Glossary of Labor Relations Terms

Authorization Card
A statement signed by an employee designating a union to act as his or her representative in collective negotiations. Unions use authorization cards to gather and demonstrate employee support for the union. They are also used either to demand recognition from an employer or request a secret ballot election administered by the National Labor Relations Board for a bargaining unit.

Bargaining Unit
A group of employees agreed to by the union and the employer, or designated by an appropriate government agency such as the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), as constituting an appropriate unit for the purposes of representation and collective bargaining.

Certification
The formal determination by an appropriate government agency, such as the National Labor Relations Board, that a union is the majority choice of employees in a particular bargaining unit and, as a result, the exclusive bargaining representative of all employees in a particular bargaining unit. The determination usually follows a secret ballot election of employees in the bargaining unit.

Challenged Ballot
A vote questioned by one of the parties to a representation election. Votes may be challenged when the eligibility of the voter is in question. Challenged ballots are kept sealed and are opened and counted only if their number is sufficient to affect the outcome of the election.

Check off
The payroll deduction of fees (usually dues) from the pay of employees in the bargaining unit. This money is turned over to the union.

Collective Bargaining (Labor Contract Negotiations)
A method of decision making in which the employer and the exclusive representative of the employees (union) determine wages, hours, and terms of conditions of employment for all workers in a bargaining unit through direct negotiations. The bargaining normally results in a written contract that is mutually binding and sets wages and other conditions of employment to be observed for a specific period of time.

Collective Bargaining Agreement (Contract, Labor Contract)
A written agreement or contract arrived at as the result of negotiations between an employer and a union. It usually contains provisions about conditions of employment and the procedures to be used in settling disputes during the term of the contract.
**Decertification**
The withdrawal by National Labor Relations Board of a union’s designation as exclusive representative. It is usually preceded by a decertification election that has been called because of the submission of a petition by employees.

**Impasse**
A situation in collective bargaining that occurs when the employer and the union, both bargaining in good faith, fail to reach agreement about wages, benefits and other terms and conditions of employment.

**Management Rights Clause**
A provision in a collective bargaining agreement that expressly reserves certain rights and responsibilities to management and specifies that the exercise of these rights and responsibilities shall not be the subject of negotiations, grievances or arbitrations.

**Mediation**
A process during which a neutral third party assists the bargaining parties in a dispute to come to a voluntary agreement. The mediator may suggest to the parties various proposals and methods for resolution of disputes, but he or she has no formal power to force a settlement between the parties.

**Representation Election**
An election conducted by a government agency (such as the National Labor Relations Board) to allow employees to express their choice of either “No Representation” or a “Yes” vote for representation by a union, provided the union has a legitimate showing of interest in the form of valid signed authorization cards (at least 30% of bargaining unit employees) to be the exclusive representative for that unit.

**Strike**
A work stoppage by a group of employees intended to express concerns about the employer’s position(s), which may include concerns over a grievance, enforce a demand for higher wages or for other changes in conditions of employment, to obtain recognition, or to resolve a dispute with management.

**Unfair (Labor) Practice (commonly referred to as a “ULP”)**
Action by an employer, union or employees that one side alleges is a violation of the National Labor Relations Act.