SELECTED REFERENCES

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SECTION

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LABOR RELATIONS IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY**

1. Overview


In this comprehensive economic analysis of the performing arts industry, Bowen and Baumol found that the cost of maintaining the arts will continue to increase because it is a craft which is by its nature economically "inefficient." In regard to labor relations in the arts, the authors conclude that the major problem of this industry is the fact that live human performance is a product whose cost rises both relatively and absolutely. The performing arts industry has little room for labor saving innovations since the end product is the labor of the performer.


This survey explores the characteristics and problems of today's performing artists. It is broadly divided into discussions of employment, earnings, and organization and is supported by multiple statistical tables. This study reports that despite the persistent problems of underemployment and unemployment, unions have improved working conditions for artists. A related title issued by the AFL-CIO in 1981 is A survey of employment, underemployment and unemployment in the performing arts by Ruttenberg et al.


This basic reference book in the labor field offers an excellent historical overview of more than two hundred trade unions since 1886. Specifically,

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** Items from this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.
sketches are provided for six entertainment industry unions including the Associated Actors and Artists of America, Actors Equity Association, American Federation of Musicians, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, and the American Guild of Musical Artists. Fink briefly discusses the nature and composition of these unions and also the circumstances surrounding their formation and development. A related reference work focusing on the biographies of trade union figures is Biographical Dictionary of American Labor, also edited by Gary Fink (Greenwood Press, 1984). An up-to-date directory of trade unions in the United States, published annually, is the Directory of U.S. Labor Organizations (Bureau of National Affairs, Washington, DC 20037).


This article “describes in detail the progress made by a number of labour and management organizations in entertainment and the outlook for future multi-national collective bargaining activity in the industry.” In view of the fact that the entertainment industry is characterized by a large number of different unions, individual bargaining, predominance of free lance, and short-term employment, it is surprising that international union cooperation has emerged in this field.


The entertainment industry is rich in labor and collective bargaining history and has some of the oldest and most sophisticated unions and bargaining relationships in this nation. Some of the factors which have contributed to making the labor-management relationship contentions are highlighted by David Tajgman in the introduction to this issue. He discusses such fundamental issues as income distribution, work preservation and creation, and work rule formulation. Among the important considerations he cites are the industry’s market structure, the quality of its workforce, and the character of its labor organization. These issues Mr. Tajgman explains by the changing technology and management, employee, and union demands. Other articles review current labor developments in television broadcasting, motion picture production and distribution, and the live performing arts. Also examined are labor relations in the cable and disc industry and the controversial issue of copyright law in the context of the newly emerging technologies.

2. The Performing Arts

Relatively little research has been done on the subject of labor relations in the performing arts. This study surveys the current status of labor relations in theatre, symphony, dance and opera and identifies areas of future concern. In addition to discussing the often publicized negotiation of collective bargaining contracts, the author also examines the relationship between unions and employees, recruitment and hiring policies, and the background of employee organizations. Seven areas are recommended for further study. These include a study of the implications of unions representing employees working in more than one sector of the performing arts, a study of the economic impact of work rules and jurisdictional lines, and a study of the implications of technical innovation. An essay by Michael Moskow on this topic entitled "The Performing Arts" appears in Emerging Sectors of Collective Bargaining published in 1970 by D. H. Mark Publishing Company.


The performing arts business today is thriving. Ticket prices for the ballet, symphony, opera, and theatre are being sold at premium prices. In this "new found wealth," the author points out that unionized artists and crafts people are bargaining for their share of the profits as they negotiate pay scales, work rules, and subsidiary rights. However the author comments that "more pay for some often means fewer jobs available for all." Furthermore, as ticket prices go up the author also raises the question of whether unions risk pricing their members out-of-business? The author also examines recent labor relations events involving several of the performing arts unions.

3. MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY


It is a well known fact that the supply of actors has always been greater than the demand. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) reports that 85% of their membership is unemployed at any one time. Cantor and Peters examine the economic issues of employment and unemployment of screen actors who are members of SAG. Specifically, the authors consider what can be learned about the employment of actors from union records and conclude that the SAG records reflect neither the trends nor the conditions in the actor labor market. In fact, "through its commitment to open membership" and by allowing producers and directors to choose who is qualified for the roles available, SAG helps perpetuate a system in which the majority of its membership does not work. The authors recommend that further study be conducted to examine how actors employment and unemployment patterns will change in response to technological developments.

This article reports on the impact of “hard times” in Hollywood and the bargaining concessions expected between the entertainment industry unions and film makers. Despite some outstanding box office successes, unemployment among the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) stands at about 60%. This and other problems are causing internal conflicts in some entertainment unions. Some actors are advocating the merger of the two large unions, the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, in hopes of strengthening their bargaining power. It is presently uncertain how far film producers might provoke the unions, but one IATSE local president predicts “revolutionary” contract changes due to “the economy, unemployment, and new technologies.”

4. MUSICIANS


This handbook offers a review of how the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), one of the largest talent unions, has developed and how it operates in relation to other art industry unions and employers. According to the author there is presently a gap between the union’s leadership and the typical working musicians which explains why this union is losing membership in the 1980s. One of the major problems identified is the difficulty in administering the AFM organization of its large number of locals. The author suggests that “to survive” the union should consolidate its locals, provide services to its younger union members, reconsider work dues collection, extend minority representation on the unions executive board, and work with the new emerging technology.


Individuals involved in the entertainment industry are represented by a large number of organizations which include trade unions, guilds, and associations of independent contractors. This essay describes and discusses six such organizations: the American Federation of Musicians, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the American Guild of Musical Artists, the Actors Equity Association, International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees, and the Screen Actors Guild.