



KITCHEN TABLE ECONOMICS

Unions: The Voice for Workers?

One of the common statements made about labor unions is that they provide workers with a “voice” in their workplace. The assumption is that workers without unions are uniquely lacking an ability or opportunity to stand up for their own self interest at work. Here are some facts about the American workplace:

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says that 93 percent of private sector jobs in America are held by people who don’t need a union to negotiate between them and their employer. Just 7 percent of all private sector jobs are union, and the number is decreasing each year.

Less than 10 percent of workers have ever chosen to have a unionized job site. Most votes to decide unionization of a jobsite were made many years or even decades before most current workers arrived. There are rarely any opportunities to give today’s employees a chance to re-evaluate decisions made long before they arrived by workers from a very different era.

The sacred right to vote a secret ballot without anyone else knowing how you voted is often not possible in union elections. According to the Center for Union facts, using data from the federal government’s National Labor Relations Board, almost 40 percent of the elections to create unionized job sites in 2009 were conducted without giving workers the right to vote a secret ballot.

Some want to make the practice of non-secret ballots far more common, with a proposal in Congress called “Card Check.”

Unions are far more common in government jobs: Nearly 40 percent union representation overall for all governments, and 45 percent for local government.

However, government workers in the most dangerous jobs of all - the U.S. armed forces - are not and never have been unionized.