

WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS AT A CROSSROADS

A Summary Report from a
Multistakeholder Dialogue on U.S.
Worker Voice and Representation

Organized by the Worker Empowerment Research Network
(WERN) and held December 1-2, 2022 in Cambridge, Massachusetts

Workers and Employers at a Crossroads

A Summary Report from a Multistakeholder Dialogue on U.S. Worker Voice and Representation

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Abstract

Worker activism in the U.S. has been growing in the past few years. In December 2022, the Worker Empowerment Research Network (WERN), a new multi-university academic group of faculty and graduate students, and the MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research (IWER) brought together a select group of more than 60 leaders from business, labor unions, other worker advocacy groups, government, and academia for a dialogue on this upsurge in worker organizing and activism occurring across the country. The event, which took place in Cambridge, Mass., included both research presentations and small-group discussions, as well as lunchtime remarks by U.S. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh. This report includes brief highlights of the research presented on five topics: 1) the relationship between unions and inequality; 2) the growth of worker centers and other worker advocacy groups; 3) business executives' views of worker activism and unions; 4) the results of surveys of frontline workers in five industries; and 5) a study of union organizing. The report also highlights some of the key themes that emerged in the discussions that took place during the event, as well as the authors' conclusions and questions going forward.

Introduction

The relationship between U.S. workers and employers is at a crossroads. A 2022 Gallup poll reported that the percentage of Americans who approve of labor unions has reached 71%, its highest level since 1965. Union election petition filings with the U.S. National Labor Relations Board increased 53% in the fiscal year that ended in September 2022; however, the number of workers organized via NLRB elections is small compared to the number of nonunion workers who express a willingness to join a union if given the opportunity to do so. Worker activism has been growing, and business leaders are asking how best to address their workers' expectations for a greater voice at work. What does this all mean—for workers, companies, and public policies?

This is a critical moment for leaders from different stakeholder groups to be in dialogue about what these developments imply for the future of work. With that in mind, in early December 2022, the Worker Empowerment Research Network

(WERN), a new multi-university academic group of faculty and graduate students, and the MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research (IWER) brought leaders from business, labor unions, a broad range of worker advocacy groups, and government together with scholars for a dialogue on the upsurge in worker organizing and activism occurring across the country. (See “About the Event.”) The union leaders in attendance included both some from long-established unions as well as some workers who are part of recently organized new unions.

We began with discussions over dinner on the MIT campus on December 1 and then continued the conversations over the course of a daylong meeting the next day. We seeded each discussion session by presenting summaries of new research that scholars affiliated with WERN have been conducting to document the scope and nature of the upsurge in worker activism. Over lunch, the group also heard remarks from U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, delivered via a video link.

About the Event

The “Workers and Employers at a Crossroads” dialogue was organized by The Worker Empowerment Research Network (WERN) and cosponsored by the MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research (IWER). The goal of the dialogue was to increase understanding about the recent wave of U.S. worker activism and its implications. To enable candid dialogue, listening, learning, and exchange of views among participants who may have very different perspectives, the event was limited to about 60 in size and was by invitation only.

On December 1-2, 2022, a select group of more than 60 leaders from business, labor unions, other worker advocacy groups, government, and academia gathered together in Cambridge, Mass. for this dialogue on the upsurge in worker organizing and activism occurring across the country. The event included both research presentations and small-group discussions, as well as lunchtime remarks by U.S. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh. All of the small-group discussions were held using the Chatham House Rule, which allows for sharing general insights learned at an event—but not indicating who said what or what their organizational affiliation was.

About WERN: The Worker Empowerment Research Network (WERN) is an interdisciplinary network of labor market researchers from multiple universities who have come together to study worker efforts to achieve greater voice, power, and representation at work, focusing especially closely on efforts pursued by workers of color, women, immigrants, and others who have faced exclusion, discrimination, or marginalization.

About IWER: The MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research (IWER) is a multidisciplinary research and teaching unit located within the MIT Sloan School of Management. IWER’s mission is to conduct and disseminate cutting-edge research that improves the lives of workers and their loved ones and that guides managers in crafting a successful and inclusive future of work.

To our knowledge, this was the first time that leaders from all of these different stakeholder groups came together to discuss the implications of current efforts by U.S. workers to increase their voice and ability to shape workplace conditions. The goal was to foster robust discussion across groups that bring different perspectives and organizational responsibilities to current employment relations issues. Given the unique gathering, we present this report to not only summarize the new research presented but also to highlight some major themes that emerged out of the multistakeholder discussions that followed. We then draw some tentative conclusions and implications both for further dialogues we hope to sponsor and for research, practice, and policies.

Part I: New Research on Worker Activism

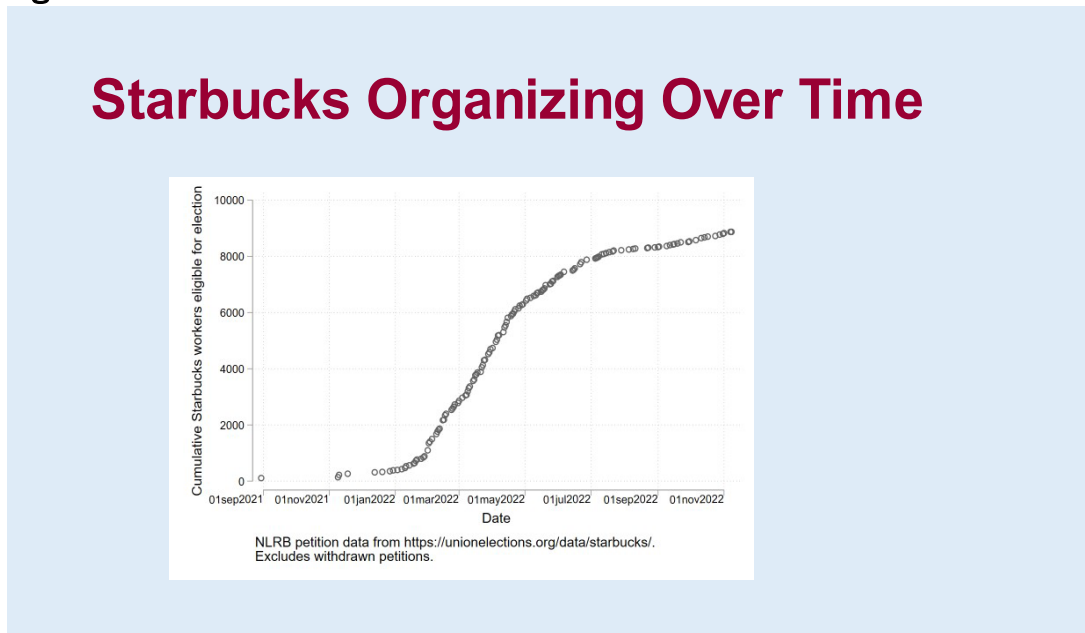
During the event, attendees heard presentations from scholars about recent research on five topics related the current wave of worker activism. Here are some brief highlights of the research presented.

1. Worker Representation and Inequality. Suresh Naidu, an economics professor at Columbia University, discussed the relationship between unions and inequality. Generally, the overall trend in the U.S. over the past century was that, in periods when union membership rose, inequality fell—and when union membership decreased, inequality increased. U.S. union members are now more educated than in the past and more likely to be White relative to the overall labor force than they were several decades ago, Naidu reported. But recent survey research finds that low-income, young, and non-White workers are the most pro-union, he added.

Naidu shared results indicating that while workers are interested in unions, they are not as interested in political involvement by unions. Interest in strikes varies with education, with workers with low levels of education being more sympathetic to them. However, research during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic found workers are more willing to engage in collective action if a significant portion of their coworkers are. Figure 1 shows the rapid spread of union organizing among Starbucks employees once it began with employees in a few locations.

Naidu added that, while union win rates in NLRB elections have been increasing since the 1980s, that has been occurring because the number of people unions have been attempting to organize has decreased substantially. However, he also noted that Google Trends data shows a substantial increase over the past decade in people asking the search engine “What is a union?” or “Can we go on strike?”

Figure 1

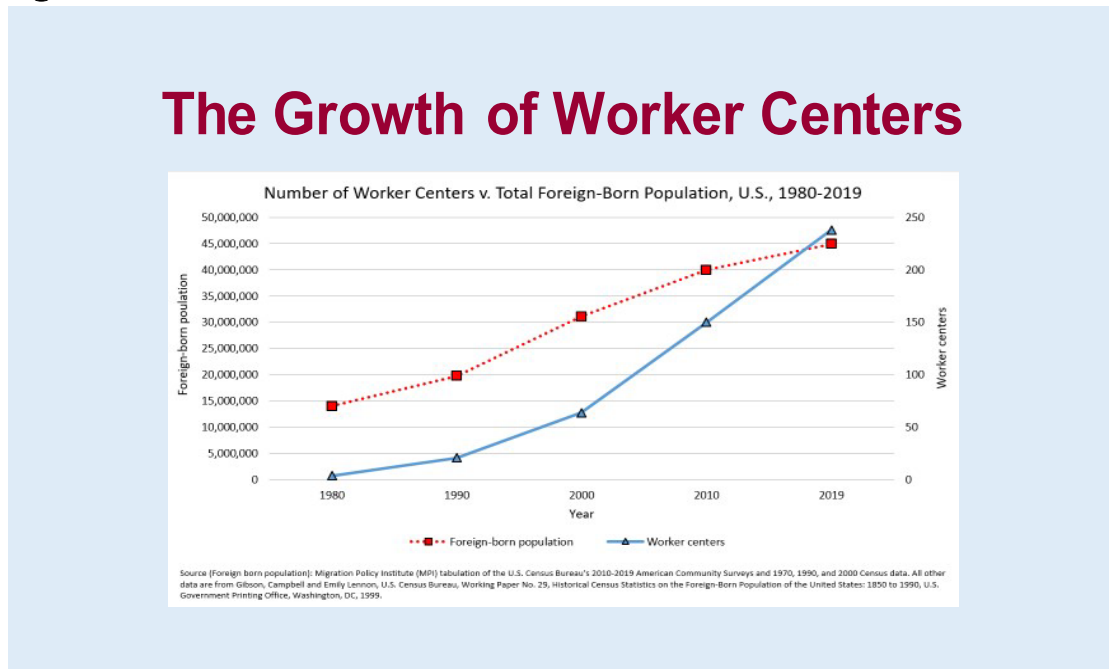


Slide source: Presentation by Suresh Naidu

2. Worker Centers and Other Worker Advocacy Groups. Janice Fine, a professor of labor studies and employment relations at the Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations, observed that today's labor activism involves not only unions but also many others worker groups, ranging from organizations such as the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Game Workers Unite to the digital platform Coworker.org, where employees can file petitions to improve working conditions. In particular, Fine reported on her research on worker centers, a form of worker advocacy group that has been growing steadily in numbers since 2000, as Figure 2 illustrates. There are now at least 246 worker centers in the U.S., although more than half are located in just five states.

Worker centers, Fine explained, are place-based nonprofits focused on issues of concern to workers. They often serve immigrant workers, and tend to rely on foundation funding rather than dues. Fine observed that in contemporary worker organizing, no one size fits all; workers may organize by firm, by industry, by identity (for example, race, gender, or country of origin), or by some combination of those factors.

Figure 2



Slide source: Presentation by Janice Fine

3. Business Leaders' Perspectives on Worker Voice, Representation, and Activism. Thomas Kochan, the George M. Bunker Professor of Management Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management and a member of the faculty of the MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research, interviewed business leaders in large U.S.-based companies about their views on the current surge in worker activism. Most, he reported, see workers today as having increased expectations for voice at work, and executives think that this is unlikely to subside, with young workers seen as being particularly active in expressing their concerns. Kochan also reported that most of these large companies have employee resource groups (ERGs) as one mechanism for employee voice, and ERGs are growing in popularity.

Some of the executives Kochan interviewed work at large companies that have had unions for a number of years. He found there is little new organizing going on at such companies, unless they have a neutrality agreement in their union contracts, where the company agrees to remain neutral in the face of organizing. Labor relations executives at these companies know how to work with their unions, but note that the labor relations bench is thin within their organizations, and that, on the union side, union leaders seem to have less training than in the past. Some also report that there is a disconnect between union leaders and rank-and-file workers that can make it harder to get contracts ratified than in the past.

Kochan also noted that he found differences between executives with and without experience in union-management relations. Labor relations executives in unionized firms reported that they knew how to work effectively with unions and did not disparage them in organizing campaigns. In contrast, chief HR officers in companies with no or little union representation often voiced extremely strong opposition to unions. Kochan found business leaders in other functions outside HR or labor relations to be skeptical about unions (and interested in alternative employee voice mechanisms such as ERGs) but also a bit curious about whether other ways for workers to have a greater voice might be explored. In general, he noted, executives of all types tend to view union organizing as a failure of management, and many view it as a personal betrayal.

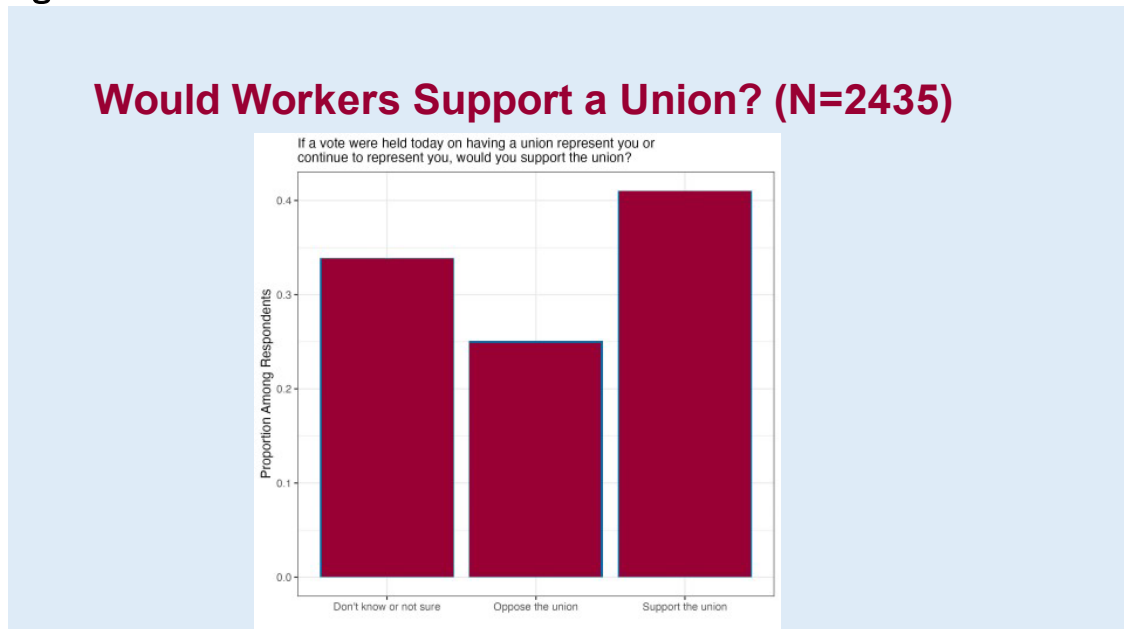
Kochan concluded that he thinks many upcoming union contract negotiations will be difficult, with a high potential for conflict, because workers are focusing on the fact that their compensation hasn't kept up with inflation during a time when their companies have made good profits, while companies are looking ahead and forecasting rocky economics times. He noted that many contemporary CEOs have not had experience in a period with strong labor demands, and there is an entire generation of HR leaders who have not worked in labor relations.

4. Surveys of Frontline Workers. John Ahlquist, a professor and associate dean in the School of Global Policy and Strategy at the University of California, San Diego, shared some preliminary data from a new survey of frontline workers that he and Jacob M. Grumbach, an associate professor of political science at the University of Washington, are conducting in five industries: warehousing, telecommunications, retail, hospitality, and health care. Overall, as Figure 3 shows, more than 40% of the workers surveyed would vote for union representation in their workplace, with about an additional third saying they don't know how they'd vote. Excluding those reporting "don't know," 62% would vote yes compared to 38% who would vote no.

Support for unionization is demonstrably higher among workers of color, but they are also more concerned than White workers about facing retaliation for organizing. Overall, 60% of all nonunionized workers report concerns about one or more type of retaliation if they supported a union; 37% report concern that they would be fired for supporting a union. The vast majority of workers surveyed also report some form of surveillance at work; that includes productivity tracking, but many workers say the surveillance isn't just about

productivity but also includes computer or other monitoring of their time use.

Figure 3



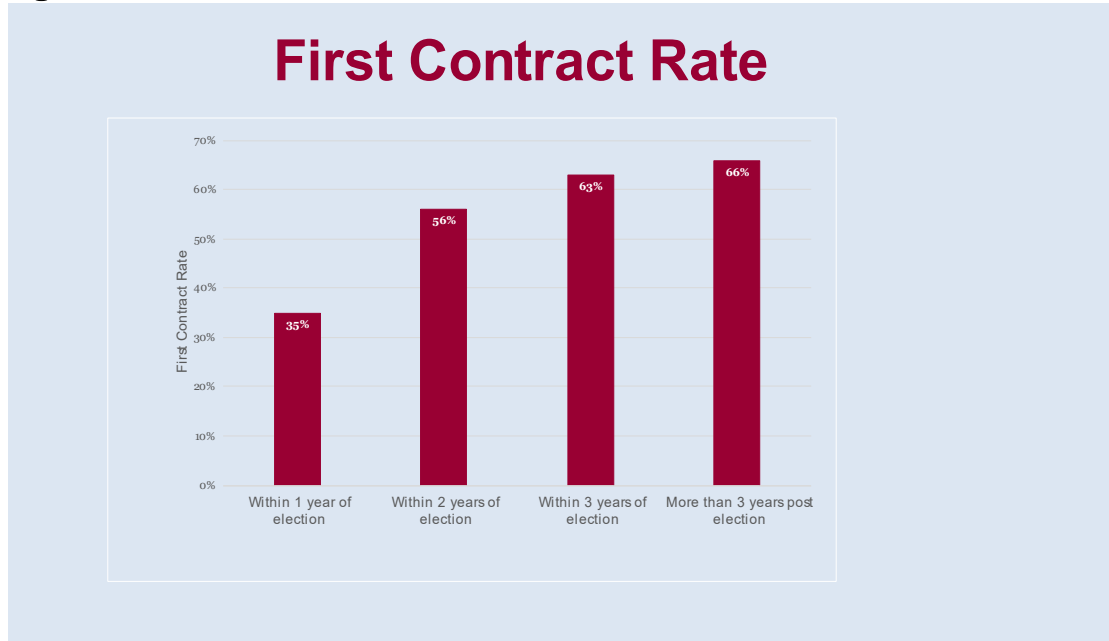
Slide source: John Ahlquist

5. Union Organizing. Kate Bronfenbrenner is director of labor education research and a senior lecturer at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. She reported on a recent survey she conducted of union organizers involved in National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) certification elections with 50 or more voters. This study was an update of prior research Bronfenbrenner has conducted, and her findings indicate union organizing is shifting away from traditional sectors like manufacturing to front-facing U.S.-based industries in service, retail, and communications. More unions, she said, are choosing targets like nonprofits where unions can restrain the employer's antiunion campaign—so much so that 13% of the campaigns she studied did not involve employer opposition.

However, Bronfenbrenner reported, when faced with a union organizing drive, most employers continue to engage in extensive anti-union campaigns. These campaigns in most cases involve using outside consultants and forcing workers to attend mandatory anti-union meetings during working hours. Forty-six percent of employers, she reported, threatened workers with plant closings or loss of work if they unionize. Thirty-seven percent surveilled workers during the organizing campaign. Thirty-one percent of employers, Bronfenbrenner said, engaged in aggressive anti-union campaigns that involved 10 or more anti-union tactics. Union organizers also report that the employees they organize are facing worsening conditions, with 34% having an average wage of

less than \$8/hour. And, even when unions win elections, getting a first contract is difficult: As Figure 4 shows, only 35% of newly certified unions had achieved a contract within one year of the union election, and about one-third still did not have a contract more than three years after the union election.

Figure 4



Slide source: Presentation by Kate Bronfenbrenner

Part II: Discussion Among Participants

What follows are some general trends from the discussions that took place among participants during the event. Following the Chatham House rule designed to promote candid conversation on sensitive topics, no participants (other than the speakers who presented at the event) or their affiliations are named.

Why Now?

One of the first questions we posed to participants at the event was: Why is this upsurge in worker activism occurring now? Three common factors were mentioned in a number of the small-group discussions: (1) working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) young workers' rising expectations and their willingness to take actions on a wide variety of issues; and (3) pent-up frustrations from years of relatively stagnant real wages, combined with pressures from the escalating cost of living. These came together at the same time that employers were experiencing

staffing shortages, so workers felt more empowered than in recent years to take action to address their concerns.

COVID-19, in particular, was cited as a major wake-up call for workers. When workplace safety became a life-and-death matter every day, workers realized the need for—and benefits of—a collective voice able to lobby for appropriate safety precautions and protective equipment. Moreover, the experience many low-paid essential workers had of receiving extra hazard pay and temporary paid sick leave—and then, often, having them taken away as the worst of the pandemic receded—awakened employees to what was possible.

While these proximate causes may have sparked worker activism, many participants thought that these would not be temporary concerns that would go away after the pandemic or when the labor market shortages dissipate; as one person noted, “you can’t put the genie back in the bottle.” Many agreed that the heightened and broadened expectations will be a force that both employers and worker representatives will need to address somehow.

Divides on Display

It is often said that contemporary U.S. society is full of divides—and those divides were very visible at this event. Event participants highlighted a number of different divides that affect worker activism. There was of course, the traditional division between workers and management, with most of the worker advocates at the dialogue showing little appetite for management-labor partnerships in the wake of the anti-union activities they have experienced from many companies. One worker advocate stressed the need to support young workers who are organizing and being fired in retaliation for it. Several young workers involved in organizing likewise expressed the hope that their efforts would gain support from leaders and members of existing unions, other worker advocates, and the general public.

Another divide is inequality, and the sharp contrast between the living conditions of the working poor and those of the more affluent in our society. As one participant put it, “Collaboration [between worker representatives and management] requires some sort of equity. And in today’s situation, there is no equity.”

But the divides aren’t just between workers and management. There are also significant generational gaps within unions, with generally older union leaders and younger rank-and-file workers having markedly different perspectives and goals. A number of management representatives at the dialogue stated that a significant gap exists today between the expectations and priorities of unionized workers on the front lines and some of their labor leaders, and a number of labor and worker representatives agreed. The gaps are particularly visible between young workers who

have not had prior experience with collective bargaining and older labor leaders. Demands for greater flexibility (in work hours, locations, and other arrangements) have taken some union leaders by surprise, especially those more accustomed to negotiating standard rules governing all bargaining unit members, not varied arrangements for different groups. The facilitator of one of the small groups summarized that group's discussion as follows:

“There is a challenge within unionized firms with getting contracts ratified. Management believes that the union leaders are bargaining in good faith and are strong partners at the table, but then when it comes to getting members to ratify the contract, there's a serious disconnect between leaders at the table and the concerns that their membership needs addressing. This is potentially due to the fact that union leaders are skilled at negotiating more traditional bread-and-butter issues, but are at a loss for how to handle the membership's desire for contemporary needs. One example is flexibility in scheduling and in location. Members want more flexibility, but leaders are more used to bargaining for universal procedures for scheduling that apply to everyone.”

As interviews with management leaders indicate (see Figure 5), a similar gap in perspectives and understanding of the workforce exists between many top executives and the frontline workforce. Part of this reflects the lack of significant pressure management has faced in recent years to address worker concerns—power shifted from workers as unions declined and the era of “financialization” and the norm of maximizing shareholder value took hold in corporate America. A number of management representatives reported that an increasingly important and challenging part of their job today is educating top executives that the labor market and worker expectations have changed and that their companies need to budget for larger wage increases for frontline workers than they had grown accustomed to.

A Broader Range of Worker Concerns

What issues are important to workers today? A theme that emerged right from the beginning of the discussion and continued throughout the meeting was that the topics of concern to workers have expanded. Those issues certainly include wages and working conditions. But they also encompass everything from a desire for greater flexibility in how, when, and where people work, to equity issues such as racial and gender equality and LBTGQ+ rights, to societal questions like climate change and corporate values. Some participants felt that these topics are not yet getting the attention they deserve from union or management leaders.

Figure 5



Views on Internal Organizational Challenges—Unions & Companies

- Large gaps inside unions between:
 - Elected union officers and rank and file
 - Younger and more experienced union leaders
- Significant management challenges in educating CEOs:
 - CEOs have not experienced strong worker demands—especially for bigger wage increases in light of current inflation and sense of greater power
- Weak bench strength in LR and HR profession — not enough with experience in working with unions and collective bargaining
- Results: Growing number of contract rejections



Slide source: Presentation by Thomas A. Kochan

This led to debate over whether other forums for worker voice are or should be made available in organizations. One option that sparked a lively discussion was Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), which are employee groups organized around a common identity or interest. Employer representatives noted these groups have grown and expanded in number, expressed support for them, and said they were highly effective in supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. ERGs typically include managers as well as workers, including in some cases union members covered by collective bargaining agreements. One attendee stressed that an advantage and perhaps a differentiating feature of these groups is that participants do not have to vie for political influence as a subgroup within a union. However, a number of the labor and workforce advocates were highly critical of ERGs. They were skeptical both of ERGs' effectiveness and of the motives behind managerial support for these groups, arguing that ERGs were being used to substitute for unions. One participant raised another limitation of ERGs—namely that they are good for addressing specific issues but do not provide a sustained structure or process for voicing concerns. There was a call for more scholarship about ERGs and their effects.

Will the Surge in Employee Activism Continue?

This question was clearly front and center on the minds of many participants throughout the meeting, particularly those from labor backgrounds. There were varied views on this both *within* the labor, worker advocacy, and business participant groups and *across* these groups. On the one hand, some noted a generational shift, with young workers much more interested in unions than previous generations. One union leader described the current uptick in organizing—and particularly the way that workers are organizing themselves and learning from each other about organizing—as like nothing that union leader had ever experienced before. Union organizing is “hip right now,” another attendee noted.

But questions were also raised by worker advocates about whether the organizing wave in new spaces will have staying power, and how to translate union election wins into contracts and worker power. Some participants noted that, in an era of financialization, investors wield tremendous power over management decisions, and companies are incentivized by investors to view labor as a cost to be reduced. Others emphasized that the sustainability of the surge in worker activism will depend on the results achieved by newly certified unions: Will they get first contracts? There is good reason to wonder about this question, given Bronfenbrenner’s general findings about unions’ difficulty achieving first contracts as well as the difficulties observed in highly visible current examples such as the first-contract negotiations at Starbucks and Amazon.

What might be needed to transform the moment into a sustained process of rebuilding worker voice and representation? One participant pointed out that prior “inflection points” in labor-management relations, such as the organizing and strike wave of 1933-35 that led to the growth of industrial unions and passage of the National Labor Relations Act, involved a much larger number of workers across a broader slice of industries and regions. That suggests that a much bigger number and broader range of workers would need to join in asserting their voices for change and for representation if the current efforts are to produce a sustained growth in union membership and/or other forms of worker voice and representation.

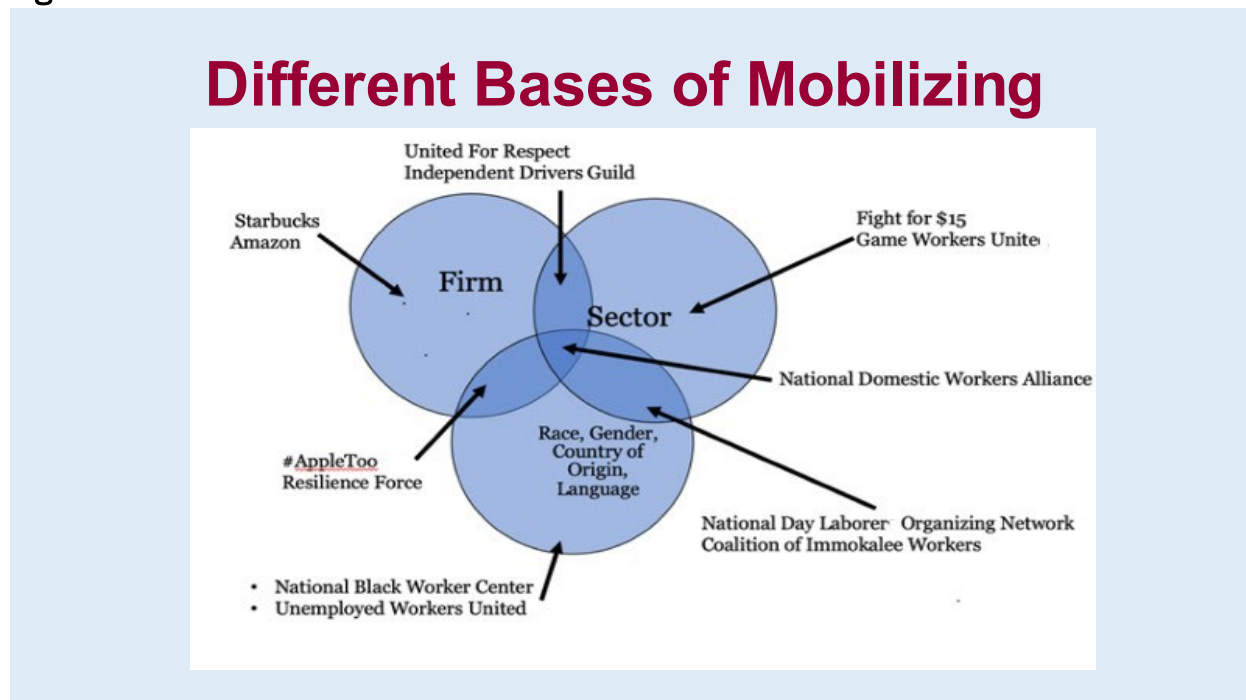
Another attendee suggested that a new “grand bargain” is needed between business and labor that might serve as a catalyst and framework for building the next generation of labor-management relations systems and processes. A historical analogy might be the negotiation of the 1950 “Treaty of Detroit” contract between General Motors and the United Auto Workers. That bargain established a new wage-setting norm and target: Wages would increase by amounts linked to increases in the cost of living and growth in national productivity. Some viewed that bargain as the cornerstone of the post-World War II social contract in the U.S.

However, unless workers and their organizations muster considerably more power and threaten broader disruption, there would be little momentum to support negotiation of a new, modern-day equivalent of the “Treaty of Detroit.” Union representatives present at this dialogue event also expressed some concerns that despite union leader calls for intensifying organizing efforts, there is little innovation in how unions go about organizing. More strategic thinking and actions are needed.

Unions and Worker Advocacy Group Collaborations

Considerable interest was sparked by a diagram presented by Professor Janice Fine showing the different bases for organizing/mobilizing workers. (See Figure 6.) There was particular interest in the role of worker centers and other groups that do not necessarily engage in collective bargaining but serve the interests of immigrants, low-wage workers, and people of color.

Figure 6



Slide source: Presentation by Janice Fine

Some participants were encouraged that labor unions and place-based or identity-based groups are working together more today than in the past and hope this will continue; one attendee observed that there was a sense among the different types of worker advocates at the event that this is a moment when they all need to work together to improve job quality for low-wage workers. For example, enthusiasm was expressed during the event for innovative collaborative efforts that are

supporting Black worker organizing efforts in the South and that involve unions, advocacy groups, and researchers. Yet there are concerns that most worker advocacy groups that aren't unions continue to depend on foundation or other outside sources for support.

Rebuilding Labor and Management Bench Strength

One of the findings from the interviews with business leaders is that there is an urgent need to build the knowledge and skills needed to lead labor-management relations—both for those who will represent employers and those that will represent unions. This finding resonated with many participants. How to do this is a critical question. Some lamented the decline in labor relations education in business and other professional schools and programs. Others noted that even in the various schools of labor and industrial relations most students today focus on preparing for careers in human resource management and get little or no exposure to labor history or collective bargaining. Furthermore, because of the decline in union representation, very few HR executives have significant experience in managing unionized workforces.

The discussion of the gap between many union leaders and frontline workers exposed a similar problem for the labor movement: What is being done to educate, train, and develop the next generation of labor leaders? The trial by fire for workers who have recently organized unions on their own without support from existing unions is a starting point. But could more be done to help these new leaders deepen and broaden their leadership skills? In addition, more than one participant noted that American public education provides students with little information about unions, and there is a need for educational campaigns to inform workers about their rights under labor law.

As part of this discussion, the point was made that there are various negotiations and leadership development training programs available from universities. The question is how to match suppliers of training with those who can benefit most from it. This is an open question and one worth further discussion within and perhaps across labor and management circles.

Labor-Management Partnerships: An Overlooked Opportunity?

In his lunchtime remarks to the group, U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh called for more labor-management partnerships, with employers and worker advocates working together to solve problems. Labor-management partnerships helped build the middle class in the U.S., he argued.

One management commentator specifically endorsed the value of such labor-management partnerships, stating they are not without difficulties but can serve the interests of both the employer and the workforce better than traditional arms-length relationships. A labor commentator noted, however, that partnerships are only possible if there is a balance of power between labor and management and that this is not the case in many existing relationships. Whatever the reasons, there appeared to be little momentum underway among attendees at the event to experiment with new partnership activities.

A related issue aroused deep concern from management representatives. They felt some of their labor counterparts at the meeting harbored a single stereotype of all employers: All are equally anti-union and can't be trusted to work in any kind of partnership with unions. But the business leaders who chose to accept the invitation to attend this dialogue event were not a typical cross-section of American corporations: Many of the companies represented at the event have substantial numbers of employees organized and long histories of negotiating collective bargaining agreements, and a number of management attendees noted that they have forged good relationships with union leaders that represent their employees. They argued that there is a broad spectrum of managerial attitudes and practices across employers, ranging from those that pursue union avoidance at all costs to those that accept employees' rights to unionize if that is their decision and seek to build and maintain "high-road" labor-management practices.

These divergent views of management led several participants to call for more documentation and research on "high-road" labor-management relationships and to highlight examples of how union and management representatives have tackled problems together, especially as they pivoted to address issues as the COVID-19 pandemic hit their organizations and workforce.

In particular, one participant pointed out five opportunities for management and unions to collaborate:

- Skilled trades development
- Getting diversity, equity, and inclusion into union contracts
- Immigration policy reform
- Workplace safety and health
- Social issues such as sexual harassment prevention.

While a number of attendees noted that America's labor law is badly broken and some argued it needs fundamental overhaul to better fit with current workforce and business needs, there was widespread recognition among participants that the long-standing impasse in Congress over whether or how to reform and update federal labor law will continue for the foreseeable future. In his remarks, Secretary Walsh noted that the Biden administration is nonetheless taking executive

actions to promote and support high-quality jobs, joint labor-management apprenticeships, and collective bargaining in ways that work for both workers and employers. The large-scale public investments coming in infrastructure, renewable energy, semiconductors, and manufacturing will serve as testing grounds for whether labor and management can be encouraged to work together in expanding apprenticeships and other forms of training, and to build positive union-management relationships. However, these administration initiatives are still in the early stages of development and implementation.

In comments during the Q&A period following the Secretary's remarks, several worker advocates stressed the importance both of protecting immigrant workers' rights in general and of visa protections for immigrants subjected to human trafficking or other abuses. Secretary Walsh noted several initiatives the Labor Department has underway for protecting immigrant workers and promised to look into ways attendees suggested to strengthen these efforts.

Part III: Implications for Further Research and Dialogue

As we hope this summary conveys, the discussions at the event were far-ranging, frank, and candid. They surfaced a considerable amount of distrust and frustration but also pointed to some possible pathways forward. While it is hard to summarize the many views expressed during this dialogue in a small number of bullet points, the key takeaways might be:

1. The divisions between business and labor views found in the research and apparent in society were mirrored in the discussions.
2. Labor representative and worker advocates are searching for ways to translate increased levels of worker activism into greater worker power.
3. Business representatives were dismayed that attendees from a labor background did not distinguish between employers that are blatantly anti-union and fight all forms of representation and companies like those participating in this event that respect worker rights while maintaining their right to present management's case within the law for why a union may not be needed.
4. Collaboration among unions and community groups, worker centers, and other forms of nonunion worker advocacy groups appears to be increasing. Union leaders and other worker advocates recognize that tensions in their relationships need to be put behind them, that these collaborative efforts need

to continue, expand, and deepen, and that now is a moment to work together.

5. There was little discussion of labor-management partnerships, apart from the Secretary of Labor's call for and support for such partnerships. Some suggested, however, that examples of high-quality labor-management relationships need to be given more attention and more research should document what it takes to produce and sustain "high-road" labor-management relationships and partnerships.
6. No one expects any breakthroughs or consensus over how to fix and update U.S. labor law but, as others have noted before, there was a sense that the law is outmoded and needs a fundamental rethinking. That is a step forward; it suggests that more options for increasing voice and representation are open for debate and "on the table" today, even though labor politics in Washington remain as gridlocked today as in the past. It will be important to track and evaluate the effects of the Biden administration's various executive actions to strengthen workers' ability to organize and to promote collective bargaining.
7. Many participants agreed that coming together for dialogues like this is worthwhile and should be continued, perhaps in various different forms—within specific regions, around specific topics of mutual interest, within industries, etc.

One overriding question that came up throughout the dialogue was whether the upsurge in worker organizing and activism is just a temporary "flash in the pan" or the beginning of a sustained period of growth in unions and other forms of worker voice and representation. We did not answer that question; indeed, it is too early to tell. But the next year or two will be pivotal to determining (1) whether or not efforts to expand worker voice, representation, and power will bear fruit and be sustained and (2) whether there will be sufficient innovation in how the emerging (and existing) forms of organizing and activism adapt to the changing expectations, needs, and interests of both today's workforce and the needs of business for more flexible and adaptable labor-management relations. Thus, perhaps the most important contribution of this first dialogue event was to put these issues on the table for continued and broader public discussion.

Given the discussion at this dialogue event and the suggestions made by various participants, some questions that might well guide our work going forward include:

1. How can we engage more business leaders in discussion of these issues?

2. How can we encourage more union leaders to experiment with innovative new approaches to organizing and representing workers that are not constrained by the decades-old National Labor Relations Act? How can more existing unions help workers trying to form a union of their own?
3. How can we encourage and support further collaboration between unions and other worker advocacy groups?
4. How can we rekindle interest and experimentation in labor-management partnerships or other employee participation programs jointly sponsored by union and management leaders?
5. What lessons can we learn from ERGs in firms and other social movement groups about ways of mobilizing workers around racial and/or gender identities?
6. How can we broaden and deepen the development of the next generation of leaders of labor organizations and of the labor relations function in businesses?
7. How can we support discussion and analysis of a broad array of options for fixing and updating labor law and policies? How can we document the effects of administrative efforts to promote collective bargaining and high quality union-management relationships?
8. Finally, how can we build greater public understanding of what is going on?

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