

TUNE IN TO THE
SOUND OF DEMOCRACY

Justice Talking Radio Transcript

State of the Unions—Air Date: 4/17/06

With more and more manufacturing jobs headed overseas, organized labor continues to see its membership decline. In 1953, 36% of American workers were members of a union, today fewer than 13% hold union cards. Meanwhile, unions fight among themselves about how to avoid extinction and policymakers consider free trade agreements and changes to minimum wage and labor laws that may dramatically affect America's working men and women. On this edition of Justice Talking we take a detailed look at the state of unions in America.

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MARGOT ADLER: From NPR, this is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. With more and more manufacturing jobs heading overseas, organized labor continues to see its membership decline. Today, fewer than 13 percent of American workers are members of a union. On this edition of Justice Talking, we'll take a detailed look at the state of unions. What influence do they have? And what does the future hold? Stay with us.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. You may have seen the bumper sticker, "The Labor Movement. We brought you the weekend." Weekends, the 40 hour work week, pension benefits—all these exist thanks to unions. But despite these gains for workers, unions are in a tough spot right now. Membership has dramatically declined. Up until 1980, one out of every three workers was a union member. Now it's closer to one in ten. In the 1950s, auto workers were well paid and working for Ford or GM was considered a job for life.

But last fall, General Motors, one of the largest employers in America, laid off 30,000 workers and slashed health care and pension benefits to current retirees. As our economy continues to change, many are asking: What's the future for organized labor? On today's show, we'll look at the state of unions in a number of ways. You'll hear a report from Seattle on efforts to organize technology workers. We'll bring you a debate between a union organizer and a lobbyist for the manufacturers. And we'll tell you what an arbitrator actually does.

First, independent producer Kyle Norris takes us to Flint, Michigan, a town whose fortunes have waxed and waned with America's auto industry.

KYLE NORRIS: Boarded up buildings and abandoned houses are everywhere in Flint. Steven Ariano is a lifelong resident who says if you look around, you can tell that people are struggling.

STEVEN ARIANO: How many places can you go to a diner and get two eggs, a couple strips of bacon, potatoes, your choice of toast and a cup of coffee for like \$2.25? You know, that's like, you know, it's like Flint's hurting, and sort of like slipping down the slope and doesn't have anything to grab onto.

KYLE NORRIS: Things weren't always this bleak in the town where General Motors began. Today, GM employs about 10,000 workers in Flint. During its heyday, GM employed 80,000 and the town prospered. From that stronghold emerged one of the most powerful unions in the country, the United Auto Workers. Micheline Maynard is the Detroit Bureau Chief for the New York Times and the author of "The End of Detroit".

MICHELINE MAYNARD: Flint is very symbolic in labor history. It was a symbol of the union's greatest strength. And now it's a symbol of the union's greatest frustration. I'm sure there are people who see ghosts in Flint, who see the factories that are no longer there, who see the full streets in downtown Flint, who see what was a very bustling, important city—not only in Michigan, but in the country.

KYLE NORRIS: In the famous sit-down strike of 1937, Flint workers protested unacceptable working conditions. Their eventual victory marked the first time that workers had won the right to negotiate with GM. Although the UAW had formed a few years earlier, the sit-down strike is considered its first major accomplishment. Today, the site of that historic event is an empty field surrounded by a few crumbling buildings.

Flint went from a strong union town to a town in decline with the union now struggling for membership. Changes in the American auto industry have meant new challenges for manufacturers, unions and for Flint. Hernando Johnson is the financial secretary of UAW Local 651.

HERNANDO JOHNSON: Well, Flint is still going to be in survivor mode. We never stop. We're always fighting to survive here. And if we have to bring in other industries to survive, we'll do it.

KYLE NORRIS: Michelin Maynard says the town can either salvage what's left or give into disillusionment of its past. She thinks the UAW can continue to play an important role in the industry, but that it should remain flexible with future negotiations.

MICHELINE MAYNARD: I think one of the most important things that Flint teaches is that anyone can close up their doors tomorrow and be gone. And it doesn't matter what you personally have done to sustain that employer. So I guess I would recommend that the UAW keep its eyes wide open and not just depend on the Detroit companies for its livelihood.

KYLE NORRIS: That advice might help Flint, Michigan return from a town filled with ghosts back into the bustling city it once was. For Justice Talking, I'm Kyle Norris.

MARGOT ADLER: Michigan is one example of a state with lots of what used to be called union towns, towns that were literally made by the auto industry with workers who earned healthy wages due to union demands. But now these towns are languishing because of plant closings and huge job losses. To help us get a better picture of what effect unions have had on America, Priscilla Murolo joins me from a studio in Connecticut. She teaches American history at Sarah Lawrence College; she also co-authored the book, "From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short Illustrated History of Labor in the United States". Welcome, Priscilla.

PRISCILLA MUROLO: Good to be here.

MARGOT ADLER: We just heard a piece out of Flint, Michigan, a city that's synonymous with industrial decline. I'm wondering as you look around the country and think about all these towns that perhaps once upon a time could have been described as union towns, how many cities and towns are we talking about? How typical is Flint's experience around the country?

PRISCILLA MUROLO: I think that it's a typical pattern in big cities that are a part of what we call now the Rust Belt—those cities that have been dependent on heavy industry and usually in heavily unionized industries. I grew up in central Connecticut outside Waterbury, Connecticut which was at one time the brass center of the world. More brass was made in Waterbury than in anyplace around the world. Now no brass is made in Waterbury. Even though the corporations that ran those brass mills still exist, they make their brass elsewhere. And all of those unions that were based in those brass mills have disappeared.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, let's back up a minute to get a better understanding of how we've gotten to where we are now. How did unions and organized labor begin in America?

PRISCILLA MUROLO: Well, the unions have been with us really from the very beginning of the nation. The first unions appeared in the 1790s right out of the American Revolution. They were Revolutionary War veterans usually. But unions as we know them came together in the 1880s. The American Federation of Labor was born in 1886. And at that time was generally a union of skilled workers. The Congress of Industrial Organizations, that other half of the AFL-CIO, is a product of the mid-1930s. That was founded in 1935 and was formed by a group of ten unions that broke away from the AFL and began to organize mass production workers.

MARGOT ADLER: I gather that a lot of this was based on what working conditions were like at that time.

PRISCILLA MUROLO: Yes, the most important issue having to do with working conditions is really the arbitrary nature of employers' power on the job—the notion that the employer was the only person with a say. Workers organized unions to have a voice on the job first and foremost. And they have used that voice for things like seniority rights, that people who do the same kind of work at the same level should have the same pay.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, you wrote a book called “From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend”. What other changes in working conditions are unions really responsible for?

PRISCILLA MUROLO: Well, in addition to the weekend, there's the eight hour day, there's the retirement pensions, health insurance. And in much larger proportions, you see things like unions lobbying for Social Security payments. They've been a very big factor in minimum wage laws and the living wage laws. Just simple things like having a chair to sit on at work or breaks every three and a half hours were the results of labor organizing.

MARGOT ADLER: This summer, there was a big shakeup at the AFL-CIO. And I'm wondering how you would describe what happened, its reasons and what it means for unions.

PRISCILLA MUROLO: Well, what happened this summer was the clash of two groups with different ideas about how to dig the labor movement out of the hole that it's in. What happened is that several unions broke away from the American Federation of Labor and formed the Change to Win Coalition. The largest of these unions is the Service Employees International Union, but it also includes the Teamsters, Unite Here, the laborers, the carpenters, the food and commercial workers.

In Change to Win, there's a commitment that I think actually the AFL-CIO shares to place a large amount of money, the lion's share of dues income, into organizing new workers. I wasn't happy frankly to see the split in the labor movement. But it does seem to have energized both sides. So we have some remarkable successes in the past month. For example, in Houston, about 5,000 janitors have been organized. In Minneapolis, we have 1,000 registered nurses. In Illinois, we have 50,000 child care providers, all of whom have been organized in the past month.

MARGOT ADLER: So you're saying that contrary to what I've been reading in the press, which that this has been a disaster for the labor movement, the split, you're saying that actually it's going to turn out not to be so bad and is going to energize both sides?

PRISCILLA MUROLO: I think so. You know, we have some historical precedent for this. The Congress for Industrial Organizations began as a split-off from the American Federation of Labor in 1935. Some ten unions left the American Federation of Labor and formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations. And in the wake of that split, both sides grew.

MARGOT ADLER: How has the decline of unions affected class in America?

PRISCILLA MUROLO: Well, it certainly made class hierarchy much steeper than ever in my lifetime. Forty years ago when I was a kid, if you saw a limousine or if you saw someone sleeping in the street, you'd go home and say guess what I saw today? I saw a limousine. Or I saw someone sleeping in the street. Now we Americans expect in our daily lives in cities to see both things pretty much everyday. And I think that the decline of unions goes a very long way to explain how it is that we have this tremendous polarization where the wealthiest part of the society is growing even wealthier and the poorest part is growing even poorer. We are losing that vital ideal that has been so important to our American Dream.

MARGOT ADLER: Thank you so much for talking with me, Priscilla.

PRISCILLA MUROLO: You're welcome. Good to be here.

MARGOT ADLER: Priscilla Murolo co-authored the book, "From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short Illustrated History of Labor in the United States". She also teaches American history at Sarah Lawrence College.

Coming up on Justice Talking, we'll hear about an effort to unionize technology workers in Seattle, and a debate between a union organizer and an industry lobbyist on what the future looks like for unions. Don't go away.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. Today's show is on the state of unions. We're looking at the place of organized labor in the global economy. Are unions headed toward extinction? Or are they on the rebound? Who will be a union member in 2025? You maybe as surprised as I was to learn that union members are as likely to be health care workers or teachers or government employees as manual laborers or machine operators. To meet some of these white-collar union members, Sara Lerner takes us to Bothell, Washington where 1,000 Cingular Wireless employees just joined the union.

SARA LERNER: Like a good Pacific Northwesterner, Michael Ward drinks a lot of coffee. It's Sunday. He and his wife have just come home from church. And they're making an afternoon pot. Ward describes himself as a conservative Christian. He's also a staunch union supporter. But only a few months ago, Ward thought union was a bad word.

MICHAEL WARD: I saw union and I saw the old '50s movies where the union comes in and put their fist down and this is the way it's going to be. And we're going to come in here. We're going to take over everything. And you're going to be working for us now. Of course, now, I mean, that's not the way unions are.

SARA LERNER: Ward works for Cingular Wireless, which recently merged with AT&T. When Cingular entered the picture, Ward, like plenty of other employees, worried. Would he keep his benefits? Would his seven years of service to the company be thrown down the drain? Would he be stuck at the same pay rate as a new employee? Enter the union. Just like in the '50s, organizers waited off premises to talk to employees about joining up. But here they were organizing people before they jumped in their Jeep Cherokees and drove off to suburban homes. Some employees at Cingular did join the union. A majority of the customer care workers at the Bothell, Washington call center voted for the union. That meant that all of the employees would join. And that's 1,000 new union members. Michael Ward says he's much more confident having more than just the human resources department there to represent them.

MICHAEL WARD: With HR, they are part of the company itself. It's another company office. With the union coming in, they're a third party. They are not working for anybody in particular except for the employee to make sure that the employee's benefits are taken care of.

SARA LERNER: Ward and his colleagues are now members of a union called WashTech. The union is a chapter of the Communications Workers of America. But Seattle-based WashTech itself is the first union that was formed solely to organize tech workers. Despite years of effort, this Cingular campaign is the union's first real success.

MARCUS COURTNEY: People have a knee jerk reaction to the word union.

SARA LERNER: Marcus Courtney is president of WashTech.

MARCUS COURTNEY: I mean, that word has become so loaded. And I think corporate America is propagandized the word union to have the negative reaction amongst employees, but especially amongst white-collar workers.

SARA LERNER: Marcus Courtney co-founded WashTech seven years ago when he was tired of being a semi-permanent contract worker at Microsoft. He certainly had some success before the Cingular faction joined up. Seventeen thousand people subscribe to the WashTech newsletter. But just a few months ago, WashTech only had 450 dues-paying members. With the latest turn of events, WashTech membership has tripled. But it hasn't been so easy. After a year long campaign at Cingular, WashTech won the

customer care department. But it failed to organize the IT department. They were just twenty votes shy of a win. Paul Guppy is vice president of the Washington Policy Center, a conservative think tank in Seattle. Guppy isn't surprised that it's been difficult for WashTech.

PAUL GUPPY: This model of the unions, you know, requiring that every worker be a member as a condition of holding their job I just think is outdated, first of all. But the main objection I have to it is that I think it really is unfair to the individual.

SARA LERNER: WashTech president Courtney says that's exactly the anti-union strategy put in place by corporations. Guppy doesn't care.

PAUL GUPPY: For the unions to say that companies are trying to discourage unions because the companies want to maximize profit, our response would be, well, that's what a for-profit company is for. I mean, with the Washington Policy Center, we have a very strong pro-free market philosophy. Those are our principles, so for us the fact that a company exists primarily to make money, we don't have a problem with that.

SARA LERNER: A big part of the reason WashTech was able to organize those Cingular wireless workers that did join up comes from Cingular. The company has a neutral stance on unions which is basically a green light for employees. Most businesses are loudly anti-unions. And that means workers are less likely to organize. Marcus Courtney wishes more private sector employees would unionize.

MARCUS COURTNEY: If people in this country are concerned about corporate power, then we need to be concerned about the lack of union representation. Because that is the one institution that can balance the power of corporations with the government is through employee organizations.

SARA LERNER: Adding nearly 1,000 new members to its ranks is a huge feat for WashTech. But the union failed to organize the Cingular IT department. It's clear that in convincing the rest of white collar America, from minimum wage to high paid employees, WashTech and other unions still have a long way to go. For Justice Talking, I'm Sara Lerner in Seattle.

MARGOT ADLER: As we just heard from Sara, there are efforts around the country to organize workers who haven't been unionized before, and while unions and management go head-to-head at the bargaining table, their battles are often behind closed doors with strike deadlines looming. Today, however, we have a union organizer and a management representative with us to share their views on what's best for American workers.

Sharon Pinnock is the director of membership and organization for the American Federation of Government Employees, or AFGE, an AFL-CIO-affiliated labor organization. She joins me from Washington, D.C. Also from Washington is Chris

Tampio. He is the director of employment policy at the National Association of Manufacturers, or NAM. Chris, I understand that you come from a long line of union workers, but you're pretty skeptical about the relevance of unions today. Why?

CHRIS TAMPIO: Sure. I do come from a union family. I'm from western New York. The steel industry was very strong there. My grandfather was a crane operator for U.S. Steel—for over fifty years he sat on the same crane. And I have many aunts and uncles that worked in the industry. My father-in-law is a retiree of Bethlehem Steel. I see that the unions did a very good job during the industrial revolution. I think they were a worthwhile organization. They helped produce many good labor laws that are still being used today.

But I feel like they've somewhat lost their way. Their organizing campaign in the '30s and the '40s might have been an us-against-them strategy of labor against management. Right now, it looks like what we see in manufacturing is that it's *us* against *them*—it's management and labor against the global economy. And for U.S. manufacturers, we need to be competing at the highest level, being flexible and being able to change things around to go up against them, the foreign competition. The old strategy of us-against-them—labor against management—just doesn't seem to be working.

MARGOT ADLER: Sharon, you call yourself a labor futurist. What does that mean?

SHARON PINNOCK: It means that I'm somebody who is always thinking about what it's going to take for there to be vibrant, vital, relevant labor organizations decades into the future. I have two grandchildren myself, and I want them to live in a country and live in a world where unions still play a vital role in fair and democratic societies. So it really is just a way of looking at unions that doesn't keep me locked in the past about what unions used to look like or how they behaved when our economy was more based on an industrial economy. We know the economy has shifted now to an information-based economy, a service-based economy. Unions are going to have to make that shift as well. In this regard, I believe that I agree with Chris that we have to be different in the way we attract workers to our organizations. And in order to be competitive, as I'm sure the manufacturers do want to be—I'm sure they also recognize that workers have to have a voice in how the work gets done.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, you've been a union organizer for a long time. Your union, the American Federation of Government Employees, represents over 600,000 government workers nationwide and overseas. What do you tell potential members about why they should join your union?

SHARON PINNOCK: Well, I tell them that the biggest reason to join the union is so that they can have a voice at work. Most workers actually know how to make the kinds of improvements that management needs their organizations to make to be more competitive, effective and productive. The problem is that we've got a management mindset that is stuck in the '40s and the '30s and actually believes more along the scientific management approach, which is: We don't pay you to think; we just want you to show up and do what

we want you to do. So when we talk to our potential members about the benefits of unionization, it is through attracting them to having their voice heard at the workplace.

MARGOT ADLER: Chris, how would you respond to that critique?

CHRIS TAMPIO: Well, that might be true for the people she represents in the government employees, but I don't see that at all in manufacturing. The employees and the employers are working together in lock step on so many issues of the day in the workplace. You look at so many new small businesses, startup companies—that's how they survive. They just don't expect to pull someone off the street and say do the job and do it this way. ***

MARGOT ADLER: So let me ask you each to very briefly say what's to blame for diminishing membership today? Let's start with you, Chris.

CHRIS TAMPIO: I do think it is a little bit of inflexibility to some extent, unwillingness to give. You know, we look at some companies that are having huge health care increases, and they go to the union and say: You know, we've had a 30 percent increase—can you now for the first time pay a co-pay, or can you take on a small percentage of that? And they're saying no when you have pensions that are being funded at adequate levels, but they want more in their pension.

Now, to be able to compete, we feel like in manufacturing we have the best technology and the best workers. And that's what can have us compete against these other economies that pay their workers lower wages. We don't want to come down to their wages. That's not a goal of manufacturing. That's for sure.

MARGOT ADLER: Sharon, what's to blame for diminishing union membership?

SHARON PINNOCK: Clearly the most unionized industries have all started to ship their jobs overseas—steel, auto. Where you found your highest density in the private sector of unionized workers, a lot of these industries quite frankly are going away. They're now referred to as “second wave” industries. Unions are also evolving and restructuring themselves to be more compatible with the new economy, and this takes time. Any type of evolution takes time. I believe that what we're seeing right now is the process of unions evolving into a different model of unionization.

MARGOT ADLER: There are now minimum wage laws, anti-discrimination laws, workers compensation laws, and family medical leave laws. Is legislation, Sharon, doing what collective bargaining once did?

SHARON PINNOCK: I believe that what we're going to see with unions as we move into this new century is fewer unions that will be asking workers to join for the benefits of collective bargaining and more unions that will be saying to workers, we can offer you discounts in certain buying services. We can work with you on how to structure your own workers comp. appeal if that's what you need to do at the workplace.

CHRIS TAMPIO: We seem to have seen it at NAM that unions also have become more of a political organization, where they've spent huge amounts of money on political causes, like Proposition 75 in California where the union would have to get their members' consent to spend money on organization. I thought it was pretty interesting they spent upwards of almost \$100 million on this, of their union's money, that would have said, can we spend your money or not? I think that's pretty interesting the way they've done that. They've become somewhat of a political organization and kind of lost their way in organizing and collective bargaining.

MARGOT ADLER: I'd like to bring in somebody who's been directly effected by these kinds of issues. Gregory Hoberock is president of HTH Companies, Inc. It's a construction company based out of Missouri. He employs 200 construction workers, and it's not a unionized workplace. I asked him what he thinks builders unions need to do to survive.

GREGORY HOBEROCK: I think the unions are going to have to get competitive. I think they're going to have to change their work rules.

MARGOT ADLER: What does that mean actually, concretely?

GREGORY HOBEROCK: Unions have very specific work rules about who does what. The open shop does not. For instance, you've probably seen them pouring a sidewalk. If I were to pour that sidewalk under a union agreement by the strict terms of the union agreement, I'd have to have a carpenter out there to set the forms. I would have to have a laborer out there to place the concrete and work the concrete. I'd have to have a concrete finisher out there to finish the concrete. And the concrete's probably got some steel in it, rebar in it. I'd have to have an iron worker out there to tie the steel. Then I'd have to have an operator out there to operate a little Bobcat to move stuff around. So you're talking about six or seven different specialties to form the work. If I go out there, I'd go out there with four guys. So I would do it with less people and get as much done in the course of the day.

MARGOT ADLER: So you'd have more flexibility.

GREGORY HOBEROCK: I'd have more flexibility. Correct. A person can have several skills. A good craftsman can do many, many, many different things and do them all very, very well. The unions don't really recognize that as such. And I think if they're ever going to survive in the construction industry, you're going to see some changes along those lines. You're already seeing some changes. The carpenters have just pulled away from the Building Trades Council, pulled out of the AFL-CIO. And they're going to organize anybody and everybody and claim all sorts of different work to try to break through I think some of these work rules.

MARGOT ADLER: So, Chris, are you going to agree with that? Do you think that rigid union rules and bureaucracy are killing unions?

CHRIS TAMPPIO: Yeah, I see that to some extent. I go back to a little bit of my family experience with the unions—and this isn't an NAM thing. It was more of a family thing that got me into it. I look at how they were in the steel mill, and there would be five or six machinists that would be working on the nightshift, and the machine didn't break down but they had five or six people there basically not doing anything. When they said, hey, we need those people to not maybe not have as many people on night shift, well, they weren't willing to give in.

MARGOT ADLER: Sharon.

SHARON PINNOCK: Well, I think there is something to be said for looking at work and how work is done differently. The example that the gentleman used earlier about needing X amount of people with the unionized contract and fewer with a non-unionized contract is a good example of how unions are going to have to change the approach that we take to how work gets done.

MARGOT ADLER: That was Sharon Pinnock. Also with me is Chris Tampio.

Coming up, more of our conversation about the state of unions. We talk with AFL-CIO President John Sweeny, and we also have a conversation with Anna Burger, chair of the Change to Win Coalition, the seven unions that broke away from the AFL-CIO. Don't go away.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. We've been talking about organized labor in America—what it means for workers, employers and public policy. To share their perspectives about the state of unions are Chris Tampio and Sharon Pinnock. Chris is a lobbyist for the National Association of Manufacturers. Sharon is a union organizer for the American Federation of Government Employees.

I'd like to bring in John Braxton who was a Teamster for twenty years. And he was part of the reform movement Teamsters for a Democratic Union. He is co-president of the Faculty and Staff Federation at the Community College of Philadelphia. And he's been a union member for twenty years. He says that outsourcing and globalization have completely changed the relationship between management and labor.

JOHN BRAXTON: So unions have had to say, oh, it's a new ballgame. And now we have to go back to some of the things that were the basics of the union movement which does involve a lot more rank-and-file participation and involvement in the union. So gone are the days when Jimmy Hoffa, Sr. could pound his fist on the table and say I demand a contract and if you don't give it to me, I'm shutting this whole place down.

MARGOT ADLER: Do you think that the changes in working conditions and the changes in the global economy mean a change in rules or strategy for union organizers?

JOHN BRAXTON: Definitely a change in both I think. I think that for a long time, unions in this country in particular acted as if workers in other parts of the world were if not the enemy, at least they were irrelevant. And so unions didn't actually work very hard to defend the interests of other workers. And that was because unions in this country were getting pretty good wage improvements and benefit packages for their workers. But at some point, it became obvious that if the wages and benefits were so much lower in Mexico or Guatemala or China than they are here, then that made it awful easy to ship job overseas. And that meant that unions were at a disadvantage here. It sounds like a trite expression in some way, but worldwide solidarity actually has become a necessity for unions to survive and defend the interests of their membership.

MARGOT ADLER: Sharon, do you agree that there is a need to internationalize union organizing?

SHARON PINNOCK: Oh, absolutely. As I said earlier, a lot of these jobs in highly unionized industries have shipped overseas. And they've done it because the wages, you know, are less. They don't have to pay as much for labor when the majority of your operating expenses are in labor costs. And if it's the only thing you can really curtail, then that's what you look to do. So it is in our interest as people working in this country to also be interested in how free trade movements are growing and evolving in other parts of the world.

MARGOT ADLER: Chris.

CHRIS TAMPIO: For us at NAM, we don't see that it's just labor costs. We see there are lots of other costs. We got a study commissioned at NAM that talked about how—take out the labor costs. U.S. manufacturers are at a 22 percent disadvantage when you take into account energy costs, health care costs, litigation and regulation. So if we would cut what actually the American government is doing to us and the lawyers in the United States are doing to us, we can compete. And we can compete.

MARGOT ADLER: That will have to wrap up our debate about the state of unions in America. Thank you both for joining me.

SHARON PINNOCK: Thank you for having us.

CHRIS TAMPIO: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

MARGOT ADLER: Sharon Pinnock is a labor futurist and the director of membership and organization for the American Federation of Government Employees. She has been active in the U.S. labor movement for more than 25 years. And Chris Tampio is the director of employment policy for the National Association of Manufacturers. He's a lobbyist on a variety of labor issues.

MARGOT ADLER: Last summer, seven unions, including the SEIU and the Teamsters, split off from the AFL-CIO. While both sides of the split are staunch advocates, they have different views about the best ways to help workers. To learn more about their views, I talked with John Sweeney, President of the AFL-CIO and Anna Burger, chair of the Change to Win Federation, the seven unions who left the AFL-CIO. John Sweeney joined me from Washington, D.C. Welcome to our show, Mr. Sweeney.

JOHN SWEENEY: Thank you. Happy to be on your show.

MARGOT ADLER: How has the shifting economy and globalization changed the influence of unions?

JOHN SWEENEY: I think we all recognize the importance of globalization and so many of the factors that impact on our country as well as the world in terms of the economy and working people force us to realize more and more how important it is that we address the issues of globalization.

MARGOT ADLER: And how should unions change to meet that?

JOHN SWEENEY: Well, I think that unions are changing. And unions as representatives of workers have to speak out strongly on where they see the greatest concerns are. I just returned from a meeting of the ICFTU in Hong Kong where ...

MARGOT ADLER: And what is that?

JOHN SWEENEY: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which represents all the unions throughout the world in developed countries as well as developing. It's about time that a hard look is taken place. How we change the rules of trade to have workers share in the success of our trading policies. That's not happening. It's not happening here in our own country. It's not happening around the world.

MARGOT ADLER: How did the split of the AFL-CIO and the SEIU, the Service Employees International Union, effect organized labor in America?

JOHN SWEENEY: Well, it's unfortunate that there is a split in the labor movement. And the labor movement really strives to have as much unity as we can possibly have. We have our differences on different policies and different issues. But I just want to say that America's labor movement is stronger when we're united. The AFL-CIO continues to look for ways to speak with a unified voice. Hopefully, we'll be able to work together.

MARGOT ADLER: How many members did you lose? And how can the union rebuild itself?

JOHN SWEENEY: At the present time, we have more than nine million members. We lost approximately four million. We are doing everything we can to make sure that we build our numbers. We're heavily focused on aggressive organizing programs in just about every industry in every union. And we are moving ahead at the AFL-CIO in a very

positive way and strengthening our grassroots mobilization around issues that are important to them. Work that we did in opposition to the Administration's proposals on Social Security is just an example of how important it is for the labor movement to be solid and to be united. We must strive to do that. But we're moving ahead on our programs in a very aggressive way.

MARGOT ADLER: John Sweeney, thank you so much for talking with us.

JOHN SWEENEY: Thanks. Nice to be with you.

MARGOT ADLER: John Sweeney has been President of the AFL-CIO for ten years. He's been working on behalf of unions for almost fifty years.

I also talked this week with Anna Burger, chair of the Change to Win Federation, the coalition of seven labor unions that split off from the AFL-CIO. She joined me by phone from Washington, D.C. Thanks for talking with me, Anna.

ANNA BURGER: It's great to be here with you.

MARGOT ADLER: Anna, I just spoke with John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO to talk about the future of unions. But I want to get your response to some of the same questions. How has the shifting economy and increased globalization changed the influence of unions?

ANNA BURGER: Well, I think that the globalization of the world, both the economy and employers, has had a direct impact on workers in our country and in other countries as well. I think the truth is the world has changed. Global corporations now often times have more power than governments. The decisions that they make have effects all around the world. Unfortunately, the labor movement has not aggressively taken on the issue and worked globally. I think that we need to do more of it.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, why do you think it was important for the unions that are now part of the Change to Win Federation to leave the AFL-CIO?

ANNA BURGER: Our unions believe strongly that the only way to value work again in our country is to organize workers so that they have a lot of voice. We believe that we have to focus real resources on organizing. And we have to focus on our core industries which are the service sector, transportation, retail, hotels and entertainment. Mostly the service workers, people who perform jobs that will stay in this country.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, it was only last summer that the split took place. What can you tell me about the impact?

ANNA BURGER: Well, we began a debate about the future of workers and how to value workers again in this country. And we began having a debate about the future of the labor movement. When we weren't able to convince all unions that growth and organizing workers was the right way to go, we decided to build our own federation. Our

seven unions have come together around a set of principles. We've now built a constitution and a new federation that's built on those principles of growth, of accountability to each other, accountability to our members and accountability to unorganized workers. We have had our founding convention. We have had our first organizing conference. We have begun the plans. And I would say that we've set the stage for action for 2006.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, in the press, the split has very much been described as weakening both sides. I gather you don't feel that.

ANNA BURGER: No, I have a sense of hope and optimism about what we can do as a labor movement. I believe that all seven of our unions have incredible strengths. While we have different histories and different industries, we all bring different strengths to the table. We learn from each other. We strategize together. We come up with joint plans. And we support each other in a larger way than we've ever done before. I believe in 2006 and '7 and '8 and into the future that you will see our unions launching multi-union campaigns that are not just based in our country, but are also in partnership with other unions and other parts of the world as well. So we can really take on global corporations and address the issues of our workers here and in other countries too.

MARGOT ADLER: Thank you so much for talking with me today.

ANNA BURGER: You're welcome. Thank you.

MARGOT ADLER: Anna Burger is chair of the Change to Win Federation, the coalition of seven labor unions that recently split off from the AFL-CIO. You can learn more about John Sweeney and Anna Burger at our website, justicetalking.org.

MARGOT ADLER: Throughout today's show, we've heard from management and union members. But when union negotiations with management seem intractable and the battle lines have been firmly drawn, an arbitrator often gets called into settle the conflict. The job calls for neutrality, fairness and a strong backbone. For Richard Bloch, who makes his living as an arbitrator, it means jumping into the most heated labor battles in America. Justice Talking's Erin Mooney talked to him about what it's like to be a professional arbitrator.

ERIN MOONEY: Richard Bloch is an arbitrator and mediator of labor disputes. I reached him at his office in Washington, D.C. So tell me, what's the difference between arbitration and mediation?

RICHARD BLOCH: Well, Erin, arbitration is in the nature of a judicial proceeding, where the parties are posing a question or series of questions to the arbitrator and expecting an answer. It's just as a court would give an answer—someone wins, someone loses. Mediation, on the other hand, is a process of attempting to get a consensual resolution—

trying to get people to agree. And it's not a question necessarily of right or wrong. It's a question of what the parties can live with.

ERIN MOONEY: So when I look at your bio, you've been involved with everyone from NBC to major league baseball. You just were involved with a dispute between the NFL in the Eagles vs. Terrell Owens case.

RICHARD BLOCH: That's right.

ERIN MOONEY: You know, you've done lots of union negotiations. You've come in at tough moments when the United Steel Workers are at a sticking point. How'd you get into the business of getting involved in some of the biggest disputes in our country's history?

RICHARD BLOCH: I've been very fortunate. Arbitration is something I wanted to do from the moment I got into law school and had a few labor law courses. And I was very fortunate to have terrific mentors and guides in the business who were willing to share and to teach and to critique—to bring me along. And to let the parties know that as a young man I was available to do this.

ERIN MOONEY: And I would imagine that's the only way you can really get these gigs is by being a trusted name.

RICHARD BLOCH: Well certainly the parties have to have confidence in what you're doing. One of the virtues of arbitration is that if they don't like what you've done, if they disagree with the results, then they'll just choose another arbitrator. That's one of the beauties of the process—that you can basically choose your judge from case to case.

ERIN MOONEY: So in your spare time when you're not resolving incredibly heated disputes, you are a magician.

RICHARD BLOCH: Yeah, from time to time I do that. You know, if the arbitration business goes downhill, it's always good to have a backup in something stable like show business.

ERIN MOONEY: Right. You can always make your money busking on a street corner.

RICHARD BLOCH: That's right.

ERIN MOONEY: So do you use any of those techniques for magic in your work as an arbitrator?

RICHARD BLOCH: I don't think so.

ERIN MOONEY: No slight of hand?

RICHARD BLOCH: The clients may have a different view of that, but that's certainly not my intent.

ERIN MOONEY: Right, right. So are you the kind of person that your friends and family call on to settle disputes? I mean, do friends who are having marital difficulties call you in? Do you use your skills in other ways like that?

RICHARD BLOCH: You know it is a discipline that is certainly applicable to non-labor or commercial disputes. And there are those who really do have a terrific practice in doing things precisely like family and marital mediation and arbitration. I do not. And I generally decline requests from friends or family for the obvious reason—that that's just a no-win situation. And I'm sure that my kids would tell you that I don't use any mediation skills; I just try to tell them that, listen, it's what I say and it's the law. They don't believe it, but I say it.

ERIN MOONEY: And you're married, right?

RICHARD BLOCH: I am.

ERIN MOONEY: How does that play out with your wife?

RICHARD BLOCH: Susan is a professor of constitutional law at Georgetown.

ERIN MOONEY: So she gives you a good run for the money.

RICHARD BLOCH: Oh yeah. She doesn't take anything I say at face value and with good reason.

ERIN MOONEY: Well, thanks so much for talking with us today.

RICHARD BLOCH: It's a pleasure.

ERIN MOONEY: Richard Bloch is a mediator and arbitrator of labor and commercial disputes. I reached him at his office in Washington, D.C.

MARGOT ADLER: Tell us what you think about the state of unions in America. Do you think unions are an important resource for workers or no longer relevant in an age of globalization? Let us know and find out more about the issues raised in today's show at our website, justicetalking.org. Thanks for joining us. Tune in next week. I'm Margot Adler.
