinational corporations and promote ethical supply chains.

7-2- Examples

- The **Rana Plaza disaster (2013)** in Bangladesh sparked global union campaigns for garment worker rights.

Studying these movements sociologically allows us to understand how collective agency, structural conditions, and political opportunity interact to shape the course of labor history. In a globalized and precarious world, the legacy of past labor movements continues to inspire new forms of organizing and resistance.

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General Conclusion

The labor movement, as explored throughout this polycopié, stands at the intersection of social justice, economic transformation, and political struggle. From its historical roots in the upheavals of industrialization to its contemporary forms shaped by globalization and digitalization, the labor movement has continuously adapted to defend workers' rights and assert their collective power.

Through the five thematic modules, we have uncovered the complex evolution of labor organizations, examined the sociological theories underpinning union strategies, and analyzed the diverse functions and global expressions of union work. The labor movement is not a monolithic entity it varies across nations, cultures, and historical periods yet it remains united by a common objective: to challenge inequality and improve the conditions of labor.

Moreover, labor unions and workers' mobilizations serve as vital agents of democratization and social cohesion. They mediate between workers and employers, advocate for inclusive policies, and provide a voice to marginalized communities within the labor market. However, the challenges of the 21st century—precarious employment, informal labor, automation, and weakened legal protections—require new forms of unionism and innovative strategies of resistance.

For sociologists, studying the labor movement is not only about analyzing organizational structures or collective bargaining mechanisms. It is about understanding broader questions of power, identity, class, and solidarity. As students of sociology, you are encouraged to critically reflect on the place of labor in modern societies and to engage with the continuing struggles for dignity, rights, and economic justice.

In conclusion, the labor movement remains a dynamic and essential field of sociological inquiry. It reflects the ongoing tension between capital and labor, the creativity of workers in organizing for change, and the enduring quest for a fairer world.