

## 2011 Employee Rights

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48th Assembly Resolution, December 2011

You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery.  
The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. (Leviticus.19:13)

### Issue

Recently efforts have been made to limit the rights of employees, both public and private, to unionize or to have their unions negotiate labor issues for them.

### Background

Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), formerly the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS), has long had a keen interest in human rights and civil liberties as well as a concern for economic justice. NFTS began supporting The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949, within a year of its adoption by the United Nations, and called on the United States to ratify the declaration at its 1953 assembly. It was subsequently ratified by the United States.<sup>1</sup> WRJ continued to refer positively to the importance of the rights enunciated in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a resolution in 1975. In a 2002 statement, WRJ expressed continued support and concern for basic civil liberties (In Pursuit of Justice: Resolutions and Policy Statements, WRJ, 1987).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 23 states, "Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his [or her] interests." Other articles of the declaration include rights to freedom of assembly and association (Art. 20); freedom of opinion and expression; and the right to seek and impart information through any medium (Art. 19). Both the constitutions of the United States and Canada provide very similar rights to free speech, assembly, and association.

WRJ has also long been concerned with the rights of workers. In 1996, the board of directors passed a statement on labor abuse issues. Again, in 2004, the board of directors passed "Worker Justice," which was concerned with the working conditions of the laborers, many of whom are women, who "fill necessary but dangerous, ... jobs. They often work in hazardous situations and have high rates of workplace-related injuries. They seldom have employment benefits . . ." "Worker Justice" also included a call for our affiliates to "Join with other religious and community groups to obtain adequate wages, benefits, training, and working conditions for all workers..."

Recently, unions and the rights of workers to join unions and engage in collective bargaining have come under attack. States, such as Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and New Jersey, are considering laws that would bar public employees from unionizing or from having their unions bargain for basic work issues like wages, benefits, and conditions of employment. Unions established in the private sector also have come under attack. According to a March 5, 2011 article in The New York Times, "Several prominent corporations, including Harley-Davidson,

*For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit [www.wrj.org/social-justice-home](http://www.wrj.org/social-justice-home)*

had pressured their unions into accepting humbling contracts that called for a far lower pay scale for new employees.”

Regardless of whether we agree or disagree with the positions taken by any one union, WRJ supports the rights to organize and engage in collective bargaining.

Unions protect employees’ interests in safe working conditions, good wages and benefits, and reasonable policies, including the requirement of cause for dismissal. The rights to join unions and to bargain collectively are included in our cherished right to the freedoms of association, speech, assembly, and to petition the government.

## Resolution

Judaism recognizes the importance of treating workers with respect and dignity. Our tradition insists on fair and prompt wages for workers. We, members of Women of Reform Judaism, have recognized the importance of treating workers well and of supporting the civil liberties of all residents of the United States and Canada. We have recognized the importance of these civil liberties not only for ourselves but for the entire world in the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Therefore, Women of Reform Judaism calls on all of our affiliates to:

1. Educate their members and congregation members on the issues at stake in the right to form unions and to engage in collective bargaining;
2. Oppose legislation aimed at barring workers from forming unions or restricting the rights of unions to bargain over the terms or conditions or benefits of employment or retirement; and
3. Join with other organizations to support the right of workers to organize unions and the right of those unions to petition the government, to bargain collectively, and to support their members.

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<sup>1</sup> Countries currently having WRJ affiliates ratified the declaration as follows: Canada-1970, Israel-1979, and the United States-1994.