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What changes when a trade union organization is established at a workplace?

Workers' Initiative

16 May 2022

In most companies and institutions in Poland there are no labor organizations in place. That means many employees are not aware of how forming a labor union can change their working conditions.

Here are 10 matters, that can change at your workplace when a labor union is formed:

1. The union can control dismissals.

The employer is required to consult any disciplinary dismissals and/or terminations with the union. He is also required to start negotiations with the union, if the employer wants to make collective redundancies.

2. The union has influence on work organization and remuneration rules.

The employer is required to consult on any changes in work regulations, which determine working hours, settlement periods, disciplinary actions and so on. Without the union's approval, the

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employer also can't change remuneration rules and rules related to bonuses.

3. The union has control over social funds

After the creation of the labor union, the composition of the Social Committee changes. A union representative must be on the Committee. The employer is also required to take the opinion of the union regarding expenses from the Social Fund into account. Without the union's consent, the employer can't abolish the Social Fund (in case there's no union at the workplace, the employer can abolish the Fund at any time).

4. The union has the right to information on the state of affairs within the workplace

The union has the right to request information on wage levels, number of employees, financial situation, etc. Thus, the employees gain more knowledge on the workplace's situation and can demand changes for the better.

5. The union can intervene in individual cases.

The labor union has the opportunity to submit to the employer various applications, inquiries and letters regarding particular persons – problems with discrimination, disciplinary actions, working conditions and the amount of remuneration. The union can also represent its members in the labor court.

6. The union can work towards changes at the workplace.

Labor unions can make demands regarding wage levels, work organization, work time, etc. They also have the right to enter into a collective dispute, within which a strike can be organized. It is a very powerful and effective tool for putting pressure on employers.

7. The union can control compliance with occupational safety and health regulations.

The employer must consult on all the actions and rules regarding occupational health and safety regulations and the union has the right to form the Social Labor Inspection – independent workers' service which monitors occupational health and safety regulations.

8. The union can cooperate with the Labor Inspectorate

In case of National Labour Inspectorate's inspection, the union receives information on the purpose of the inspection and its results. The union's representatives can be present during inspectional activities.

9. The union can counteract mobbing.

The union can put its representatives in for anti-mobbing committees and submit proposals on rules and procedures for counteracting mobbing.

10. The union has the right to conduct informational activities.

The union has a right to a room, an information board and the right to inform the employees about its actions, statements and announcements.

When is the labour union effective?

Forming an union is itself not enough to make any changes at the workplace. Employers will ignore your proposals, bend the rules and refuse to meet demands. The courts, Labor Inspectorates and state and local governments will not always be on your side. In order to really change your workplace, an union must be proactive: submit letters, negotiate with the employer, conduct legal interventions, organize protests, demonstrations, and strikes. This is the only way by which the unions are able to make a change.

What you can expect of joining OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers' Initiative)

People who will form a union at their workplace are not alone. If you decide to join the Workers' Initiative and to establish Workplace or Inter-Workplace Committee of the Workers' Initiative, you can count on:

- receiving legal assistance
- cooperating with committees from other workplaces
- receiving training

- the strike fund while in collective dispute and strike
- receiving publications and information materials published by WI
- cooperation with colleagues from unions from other countries
- more information on how to establish Workers' Initiative's committee can be found on: ozzip.pl