THE SINGLE-FIRM INDEPENDENT UNION**

1. General Discussions and Opinions


According to this expression of opinion, the great majority of single-firm unions exist because “they serve the purpose of their employer as buffers against legitimate labor organization.” The article goes on to criticize many aspects of the independents and to suggest that they harm non-members as well as members by permitting employers to use independent union “bargaining” to undercut industry negotiations. Hope is expressed that independents will soon see the error of their ways and recognize that “there is no substitute for strong, effective unionism.”


A “prominent industrial relations executive” offers a series of eleven arguments for the single-firm independent union. While conceding that there are arguments in favor of “combines of unions,” the author suggests that the single-firm union offers a better solution to the problem of intelligent representation than does the international-type organization. The specter of racketeering and other union faults are said to encourage new interest among workers in a “form of unionism over which they have direct and immediate control.”


The first general study of the single-firm union published in the last thirty-five years, Based on a field study of over forty blue- and white-collar organizations, the discussion ranges back to the 1900’s, focuses closely on the contemporary scene, and ventures several predictions.

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** Items from this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.

Argues that the independence of single-firm unions primarily reflects a belief that wage rates can be maximized by localized bargaining. Particular attention is paid to the nature of the conflict between single-firm unions and the international organizations, and the roots of the conflict are traced to differences in interpretation of the purposes and techniques of collective bargaining. The resulting "competition between labor organizations, like competition in product markets, ought to benefit the consumer—in this instance, the worker."


Challenges the view that single-firm unions are actually disguised company unions. Basing the challenge on legal and economic criteria rather than on field research, the author designs tests of legitimacy that support his contention that single-firm unions are bona fide and viable. An examination of NLRB statistics also leads to the conclusion that single-firm unions can compete with international union rivals, although the legal developments necessary to insure the dominance of single-firm unions over international unions are judged "neither likely nor desirable."

Also of interest is the exchange of views between Professor Philip Taft of Brown University and Professor Troy which appeared in the October, 1961 issue of the Industrial and Labor Relations Review, pages 102-119. In this correspondence Taft challenges the description of the independent single-firm union given in the above article and outlines different criteria which suggest that these organizations are less virile than affiliated unions. He also disagrees that competition among unions for members is a desirable situation. In his reply, Troy further defends the position taken in his article.

2. Independent Unions of Production Workers


An account of how and why single-firm independent unions formed the National Federation of Telephone Workers in 1939 and later converted this association into an international union. Especially valuable is the writer's account of the positive benefits of membership in company unions, "benefits almost always overlooked in the sweeping criticism common today." Equally valuable is the account of the decline of a once-powerful association of independents.

While basically a case study of the failure of a Teamsters' Union raid, this article also explores various reasons for the continued dominance of the petroleum refining industry by independent unions. Based in part on field research, it sheds light on the intricacies of inter-union rivalry, especially as that rivalry shapes the format and fate of independent unions. On balance, the study concludes that a harassed independent at the largest refinery in the country (Esso at Baton Rouge) is secure in the favor of most of its members and of key management personnel.


A general study of the packinghouse worker, this sweeping factual report includes a case study of a Kansas City local of a major single-firm independent union. Especially valuable is the comparison of such a local with two rival locals of different international unions. The single-firm union proves an able competitor, although the writer calls on the union to "become more of a typical trade union even though independent."


After a year and a half of living in stockyard communities, the author felt ready to discuss patterns in attitudes towards, and opinions about, labor unions of packinghouse employees. One of these unions was a major single-firm organization, the National Brotherhood of Packinghouse Workers. Its origin in an employee representation plan receives close scrutiny, especially as the existence of the plan affected the later course of union-management relations throughout the industry.


This examination of inter-union rivalry focuses on the one industry in which single-firm unions numerically outstrip the internationals by a considerable margin. In chemicals, experience demonstrates the ability of single-firm unions to successfully repulse and to profit from concerted attempts to induce them to affiliate with major international unions. It is significant, however, that fragmentation of worker organization in the industry has "resulted in a weakening of the bargaining strength of all, both individually and collectively."
3. White-Collar Independent Unions


A sociologist examines the perspective from which professional employees view their union and contends that unionized professionals have a unique definition of important features of trade unionism. This definition reflects middle-class values and interests and helps to explain why single- and multi-firm unions of engineers represent an amalgam of elements of the professional society and the trade union.


On the basis of interviews with research scientists, engineers, and managers in nine establishments, the author analyzes relations between professional employees, the professions to which they belong, and the organizations for which they work. Chapter IV includes a general discussion of the problems and decline of single- and multi-firm unions of engineers. While an enlarged role in employee relations for professional societies is predicted, the conclusion is that "the balance of power remains strongly in favor of management."


A management spokesman recounts the rise and fall of a single-firm union of engineers at the Western Electric Company. Bitter union-management relations are traced and explained, as are also recent company efforts to improve its engineering personnel relations. The writer concludes that "Engineering unionism and true professionalism are incompatible. Engineering unionism is detrimental to the interests both of the engineers and of the Company."

Walton, Richard E. *The impact of the professional engineering union;* a study of collective bargaining among engineers and scientists and its significance for management. Boston 63, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University (Soldiers Field), 1961. 419 pp. $5.00.

A field report on the experiences of eleven companies in which professional engineers have organized single- or multi-firm independent unions. An introductory chapter covers the history of such unionism and develops provocative insights into the sociological and psychological makeup of the organizations. Other chapters focus on the impact of the unions on salary structure, discipline, discharge, and related issues. The book concludes with a plea for "research into, innovation of, and experimentation with a variety of employee organizational forms."