The Rise & Fall of U.S. Labor Unions

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**Introduction**

The labor movements grew out of the need to preserve the common interest and needs of the workers in the United States of America (USA). For those employed in the industrial market, systematic labor unions strived for enhanced wages, safe working conditions and plausible hours. The labor movement in the United States was the fundamental institution fighting for the average labors. Private sector workforce lost its share from thirty-five percent to six and a half percent in contemporary time. The loss does not only affect the labor but it also created problems in political and economic stability. It created hurdles for the immigrant populations to integrate economically. Besides the negative impact on the political and economic condition, unions also retain some powerful point for the country. For instance, the success of the organizations fighting for the labor force exposes the significance of the strengthened labor movement for the US civic and economic progress. It is worthwhile to comprehend the essential functionality of the unions. These unions restrict the number of employees in an industry or company to accelerate the remaining wages of the workers. Over the course of time, the unions desecrate jobs in several sectors and have a profound impact on the state of affairs.

**Background**

During the middle of 1950, unions were made in the United States by selecting one of the labors out of every three non-farm labors. This was the phase when the labor power was on peak because the place of unionized labors shrank in successive decades. The decline in labor power accelerated between the 1980s and 1990s (“The Rise and Fall of America’s Labor Unions,” 2014). It was stimulated by the combined effect of political and economic development. It was the time when the country opened up in the international market and competition got higher. Outsourcing appeared as a famous training among the labors who were seeking to compete in the new environment. Overseas competition did not become a threat to the deregulation of the companies. For instance, trucking put organized labor into a disadvantage because new nonunion companies got a place in the market with the help of low labor costs.

Similarly, employers of the United States engaged in legal, semi-legal and illegal practices. These practices helped them to prove their effectiveness at eradication development of present unions and stopping nonunion labors from organizing. The common practice that the employers deployed to stop the strikes include threatening the labor and warning them about firing or replacing them with new labors who were involved in any movement or strike. Employers conducted a meeting with labor and exploited all legal and illegal method to stop them.

**Discussion**

The employer acquired more power with the help of politicians. President Regan's public firing of striking resulted in the weakening of the labor movement. It increased the worries of labor involved in strikes as they were already threatened by the employer of the companies. With the help of rebalancing the playing field, politicians who were anti-union choked the all possible efforts which were helping the labor movement. Even in the contemporary time, both types of politicians are present in the Senate which results in the employee free choice act, established in 2008-2009. This act developed opportunities for private sector organizations.

In the peak times, the labor campaign stood potentially alongside the powerful policymakers and business leaders as the prominent institutions to shape the nation's polity and economy. The union workers cherished the healthy increase in pay resulting from working under a strengthened union-negotiated contract. However, the non-union workers also cultivated immense advantages from the presence of strong labor. As per the research conducted at Harvard University, the nonunion workers were compared in highly localized industries and locales to the nonunion employees in chunks of the labor market with the presence of little unions. After establishing the fundamental determinants of wages as specific educational levels, it was revealed that the nonunion workers in potentially unionized areas and industries cherished substantially higher wages. Therefore, the economic perks of a strong labor movement redounded to unregulated and unorganized workers in addition to the union members. The craft union and relevant unions in the early 20th century engaged in a wide range of discriminatory practices. Consequently, the instance, in 1935, when Franklin Roosevelt promulgated the Wagner Act, less than 1% of trade unionists were of African American ethnicity (Sherk, n.d.). The Wagner Act aimed at strengthening the fundamental rights of the workers of the private sector. However, millions of people belonging from minorities struggled to cherish the protection. Throughout the second phase of the 20th century, several unions advanced to denounce these xenophobic and racist legacies.

Meanwhile, these events shaped the path for African Americans who were keen to avoid racist policies. These African Americans, soon, manifested in the highest organization rates of any ethnic or racial group. The primary reason for their incorporation in these unions accounted for the protection of their rights in organizations. There were more than 40% African American men and 25% of African American women employed in the private sector. These impressive organization rates assisted to narrow the racial disparities vested in wages after raising African American wages. Had these union declines not occurred from the 1970s, the weekly wages of the black males would be estimated $50 higher. Several immigrants and children, the population of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) utilized these movements to infiltrate into the nation’s middle class.

The influence of the equalizing impact of the union was not confined to the economic paradigm. A wide range of research has revealed that the union membership instigates civic participation in non-elite populations of America. For instance, voting is an explicit illustration of the practice defined by education and income. Most of the Americans are likely to vote. The unions assisted to confront the categorized inequality in political ventures to ensure that the stakeholders honored the desires and needs of a plethora of non-elite Americans.

The employers are against the unions due to various reasons. Besides the personal benefits, they find the role of the union as cartels. For instance, several times unions claim high wages for the labor but employer comprehends the reality. The actual reason for the increase in wage is limiting productivity. Union members control the supply of the goods and services due to which consumers have to pay more than the actual price. This high price leads to the high wages for the union labors. However, it is the illegal method to achieve high wages as high productivity should be the aim of the labors. The efficient and sufficient use of labor is more beneficial for the economy rather than obtaining revenue by limiting the supply.

The labor movement is somehow in a challenging period where attacks from anti-union sources have crippled the model of union organization. The core reason for the continuous attacking and struggling to lower the strength of the labor movement is to weaken the footsteps of labors in public sector membership base(“How today’s unions help working people,” n.d.). Supporters of an anti-union especially lobbying group and policymakers are trying to defang and defund the public sector unions. They are struggling to stop the growing size and superiority. Politicians used the labor movement as a power card during the elections but their role after being elected is not positive towards labors. Labors found political parties especially Democratic Party curious as even after giving them a source of finance and votes during the campaign. There are few allies who actually show their support by action rather than by dialogues.

**Conclusion**

The unions manifested some advantage by providing organizational and financial support to the political parties. They acquired a series of successes at the local and state level. The most prominent advantages that union accomplished included the increase in minimum wages and paid medical leaves.The primary source of success for the unions on the behalf of America's middle and working class will be challenging to accomplish in the absence of regulating a plausible platform of funding. The bottom line is that widespread inequality will sustain in society unless a revitalized labor movement is established. A critical appraisal of the events reflects that American society deems the labor union as part of the adversity, not the solution. The unions have utterly struggled to cultivate a positive image in public. The radical stories of mob influence, labor racketeering and critical trials of labor officials for bribery and embezzlement are a common practice. Therefore, these unions have failed to manifest a productive growth, profound influence and consequent wages for the labors. The negative perception constructed in society primarily contributes to the hatred and resentment subjected to these labor unions. In addition, several Americans prefer to approach the government instead of turning toward the unions. The workers are largely dependent on the pensions, protection against discrimination, healthcare and several pertinent perks which were previously offered by unions. These beliefs and state of affairs define the contemporary manifestations for the unions in America.

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