

Union workers pay less for benefits, but get more

Health insurance and retirement plans are prime examples of how the nonunion marketplace makes it harder for workers to provide for their families and futures.

Union workers are far more likely to have health insurance and a real pension, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. At the same time, union workers generally pay smaller premiums and have better plans, including prescription drug, dental and vision coverage.

Union workers do better in a range of other benefits, too, including paid life insurance, short-term disability, and paid time off. And that doesn't include the day-to-day benefits the government doesn't track – everything from scheduling to overtime protection to guarantees against unjust firings and discipline.

Having a real, defined-benefit pension is one of the most dramatic examples of the union advantage: 67 percent of union workers have one; 85 percent of nonunion workers don't. In fact, more than half of nonunion workers don't have *any* employer-sponsored retirement plan, not even a 401(k). By comparison, more than 80 percent of union workers have a retirement plan on the job.

It's the same kind of story with health insurance: Fewer than half of nonunion workers in the private sector have health insurance at work, BLS statistics show, but 78 percent of union members do.

Advantages put more money in your pocket

The union advantage in health coverage plays out in other ways, too:

- Union members pay lower premiums. For individual coverage, 50 percent of union members pay no monthly premium at all; only 19 percent of nonunion workers can say the same.
- When union workers do pay premiums, they typically pay only 8 percent for individual coverage. Nonunion workers pay an average of 20 percent. Converting that to real dollars means that even union workers who have to pay part of their premium pay about \$21 less each month.
- For family coverage, 43 percent of union workers pay no monthly premiums, compared with only 7 percent of nonunion workers.
- When union workers do pay premiums, again, they typically pay less. Union workers pay an average of 12 percent. Nonunion workers pay more than twice that – an average of 32 percent. This gap gives union members an extra \$1,342 each year in take-home pay.

The Union Advantage: Benefits

Workers with access to benefits

Benefit	Union	Nonunion
Paid Sick Leave	61%	57%
Paid Holidays	84%	77%
Average number per year	10	8
Paid Vacations	83%	77%
Paid Jury Duty	82%	70%
Paid Funeral Leave	81%	67%
Paid Military Leave	55%	48%
Child-Care Assistance	21%	14%
Education Assistance (work related)	57%	48%
Life Insurance	76%	56%
Short-Term Disability	61%	36%
Long-Term Disability	33%	31%
Health Reimbursement Account	37%	33%
Health Savings Account	3%	8%
Wellness Program	37%	24%
Fitness Center	11%	13%
Employee Assistance Program	64%	39%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics: "National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States, 2007"

The Union Advantage: Benefits

Workers participating in retirement and health-care plans

Benefit	Union	Nonunion
Medical Insurance	78%	49%
Individual Coverage		
No employee contribution	50%	19%
Employee's share of premium (avg.)	8%	20%
Employee's monthly cost (avg.)	\$57.28	\$78.34
Family Coverage		
No employee contribution	43%	7%
Employee's share of premium (avg.)	12%	32%
Employee's monthly cost (avg.)	\$211.91	\$323.80
Dental insurance	62%	33%
Vision insurance	47%	19%
Prescription drug coverage	75%	46%
Retirement plan	81%	47%
Defined Benefit	67%	15%
Defined Contribution	41%	43%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics: "National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States, 2007"

Add that to the huge gap in wages between union and nonunion workers doing the same kind of jobs, and union families see an average of \$11,742 more each year on their paychecks.

It's not just money, either. Union members also have more time off to enjoy.

For example, vacation benefits are about the same at union and nonunion workplaces – for the first 10 or 15 years. But by the time a worker reaches 20 years of experience, a typical union member enjoys more than a full week more of paid time off: 2 extra paid holidays and 3.4 extra paid vacation days.