

## **Fact Sheet: Strikes & Unions**

### **About strikes**

- A strike is a work stoppage caused by the mass refusal of employees to work. During a strike, the employees get together and decide to stop working (and stop getting paid) as a way to demand what they view as fair pay and working conditions.
- When strikes happen in private companies, they usually reflect competing interests of workers and the corporation they work for. The corporation wants to maximize profits, which it believes it can do by reducing workers' wages and benefits. Workers want to maintain or improve pay and benefits.
- Strikes are very uncommon in the U.S. these days, because many workers are afraid of losing their jobs. It's especially unusual for low-wage workers to strike. The turnover in these jobs is so high, in the past most workers moved on to a new job instead of demanding better pay and working conditions or a union.

### **About unions**

- A union is an organized group of workers who come together to make decisions about the conditions of their work and to maintain or improve their wages, work hours, benefits, workplace health and safety, and other work-related conditions.
- Many of the benefits and protections workers do have today (like the minimum wage, an eight hour day, and weekends) are in place because workers and their unions fought for them.
- Under U.S. law, workers of all ages have the right to join a union. However, in practice, employers often make it very difficult. Sometimes they fire people who are trying to organize, or they use their money and power to intimidate workers who are trying to organize. Also, employers finance political candidates who, when elected, pass laws to make organizing harder.
- For these and other reasons, union membership has been dropping in the U.S. for many decades. The "labor movement" has been in decline. Workers' wages have stagnated, and benefits have been cut.
- A new wave of creative organizing by low-wage workers, including many immigrants, is now underway, and it is beginning to change the labor movement. Fast food workers, domestic workers, restaurant workers, and taxi cab drivers are all trying out new ways of organizing and protesting. On November 23, 2012, workers at WalMart organized protests at 1,000 stores in 46 states. WalMart is the largest private employer in the U.S.