Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Discuss union organizing.
2. Describe nontraditional union organizing tactics.
3. Discuss bargaining structure and the determinants of bargaining structures.
4. Discuss pattern bargaining.
5. Explain the four subprocesses of negotiations.
6. Discuss the dynamics of management’s decision-making process.
7. Examine union and worker involvement in negotiations.
8. Explain the cycle of traditional negotiations strikes.
9. Discuss strike activity.
10. Discuss the role of strategy in negotiations and strikes.

Written Lecture

This unit discusses union organization and bargaining structures. These two central issues emerge early on in the chronology of the bargaining process. Union organizing decides whether there will be bargaining in the first place, and then the parties’ attention turns to the structure of bargaining. An organizing campaign is initiated by union organizers, typically including some full-time paid organizers and shop floor employees. To receive authorization from the NLRB for a representation election the union needs to have 30 percent of the election unit sign authorization cards. Management typically launches a counter campaign in which it tries to convince employees not to vote for union representation. Unions have not fares particularly well in their organizing efforts over the last 30 years. Management has been aggressive in developing personnel policies that weaken the appeal of unions and in the conduct of counter campaigns against unionization. But unions have not been passive either, as they turned to corporate campaigns and other new organizing tactics. Bargaining structure determines which unionized employees are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Compared with other countries the United States continues as an example of relatively decentralized bargaining structures. From the 1980s on previously centralized bargaining structures in trucking, steel, coal, and many other industries either fragmented or collapsed.

This unit also explains the dynamics of negotiations and the factors that lead to strikes. Negotiations and strikes are the most visible parts of a collective bargaining system. Contract negotiations provide labor and management with a predetermined time to set or revise the terms of the agreement governing their relationship. The pressures of a contract deadline and perhaps of a strike threat focus attention and clarify how important each party feels about critical issues and the need to either alter or preserve current practices. Negotiations may, from time to time, produce the strikes that often provide headlines for popular press coverage of collective bargaining.