

Employment Policy Foundation

Suite 1200 1015 Fifteenth Street, NW Washington, DC 20005 (202) 789-8685 Fax (202) 789-1708

NOT in file
Future Worker - Management

CONTACT: Bradley Cameron
Phone (202) 789-8685

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National Poll Shows What Public Wants From Labor Law Commission

**Most Important Issues Are
Less Government, More Cooperation, Alternatives to Litigation**

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Poll results released today by the Employment Policy Foundation show that the American public believes reducing litigation and government "red tape" in the workplace is the most important issue facing the President's Commission for the Future of Worker-Management Relations. The Commission, formed to recommend changes to the nation's major labor laws, holds its first hearing today.

The poll also indicates that the public's ideal vision of the future workplace includes more worker-management cooperation and greater employee involvement in workplace issues, but not necessarily under a government mandate. In fact, 75% oppose federally mandating any specific form of cooperative programs, such as labor-management committees.

The poll also shows the public to be generally satisfied with the current balance between organized labor and business. Only 17% believe that the Commission should focus on increasing protections against anti-union practices by businesses, and only 9% believe that the focus should be on making union representation easier.

When asked to assess the importance of four popular reasons given for the decline in union representation, ineffective union representation and workforce changes were regarded as "very" or "somewhat" important by 82% of the respondents.

Finally, a majority (51-43%) believe that the current law allowing employers to permanently replace strikers should be retained, with 69% believing that recent declines in strike activity have been good for the country.

The Employment Policy Foundation conducts in-depth research on the practical implications of employment policies being formulated by governmental agencies, Congress, and the Courts.

The national poll was conducted on May 8-10, 1993, by Penn + Schoen, a New York and Washington, D.C. national survey research firm which has performed similar studies for the AFL-CIO and its member unions. The telephone poll contacted a stratified, random sample of 1,003 Americans. The margin of error for the poll results is plus or minus 3.1%, with a confidence level rating of 95%. 25% of respondents belong to a union, which is about 9 percentage points above the actual representation of unions in today's workplace.

Most Important Issues

According to results of the poll, Americans would prefer the Commission examine ways to: (1) reduce government "red tape" to encourage companies to hire more people; (2) help employees and management increase workplace productivity, and; (3) promote ways employees and management can settle differences without going to court.

The Secretary of Labor has appointed a Commission to examine the future needs of the workplace. Please tell me which of the following issues you would prefer the Commission to examine:

- reduce "red tape" 25%
- increase productivity 23%
- settle differences without going to court 21%
- more protections against unfair labor practices 17%
- easier union representation 9%
- don't know 4%

Worker-Management Cooperation

The poll indicates that the public strongly supports increased cooperative efforts between workers and management over other workplace arrangements:

The following is a list of possible alternatives concerning the future of our basic labor laws. Please tell me which alternative you prefer.

- encourage cooperative programs 44%
- more authority to individual workers 19%
- no changes 17%
- strengthen union power 16%
- don't know 4%

Despite this finding, the public overwhelmingly rejects government mandated cooperative programs (75%). Among union members, 77% reject the concept of mandated programs:

Employee participation programs have become more common recently. Examples are work teams, labor-management committees, and quality circles. Should Congress mandate one type of participation program, such as labor-management committees, or should Congress not mandate?

- do not mandate 75%
- mandate 19%
- don't know 6%

Additionally, a large majority of the public (83%) believes workplace productivity and job satisfaction are increased through direct communication between employees and management, rather than through third-party representation. 82% of union members agree.

Speaking generally, if you and your coworkers figure out a way to do your job differently or better, would you prefer to:

- talk to management directly 83%
- communicate through a union 14%
- don't know 3%

A smaller majority (54%) do not believe unions are required in order to protect employee interests under employee participation programs. While 58% of non-union respondents believe unions are not required in this case, 53% of union members agree.

Speaking generally, do you think employee participation programs are only effective in protecting employee interests if a union represents employees?

- does not require union 54%
- requires union 37%
- don't know 9%

Alternatives To Litigation

With the growth of litigation over workplace disputes, the poll shows tremendous, broad support for resolving lawsuits through mediation and other alternatives to litigation.

In recent years there have been more lawsuits involving employment disputes. Do you think that alternatives to court proceedings, such as mediation, should be required before employment lawsuits go to court?

- favor alternatives 84%
- do not favor alternatives 11%
- don't know 6%

It is important to note that strong support for alternative dispute resolution is registered among union (88%) and non-union (84%) respondents, and among Republican (86%), Democrat (84%) and Independent (84%) respondents alike.

Making It Easier To Organize

When asked to comment on specific proposals which would make union organizing easier, a majority of Americans object to the proposals. Moreover, the poll suggests the public supports retention of the concept that unions with majority support in a given worksite should represent all employees.

Union organizers who are not employees are not always allowed to come on company property to talk to employees during normal working hours. Do you think that the law should be changed to make it easier for unions to contact employees on company grounds during normal working hours?

- don't change law 56%
- change law 41%
- don't know 3%

There are two ways to determine if a union has the support of a majority of employees. The first is a secret ballot that is supervised by the government. The second is to count employee signatures on cards or petitions that have been circulated by union supporters. Which is the better way?

- secret ballot 66%
- signatures 28%
- don't know 6%

In the place where you work, if there were an election by secret ballot among you and your coworkers, would you vote to form a union?

- no 48%
- yes 39%
- already have a union 5%
- don't know 8%

In the place where you work, if a majority of the employees chose one union and a minority of the employees preferred a different union, do you think the minority should be allowed to be represented by their own, separate union or should the majority union represent all?

- majority union only 58%
- allow minority union 33%
- don't know 9%

Union Decline

Union membership has declined from over 37% of the private sector workforce in 1953 to less than 12% today. The poll asked the public to evaluate the importance of four reasons frequently given for the decline of unions in the United States. Foremost is a belief both that unions no longer represent the interests of workers as well as they once did (82%), and that workforce changes have had an impact (82%). Union members agree with these conclusions by a majority of 79% and 82%, respectively.

Also by a significant majority, the public attributes the trend to the desire by employees to speak independently from unions (69%, 60% among union members). A majority (62%) also believes company pressure not to join unions is an important factor. However, when asked whether Congress should take action to "protect" labor unions, a majority of the public (58%) say enough protections already exist. Importantly, 43% of union members polled agree with the majority.

During the past three decades, the percentage of the workforce that has been represented by unions has declined. I am going to read you a list of reasons why this is so. For each one, I would like you to tell me if it is a very important reason why the workforce represented by unions has declined, a somewhat important reason, a somewhat unimportant reason, or not at all important reason.

	Important			
	very/somewhat		not very/not at all	
unions don't represent as well as before	50%	32%	7%	7%
workforce changes	48%	34%	7%	7%
employees would rather speak for themselves	39%	30%	12%	16%
employer pressure	26%	36%	14%	18%

Some people say we need the Congress to do more to protect labor unions. Other people say that unions have sufficient safeguards and Congress does not need to pass more legislation. Which comes closer to your view?

- enough now 58%
- should do more 38%
- don't know 5%

Striker Replacements

The poll found that a majority of Americans oppose passage of a federal law to prohibit permanent replacement of striking workers.

Do you favor a federal law that would prohibit employers from hiring permanent replacements for striking workers?

- no 51%
- yes 43%
- don't know 6%

The poll also found that, when the possibility of increased strike activity is raised in connection with the issue, a slightly larger majority opposes changes in the law, but a significantly larger majority believes the country benefits from fewer strikes.

Would you be willing to strengthen the right of employees to go out on strike if it meant there might be more strikes?

- no 53%
- yes 39%
- don't know 8%

The number of strikes has declined dramatically in recent years. Speaking generally, do you think this has been good for the country or not good?

- good 69%
- not good 24%
- don't know 4%
- no effect 3%

Other

A final question was asked regarding respondent preference between salaried and hourly wage employment with the following results:

Assuming that you would earn about the same income either way, would you rather be paid a fixed salary without overtime payments, or an hourly wage with a chance to occasionally earn time-and-a-half overtime?

- hourly wage 71%
- fixed salary 24%
- don't know 4%

For further polling information, including response data by category (e.g., union, non-union, geography, gender, political party, etc.), contact Bradley Cameron: (202) 789-8685.