

Organized Labor and the National Labor Relations Act

The Industrial Revolution led to the development of a large collective labor force. Prior to the emergence of manufacturing and mass production, labor was spread out and disorganized. Factories pulled large numbers of laborers together in central locations, leading to the natural development of organized labor movements.

Wages and working conditions were the primary target of the first labor movements. Starting in the very early 1800s, wage cases began moving through the courts. Victory built upon victory over the next 100 years, including legalization of labor unions and strikes. Congress followed court decisions with a string of federal acts aimed at supporting the labor union effort.

The NLRA was enacted in 1935. This landmark legislation consolidated and defined national labor policy by granting employers and employees certain rights, defining illegal practices, and establishing the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) as the administrative agency responsible for oversight and enforcement.

[NLRB.gov](#)



The NLRB was created as part of the NLRA. Union activities, such as the recruitment of union members pictured above, fell under the jurisdiction of the NLRB.

Review the following link to learn more.

[Our History](#) A small blue square icon with an external link symbol (an open square with a line), indicating a link to another website.

The NLRA provided basic organizing rights to employees. Unfair labor practices by employers were identified, which included interfering with labor organizations, influencing labor unions, discriminating against union members, and refusing to bargain with a legal bargaining representative.

Enactment of the NLRA was followed by a decade of union strengthening. The concept of a “closed shop” (meaning a business will only hire union members) emerged. Numerous strikes, some leading to crippling economic shutdowns, convinced the public and Congress that unions were gaining too much power. Corruption in unions became a problem.

Closed shops were banned in 1946 with the Taft–Hartley Act. Multiple amendments to the NLRA in response to union abuses pulled back the power of unions in order to control the nation’s economy.

Today’s version of the NLRA and current activities of the NLRB bring more balance to the labor versus employer relationship.



Additional Materials

From your course textbook, *Employment and Labor Law*, read the following chapters:

- The Rise of Organized Labor and Its Regulatory Framework
- The Unionization Process

From the South University Online Library, read the following article:

- Who's the Boss? 



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