

15.3: Discussion- Union–Management Relations

At the start of the industrial revolution, employers took advantage of desperate workers by demanding 12–16 hours a day, six days a week from them, providing poor working conditions and little in terms of compensation and benefits. Labor unions swung the balance back in the direction of the worker and continued their hold as a solid third-party participant between workers and employers in labor negotiations throughout the post-war era.

Some people think unions are a twentieth-century has-been, and that they're not as powerful as they need to be to protect workers' interests. In his 2014 article "[The Employer Strikes Back](#)" for prospect.org, Josh Eidelman talks about the worker lockout, and how it's used by employers as a weapon to force desperate workers to agree to worse contracts than those that have just expired.

On the other hand, in the October 2019, Economist article, "[The GM Strike is an Anachronism](#)," the author states that, over time, union victories made carmakers less competitive, and the recent Flint, Michigan, auto workers strike may be another case where demands will be met that will make employers buckle, this time under the weight of healthcare costs.

Looking at it from either the point of view of the locked-out worker, or the employer who is facing lost profitability and crushing overhead costs, it seems as though unions might not be making the same difference in labor negotiations that they used to.

Discussion Prompt

Technology aside, the future of unions is in debate in these two articles. As a future HR professional, read these articles and consider these differing opinions on the work of labor unions. Is there a way that labor unions can move away from a zero-sum-game approach to negotiations, where one party has to lose in order for another to gain? Consider government law and government contribution in your response (e.g. Affordable Health Care Act, etc.) Write your thoughts in 1–3 (short!) paragraphs. Then, review the thoughts of at least two of your classmates.

Grading

Share your opinions below and respond to two of your classmates' thoughts.

Discussion Grading Rubric

Criteria	Not Evident	Developing	Exemplary	Points
Submit your initial response	0 pts No post made	5 pts Post is either late or off-topic	10 pts Post is made on time and is focused on the prompt	10 pts
Respond to at least two peers' presentations	0 pts No response to peers	2 pts Responded to only one peer	5 pts Responded to two peers	5 pts
			Total:	15 pts

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