

**Houston Area
Model United Nations
Specialized Committee**



ILO

**Chair | Achal Kulkarni
Specialized Committee Background Guide
Houston Area Model United Nations 47
January 27-28, 2022**

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Note to Delegates

Delegates,

Welcome to the 47th annual Houston Area Model United Nations conference! My name is Achal Kulkarni, and I am beyond excited to serve as your chair for the International Labor Organization (ILO) this year.

Currently, I am a senior at the University of Texas at Dallas majoring in Global Business with a concentration in International Political Economy, and minoring in Economics. At UT Dallas, I serve as the President of the Model United Nations organization, and am an Alpha Kappa Psi brother. Outside of my academics, I enjoy trying different cuisines, keeping up to date with the current events, and buying candles.

I have been involved with MUN since my junior year of high school, where I first participated as a delegate at CTMUN and absolutely loved it. Since then, MUN has given me the opportunity to compete in cities like Seattle, Portland, and New York. I always get excited to see other university students share the same passion I do every year.

We will address two topics this session: 1) Wealth Inequality and 2) The Rights and Powers of Workers' Unions. Both of which have been greatly impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. I know that this committee will work extremely hard to develop a well-rounded understanding of the impact these topics have on the international community. I look forward to seeing what you all accomplish and bring to the table.

See you soon delegates!

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Background Information

As the only tripartite United Nations (UN) agency, the International Labour Organization has brought together governments, employers and workers of 187 Member States since 1919. It aims to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all men and women.

The original Constitution of the ILO was composed of representatives of nine countries: Belgium, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, Japan, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The main driving forces for the creation of the ILO came from security, humanitarian, political and economic considerations. The founders of the ILO recognized the importance of social justice in securing peace, against a background of the exploitation of workers in the industrializing nations during that time.

The ILO accomplishes its work through three main bodies, composed of government, employers, and workers' representatives. The International Labour Conference sets the international labour standards and the overarching policies of the ILO. Meeting annually in Geneva, Switzerland, the Conference is a forum of discussion for key social and labour questions. The Governing Body is the executive council of the ILO. Meeting three times annually in Geneva, it takes decisions on overall ILO policy and establishes the programme and budget, where after it is submitted to the Conference for adoption. The International Labour Office serves as the permanent secretariat of the ILO. As the primary point for the ILO's overall activities, it prepares under the scrutiny of the Governing Body and under the leadership of the Director-General.

Today, the ILO works toward the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda; employment creation, social protection, rights and work, and social dialogue have become integral parts of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 8 of the Agenda calls for the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work.

Topic Concept

Globally, inequality has increased approximately with 62 of the world's richest individuals owning as much as half of the world's population in 2015. Businesses have a fundamental role and responsibility to respect human rights of the groups influenced by operations. The UN Sustainable Development Goals call on businesses to help achieve the vision of fair, equitable sustainable development by ensuring no group in society is excluded from accessing opportunities for individuals and their families.

Economic inequality, also known as wealth inequality, can be measured using the distribution of income and the distribution of wealth. Though this type of inequality is not always determined simply by the amount of money an individual makes, but can be attributed to external factors such as ethnic background, disabilities, gender, geographic location, and others. In the past 25 years, this income inequality has improved between countries, meaning the average incomes in developing countries are increasing at a faster rate. Though the gap is still considerable. For example, the average income of people living in North America is 16 times higher than that of those in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is safe to say that inequalities between countries have overall improved, but within countries they have gotten worse. Today, 71 percent of the global population live in countries where inequalities have increased.

The History of Trade Unions

A trade union is an organization of workers who have come together to achieve a common goal, such as protecting the integrity of a trade, improving safety regulations, or others. The origin of labor unions date back to the 18th century and the industrial revolution in Europe, though when introduced in America, they played an important role towards independence. Although physical efforts for the cause of independence were ineffective, the ideas they introduced, such as protection for workers, became a part of American culture.

In many other countries, trade unionism is synonymous with a labor movement. Smaller associations of workers started appearing in Britain in the 18th century, but they remained sporadic and short-lived, in part due to the hostility from employers and government groups, as they resented this neo form of political and economic activism. The founding of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) by several unions of skilled workers in 1886 marked the beginning of a continuous large-scale labor movement in the United States. Its member groups comprised national trade or craft unions that organized local unions and negotiated wages, hours, and working conditions.



Figure 1. The State of Global Trade Union Membership, Forbes

In the 20th century, craft unions lost to industrial unions - these groups believed that unskilled workers were unsuitable for union organization. In 1935, the AFL opposed attempts to organize the unskilled and ultimately expelled a small group of member unions - this would later become the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). These two organizations would later merge to become what is now known as the AFL-CIO, one of the biggest in the world with 57 democratically governed unions.

The Fall of Trade Unions

Unionization levels across the world reached their peak during the 1970s. Private sector union membership started its steady decline still seen today, whereas membership in public sector unions are seeing more growth. But overall, the numbers in unions have fallen - the exploitation of workers and unions in the name of economic development and growth has increased. Rights such as the access to adequate healthcare coverage in the workplace, equal pay, and safe working conditions caused a decline in the growth rate of the market globally, as it was now the free market's place to decide.

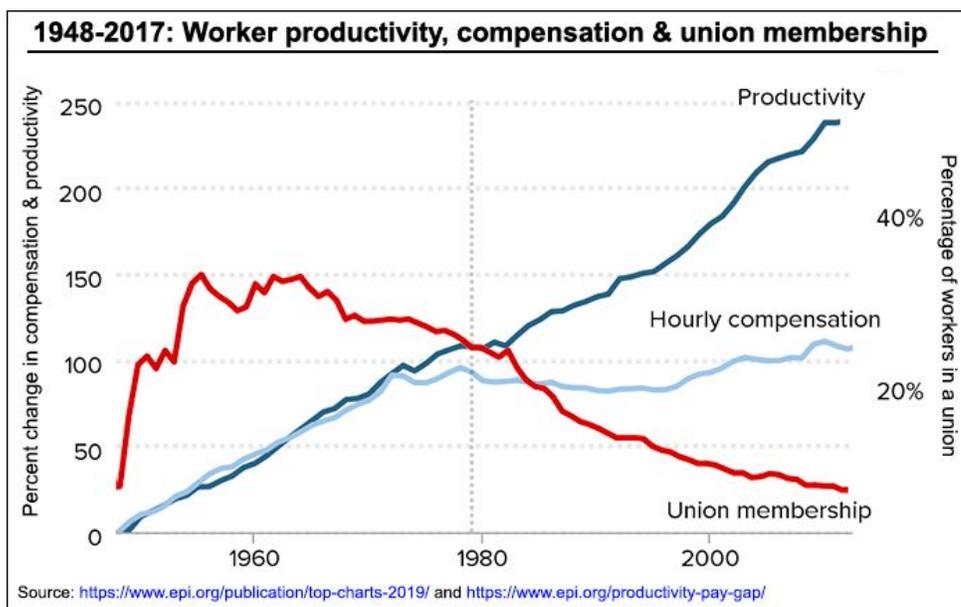


Figure 2. Economic Policy Institute: Worker Productivity, Compensation, & Union Membership

With fewer unions, workers' productivity gains which had previously been compensated instead were pocketed by owners. Illustrated is the relationship between union density and the percentage of national income going to the richest 10 percent of Americans. The larger the share of the American workforce that's unionized, the lower the share of national income goes to the richest segment of the population - and this is applicable in several other developed countries, such as the United Kingdom.

Case Studies: Trade Unions in a Modern World

Although overall participation in trade unions has fallen over the past few decades, there are still a number of influential international unions.

The All-China Federation

The union is by far the world's largest, with approximately 190 million members. The ACFTU was considered a revolutionary organization upon its founding in 1925. After Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, the ACFTU was banned again. Today, the organization is backed by Beijing, though with complexities. The government introduced new labor laws in 2008, requiring international companies to create in-house committees for workers to consult with management.

Confédération Générale du Travail

In 2006, then-Prime Minister of France Dominique de Villepin announced plans to reform the country's labor laws to create flexible working contracts for young people - resistance from unions were expected as they shaped the country's labor policies for the previous decades. Though violent street protests ensued and took the French government by surprise. Union leaders in France have done well to support an image as popular revolutionaries, representative of the storming of the Bastille. Today, the country sees lower membership rates hovering around 8 percent, compared to the United Kingdom's 30 percent.

Egyptian Trade Union Fed.

On January 30th, 2011, members of the state-run Egyptian Trade Union Federation met in Tahrir Square in Cairo, the stage for the later overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's government. Four unions signed a new declaration creating the Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions, ending state control and creating a powerful new force for change in the early stages of the country's uprising. After the president's resignation, unions continued to lobby for labor reform, workers and human rights, and played an important role in the post-Mubarak era.

Future ILO Initiatives

The ILO has curated a set of policy proposals to address inequality at the root. These policies call for the: promotion of job creation, fiscal redistribution through taxes, collective bargaining, sustainable minimum wages and attention to disadvantaged groups of union workers. It is imperative that the ILO focus on strengthening corporate responsibility, supporting national structures of tackling wealth inequality, prevention of corruption through financial power and institutions, and strengthening the protection of workers' rights.

Questions to Consider

1. Are there ways for Member States to inhibit economic equalities from initially existing?
2. To what extent does the burden of wealth inequality fall on multinational corporations? National governments?
3. How have coups/uprisings/acts against governmental bodies aided unions from achieving varying demands on rights? How have they inhibited progress?

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