

What is a Union?

According to the *American College Dictionary*, a union is:

1. act of uniting two or more things into one
2. something formed by uniting two or more things, a combination
3. a number of persons, societies, states, or the like, joined or associated together for some common purpose
4. the uniting of persons, parties, etc. in general agreement
5. a trade or labor union, or organization of workmen
6. a union is a state of being united, a combination, as the result of joining two or more things into one

Those are some of the definitions that the *American College Dictionary* gives. They give more examples, but we think you get the idea. We at CWA Local 4900 agree with their definitions, but also feel that a labor union goes a little further than the dictionary describes.

We believe that a labor union is somewhat like a family that supports, consoles and defends one another. While we may have disagreements within our family, we pull together to protect and defend against outside forces. In the following pages of this book, we would like to tell you more about your new family of union brothers and sisters.

History of CWA Local 4900

The time is 1947. American Telephone and Telegraph is battling the employees over having the right to be unionized. The old timers tell us about meetings after dark in groups of three. The company had hired spies, thugs, private detectives and the like. The company would do almost anything to prevent the employees from having rights in the workplace. Firings and layoffs were common throughout Indiana.

The National Federation of Telephone Workers, with a million dollar gift from the United Mine Workers, started a massive drive to unionize the telephone industry. The organizing drive gave birth to the Communications Workers of America.

In the early fifties, the union took shape in Indiana. After a successful strike in 1953, the Indiana CWA Locals began to take shape. The locals were formed around wire centers. As the wire centers began to merge, so did the locals.

Changes in the company, technology, laws and many other factors continued to change the structures of the locals.

CWA Local 4900 was formed in the early eighties. Several locals, realizing its future, would bring massive change to the industry merged together to form 4900. CWA Local 4900 continues to thrive, as the largest CWA local in Indiana, and one of the largest in our district.

The local represents members from several companies. Local union representatives are involved in many fields of representation. Safety, federal and state legislation, minority concerns, community service and many other activities are pursued by the local. The local provides due process for members.

The members are what Local 4900 is all about. Local 4900 will be involved in many endeavors to improve our members' employment security. Please contact your Steward for assistance.

Your Right to Union Representation by Law

Every union member has a right to Union representation by law under the Weingarten Act, established in 1975 by the United States Supreme Court.

The Weingarten Act simply states that anytime a union member is being questioned in any manner by management that may lead to disciplinary action, the employee has the right by law to ask for union representation.

The company then must do one of three things:

1. Halt questioning until a union Steward arrives;
2. Call off the interview; or
3. Tell the employee that the company will call off the interview unless the employee gives up their rights.

Always be sure to ask your manager if a meeting could lead to disciplinary action. If so, always request union representation;

Never Forget Your Right To Have Union Representation. A Union Member's Rights and Responsibilities

Each and every union member has the right to enjoy privileges union membership provides. A member has a voice in the every day functions and operations of the union. They also have the right to vote on contracts, elections and on other issues.

Although the union member enjoys privileges that the non-union worker doesn't, it by no means excuses a poor worker. Each and every member of this Local is expected to perform their job to the best of their ability, not only by their respective company, but also by CWA Local 4900.

This not only means your duties to the company, but also your obligations to your co-workers. It is expected of you to interact positively with your co-workers, as well as your managers. If you do experience a negative interaction with either, notify your department Union Steward. And remember, that while we may not all agree on everything, we are in this together for the betterment of all involved.

Why Do We Pay Union Dues?

Union dues and taxes are a lot alike, nobody likes to pay them. But let's examine some facts about both. Taxes provide roads, schools, police, military forces, courts, etc. The very things this nation could not function without.

Dues provide professionals to bargain new contracts; lawyers to argue arbitrations; Stewards and Officers to ensure fair treatment in the workplace, higher wages and better benefits.

In the United States, according to the 2006 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Union workers made thirty percent (30%) more on wages and substantially more in benefits than non-union workers.

That figured up to an eighteen dollar (\$18.00) return for every dollar spent on union dues. Not a bad return.

Hopefully this will help you understand why we pay dues.

The Contract

The duration of a CWA contract is normally three to five (3 to 5) years. It is important to familiarize yourself with the contract under which you are working. By doing so, you will understand what this contract covers and the benefits it provides.

A CWA contract normally covers working conditions, wages and benefits. You will find the language in our contracts is usually non-specific or ambiguous. In other words, there are a lot of gray areas. The reason for this is what works in one geographic area may not work for another geographic area. This leaves interpretation of an Article or Section open for local negotiation by union representatives.

When you have questions regarding working conditions, wages or benefits, you need to go to your local leadership for answers and/or interpretations.

Remember, as a union member under contract, you are guaranteed representation in any dispute, disagreement or disciplinary action with the company.

Code of Conduct Books

Each year or so, and for each new hire employee, the company asks, and at times almost insists, that each employee sign a *Code of Conduct* book.

The *Code of Conduct* book covers almost all conduct in which the company expects you to adhere. The problem is that the *Code of Conduct* book has been determined as a book that is too difficult to understand unless you are a lawyer.

We strongly suggest that you do not sign this book due to the fact that almost every time there is disciplinary action taken against an employee, these signed books are brought up to use against the employee by the company. All you have to do is use the disclaimer card statement enclosed with this packet if a manager insists that you sign a *Code of Conduct* book, then ask your Steward for advice. Your Steward will know what to do.

Local Structure

Local Officers, Area Representatives, Chief Stewards and their duties:

The Officers of this Local shall be:

1. President
2. Secretary-Treasurer
3. Division Vice Presidents

Duties of the President:

- The President shall preside at meetings of the Local and at meetings of the Local Executive Board and shall be responsible for the conduct of the Local including;
- The prosecution of grievances and appealing them to higher levels of the Union if not satisfactorily settled;
- The supervision of all Committees of the Local;
- The approval of all bills to be paid by the Local Secretary-Treasurer, to countersign checks drawn on the treasury of the Local and shall be bonded;
- Bargaining of contracts;
- Perform whatever additional duties as may be assigned by the Local required by the policies and Constitution of the Union.

Duties of the Secretary-Treasurer:

- The Secretary-Treasurer shall maintain a record of the Local Membership and keep minutes of all Local meetings and meetings of the Local Executive Board;
- The Secretary-Treasurer shall cause the payment of all bills approved by the President;
- The Secretary-Treasurer shall perform such duties as may be assigned by the Local, the Local Executive Board, or the Local President.

Division Vice Presidents and their duties:

- The Division Vice Presidents shall direct and assist the Area Representatives of their respective Divisions;
- The Division Vice Presidents shall perform such other duties as may be assigned by the Local Executive Board or the Local President;
- The Division Vice Presidents shall be responsible for all work locations within his/her division.

Area Representatives and their duties:

- The Area Representatives shall work under the direction of the Division Vice Presidents and shall perform such other duties as may be assigned by the Local, the Local Executive Board, or the Local President;
- The Area Representatives shall preside at meetings of their respective Areas.

Chief Stewards and their duties:

- The Chief Stewards shall be elected from their respective groups if requested by a Member. The Area Representatives may appoint Chief Stewards if an election is not requested.
- The Chief Stewards shall work under the direction of the Area Representative of their respective Area. They shall perform such duties and responsibilities as may be assigned by their Area Representative.

Stewards and their duties:

- The Stewards shall be elected from their respective groups if requested by a Member. The Area Representatives may appoint Stewards if an election is not requested;
- The Stewards shall work under the direction of the Area Representative of their respective Area. They shall perform such duties and responsibilities as may be assigned by their Area Representative.

What Do Stewards Do?

The role of the Stewards vary in different areas. In some areas, they deal with management to settle disputes, handle grievances, and other important duties, while in other areas, they do just what every Steward does, and that is to be the eyes and ears of the Local. Without input from the Stewards on the job site, the Local would not be able to effectively represent the membership. You perhaps might say that the Stewards are the most important people in this Local, and that just might be true.

Grievances What, How and Why

A grievance is very much like a lawsuit that you file in City, County, State or Federal Court. It is handled internally between the union and the company, with the exception of when the two reach an impasse after exhausting a three step process. When an impasse happens, there are two options available, depending on the situation and to what both sides agree upon. One option is mediation, where usually both sides give a little to reach an agreement. The other option is arbitration, where an impartial arbitrator makes a decision that is legally binding.

Why do we file grievances? For several reasons, but the main reason is to ensure that all union workers are treated fairly and equally. Grievances are also used to prove to the company how the employees feel, or to prove they are being treated unfairly or to address an alleged contract violation.

When you feel that you have been unjustly treated, or you feel the contract between the union and the company has been violated, then talk to your Steward. They are trained to help you receive the justice that you deserve.

Do not take your grievance to the manager
directly, see your steward!

Committees

1. **Education Committee:** The Education Committee shall assist in developing the Local's Educational program and with the Local Officers, be responsible for effectuating the Union's and the Local's educational program.
2. **Election Committee:** The Election Committee shall conduct all nominations, elections and referenda of this Local.
3. **Organizing Committee:** The Organizing Committee of Local 4900 has the purpose of promoting social justice for all working people. In addition to AT&T, Local 4900 represents a catering company, an alarm company, an independent telephone company and other telecommunications related companies.

The Committee helps educate unorganized workers to the benefits available to them through their membership in CWA. The Committee has support for organizing campaigns from the District 4 Organizing Department. Educational opportunities are available for those interested.

There are also opportunities for individual members to actively participate in organizing campaigns by helping to house visit prospective union members on an individual basis to explain the benefits of being a union member.

4. **Legislative Committee:** The Legislative-Political Committee shall assist in developing and pursuing the programs of the Union and the Local in the legislative field. It shall be responsible for the Local's program to register each qualified voter. The company annually spends far more than the union on political contributions. Consequently, more and more legislation is being passed that is obviously anti-labor. The union's greatest ally is COPE contributions. Your COPE dollars are used as contributions to candidates who are friendly to labor and labor issues. They are used to help inform the public of labor issues and the candidates who support them. All union members are encouraged to participate in COPE and the legislative process. Quorum members are those who contribute \$10 per month and Platinum quorum members contribute \$20 per month. Signing a COPE card is an easy way to be active and show your concern. For further information, please contact your Area Representative.
5. **Membership Committee:** The Membership Committee or Membership Committees shall accept or reject membership applications in accordance with the Bylaws and Rules of the Local and the Constitution and policies of the Union.
6. **Community Services Committee:** The Community Services Committee shall assist the Executive Board in establishing a program of Community involvement to assure Local awareness of Community needs.
7. **Finance Committee:** The Finance Committee shall audit the financial records of the local and make a written report quarterly to the Local. The Committee shall perform any other financial duties assigned by the President.
8. **Building Committee:** The Building Committee shall manage and control under the direction of the Executive Board of the Local, all real estate which the Local acquires for use as a Local Headquarters or for furtherance of any legitimate object of the Local.
9. **Activities Committee:** The Activities Committee shall coordinate social and other activities of the Local in conjunction with all other Committees.
10. **Safety Committee:** The Health and Safety Committee consists of as many members as needed to be able to carry out their mission in covering the different areas and businesses we represent. Our mission is to move information, news, training updates, etc. to our members in a timely manner; to research and implement on-going needs and training as new issues develop with our members; to identify specific needs in environmental health and safety in the businesses, areas and technologies we represent; to ensure that our members have a safe and healthy environment in which to work.
11. **Womens Committee:** The Womens Committee shall work in the area of special concerns for women in the Local membership and assist in developing and sustaining a local program to educate and address issues specific to women.
12. **Equity Committee:** The Equity Committee shall work in the area of special concerns for minorities in the Local membership and assist in developing and sustaining a local program to ensure equality to all members.

Bargaining a Contract, Strikes and Scabs

Every unionized company must bargain a contract with the union as to what wages, benefits and working conditions will be during the duration of that contract. (Your contract book will tell you how long your contract is bargained for). At the expiration date of the contract, different things can happen. The union can continue to work without a contract, the present contract can be extended, or a strike against the company can be called.

If a strike is called, then all members are expected to honor the picket lines and strike along side their fellow members. Those members, and we most certainly hope there are none, that do not honor the picket lines and who report to work are called scabs. The end result of crossing a picket line is something that an individual carries with them for a lifetime. Being an outcast, not trusted, not being an intricate part of an organization that depends upon the support of each of us for the other, these are just a few of many issues to be considered. Your local union functions on the trust and dependability of one another, one should give much thought before breaching that trust.

If, during a strike, you experience financial difficulties, contact your union steward or the union hall and you will be provided assistance.

Final Thought

The days of the so called "union goon" have long faded into the past.

Today's union members, especially the active ones, are dependable, professional, informed and well educated. They are active in their communities and diverse in their interests.

In the past, union members were frequently depicted as people who would wear a size 50 jacket and a size 2 hat. In other words, all brawn and no brains. But in today's environment, it takes people who are educated, dedicated and prepared to move the union in a positive and progressive direction. These are people who will grow a strong democratic union. This depicts the unionist of today and in the future.

Unions are a definite asset to business, large or small. Businesses who have union employees are considerably more productive, are more quality conscious, and provide the employer with a workforce that has very little turnover. Due to collective bargaining and benefits that result, absence and disabilities are much less of an issue than in non-union businesses.

Once the union and the employer learn to work together, the stability of the business itself and the resultant job security are greatly enhanced.