

Student Handout 12.4E Labor Organizing and the Garment Industry

Directions:

Each source gives you information about either how or why workers organize to push for greater workers' rights. Some sources give evidence of both. Examine each source and write down at least one piece of evidence in at least one column for each source. The first one is done for you.

	How do workers organize?	Why do workers organize?
Source 1		Workers in this garment factory do not appear to have clean, safe work spaces. It may be hard to know how much work there is to do, and who is responsible for which tasks.
Source 2	By forming a recognized union and registering that union trademark with the state.	
Source 3	By planning strikes to call attention to poor working conditions.	Workers feel threatened by lack of job security and want to improve pay, benefits and working conditions.
Source 4	By planning a picket during a strike to call attention to poor working conditions.	
Source 5		This factory appears unsafe because of overcrowding and exposed wires and pipes.
Source 6	Speaking to Congress to call attention to poor working conditions.	In Bangladesh, workers in this garment factory faced very low pay, extremely long hours, child labor violations, and physical violence if they tried to push for better working conditions.
Source 7		In El Monte, employers used foreign laborers in slave-like conditions.
Source 8	Union representatives and others held a rally to spread awareness of the new minimum wage.	

Next, consider all of your evidence from the “How do workers organize?” column.

What patterns do you see?

Raising awareness of poor working conditions by involving the government.
Raising awareness of poor working conditions by appealing to the public who buy these goods.
Raising awareness among fellow workers to protest poor working conditions.

How would you summarize all of these points?

Some garment workers stand up to demand better working conditions and call on their fellow workers to do the same in hopes of persuading their employers, as well as government officials and the public, to improve working conditions.

Next, consider all of your evidence from the “Why do workers organize?” column.

What patterns do you see?

Workers sometimes work in unsafe conditions.
Workers sometimes work for too little pay or without job security.
Workers sometimes feel threatened by their employers.

How would you summarize all of these points?

In the United States and in other countries, garment workers can earn very little money and have no job security while also working in unhealthy and unsafe conditions.

Finally, how would you put these together to answer the question, How and why do workers organize?

In the garment industry here in the United States and abroad, workers will sometimes organize themselves in order to stand up to their employers and demand better working conditions. These working conditions can sometimes be so poor that workers’ health and safety are threatened. Long hours, low pay, and lack of benefits and job security are all reasons why garment workers consider organizing.
