

## The Resurgence of Labor's Biggest Threat – The Strike

*What does the resurgence of labor's large-scale strike tactics mean for your organization?*

After years of relative stagnation, and despite regulatory and legal setbacks, union activity is ramping up nationwide. Unions have either held large-scale strikes or protests or are threatening them to gain leverage in negotiations. Have you noticed more union strike activity lately? Do these recent union-driven events ring a bell?

- In 2018 and 2019, thousands of teachers from both traditional and charter schools held strikes in nearly a dozen states and the District of Columbia. Some of the biggest walkouts occurred in California and Illinois.
- On September 16, 2019, nearly 50,000 members of the United Auto Workers went on strike against General Motors for the first time in 10 years over plant closures, pay and benefits.
- On September 20, 2019, nearly 9,000 nurses belonging to National Nurses United staged a one-day strike and walked out on their jobs and their patients in California, Arizona, Florida and Illinois, prompted by what they felt were stalled negotiations on new and successor labor contracts with their employers.
- The ongoing fight that began with a walkout of fast food employees in New York City and has spread globally as the Fight for \$15 movement, which focuses on wages and union rights?

Those organizations aren't even unionized, but the events still brought unwanted labor strife and attention to those companies. And the union strike threat doesn't stop there:

- Next month, unions representing workers at Kaiser Permanente are planning a week-long strike in six states and the District of Columbia for 80,000 hospital workers if talks about the company's labor practices fail. If it happens as planned, the strike would be the largest since 185,000 Teamsters walked out at United Parcel Service in 1997.
- Approximately 47,000 workers from over 500 Southern California grocery stores are preparing for a possible strike as early as October – the first since 2003 – if contract negotiations break down.

And what about:

- The walkouts against ride share companies like Lyft and Uber in eight cities that happened earlier this year over wages and working conditions?
- The various employee activism efforts at Google, largely focused on non-traditional issues like contracts with the military and search in China?

Is your organization able to handle a threat like this? How prepared are you to protect your organization and its reputation?

## WHY IS THIS HAPPENING NOW?

According to the latest statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, union membership in the private sector stands at 6.4%, nearly half of what it was in the 1980s. Although unions have seen some recent and unexpected membership gains, the general membership trend is a negative one.

As big businesses and political entities, unions are fighting for their very lives. Strikes represent a union's most powerful leverage before and during labor negotiations. Unions use strikes to motivate their membership, to remain in the public eye, and to try to remain relevant. Unfortunately, the threat of a strike is one of the most destructive elements of the management-labor relationship.

The resurgence of large-scale, high-profile events like strikes means your organization needs to make the necessary investments to ensure you are both nimble and prepared for labor organization efforts, particularly if you operate in a union environment. The bottom line: *Unless you are ready, you are already behind.*

## STRIKE CONTINGENCY PLANNING – HOW CAN YOU PREPARE?

Consider taking these basic steps to strengthen your negotiating position and evaluate your organization's strike readiness:

- Assess the current labor environment and collaboratively identify and recommend bargaining objectives that may better align the collective bargaining agreement(s) with your organization's strategic objectives.
- Develop and help implement a comprehensive internal and external communications campaign to help explain the compelling case for change before, during and after negotiations.
- Identify your organization's vulnerabilities to corporate campaign pressures and help prepare wedge-issue messaging, including having a dedicated internal Marcom staffer or external contractor regularly monitor the internet, social media pages, and groups within the public domain for potential issues.
- Train the management team to communicate legally and effectively with employees and other internal and external stakeholders about the status of negotiations.
- Guide a multi-disciplinary team of leaders through the comprehensive strike contingency planning process.

If you're operating in a unionized environment, you need the right tools to manage your organization's workforce and reputation while remaining agile and cost-competitive. Conducting labor negotiations and crafting contracts that balance organizational imperatives and employee interests requires experience, expertise and skill. But the ROI will contribute to developing and maintaining a productive and positive relationship with your workforce.



Unions are on the rise...working people are just getting started.”

– Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO