

## What Is a Union?

### General Agents School

No date

One of American Income's strengths lies in its commitment to labor unions. The company backs up its rhetoric by belonging to the AFL-CIO, contributing substantially to many labor causes, and educating its workforce on the importance of unions. American Income's market necessitates its sales force to be able to relate to the average union member. Mr. Rapoport speaks to the General Agents about the union's history, function, and structure. With their knowledge will come a better understanding of how to sell insurance to a union member.

Rapoport defines a union as a group of people in a particular trade that join together to voice their opinions with poignancy and strength. Unions in the United States began in 1792 with the Journeymen Shoemakers of Philadelphia. Until the Civil War, unions were located along the Atlantic coast. The individual trade unions evolved into "city-wide federations...called trade assemblies." In these assemblies, the carpenter union would help out the shoemaker union and vice versa in strikes or boycotts. The trade assemblies began publishing newspapers and taking more political action. Now, those trade assemblies have grown "into what we now call city central bodies or state central bodies."

Unions serve many functions. In the United States, the right to join together and protest for a cause is one of the most fundamental protected rights. Rapoport argues that in a totalitarian regime, unions are banned because the people have no voice. Unions are

as basic to the democratic system as elections, churches, and schools. Unions were first formed to protect the worker. Rapoport makes the bold statement, “Unions are indispensable for the dignity of the worker.” As a business owner, Rapoport was surprised with the results of a union-led organization of his company. His workers were asking for things he had no idea that they wanted, and Rapoport says, “Their demands were most reasonable.” The employees were able to voice their concerns and effect change. The result was a happier workforce and increased productivity. Unions exist to mediate the self-interests of the owner and the employee. With collective bargaining, the two sides can draft a contract that satisfies both of them. Rapoport says that 98 percent of the time collective bargaining works. However, sometimes unions have to resort to strikes. The right to strike is another fundamental concept in democracy. It functions as a tool for workers to use in extreme cases. Some people have low opinions of unions. Rapoport calls these people “prejudiced.” The positive actions of unions far outweigh the unfortunate event of a strike. For instance, the union’s political involvement has helped enact public policies like free public education, child labor laws, minimum wage laws, Medicare, and Social Security.

Explaining the structure of unions begins by naming the three largest labor organizations: 1) the United Mine Workers of America, 2) the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and 3) the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organization or the AFL-CIO. American Income does business with the AFL-CIO the most so Rapoport goes into detail about its structure. Every two years, the AFL-CIO holds an electoral convention. The representatives from various international unions choose an executive council comprised of the president, secretary-treasurer, and 33 vice

presidents. The General Board of the AFL-CIO is made up of executive members and the principle officer of each international union. From the AFL-CIO national headquarters in Washington D.C, the organization is broken down into departments, such as the Sheet Metal Workers and the United Food and Commercial Workers. Then it is broken down further into state and local union entities. American Income belongs to the OPEIU Local 277 and the international OPEIU union. General Agents need to be comfortable with the structure of the central labor body of their communities for public relations purposes. With an understanding of the breakdown of union organization, the GA's can communicate business with the right person within the union.

The General Agents should be proud of their company for its union association. American Income funds a long list of union philanthropies. Histadrut, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, Frontlash, The Latin Council for Latin American Advancement, and The Coalition of Labor Union Women are just a few examples. American Income also has the privilege of employing some top union officials like Joyce Miller who was the first president of The Coalition of Labor Union Women. American Income salespeople can use the pamphlet "American Income Helping Unions – Here's Proof" as a tool to persuade prospects to choose insurance from this company. The *A.I. Labor Letter* is another way American Income helps unions. A better understanding of the relationship between unions and American Income will assist the agents in better serving their market.