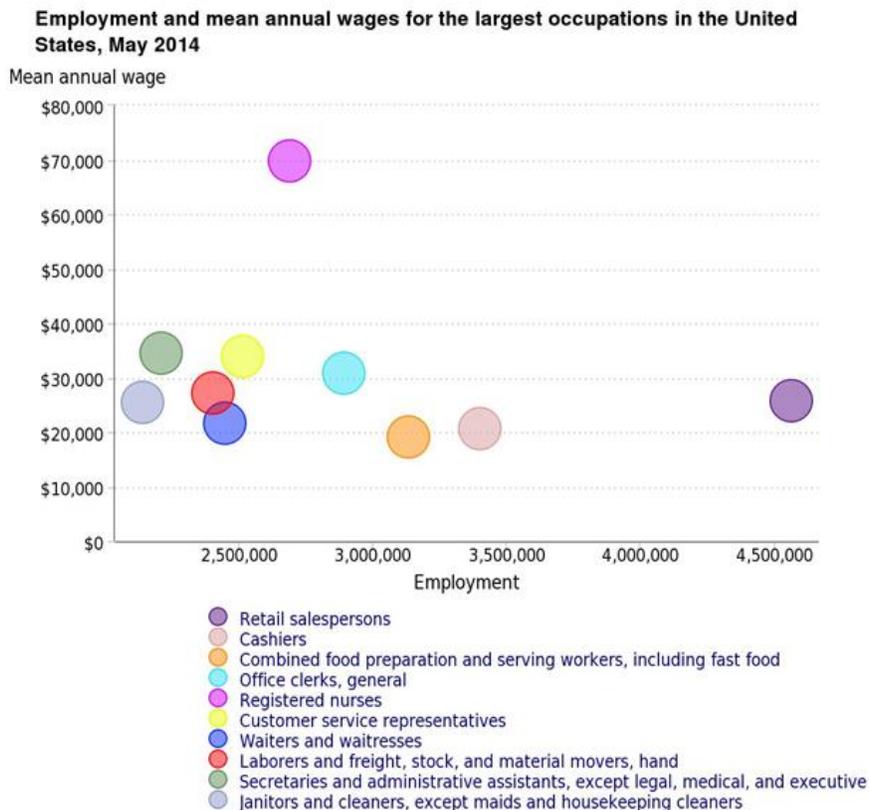


Working in America

The Future of Worker Voice

FACTS ABOUT WORK IN AMERICA

- 63% of noninstitutionalized civilians age 16 and over were in the U.S. labor force in March 2015.ⁱ
- This percentage translates to 157 million people in the U.S. labor force. 148 million were employed.
- In March 2015, the U.S. had a 5.5% unemployment rate. Approximately 26.4 million people worked part-time, and of those approximately 6.7 million were involuntarily part-time.ⁱⁱ
- 93% of the employed were wage and salary workers (the rest were self-employed or unpaid family workers)
- 56% of employed wage and salaried workers were paid hourly (77 million out of 137 million).
- Most of the largest occupations in today's economy pay low wages (see chart belowⁱⁱⁱ). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the *mean* hourly wage across all occupations in 2014 was \$22.71. BLS multiplies that by 2,080 hours to get an estimated *mean* annual wage in 2014 of \$47,230.^{iv} BLS data show that the *median* hourly wage was \$17.09, which annualized would be \$35,547.



- In 2014, union membership in the U.S. included approximately 11% of wage and salary workers, down from a peak of almost 35% in 1954.^v
 - Unionization rates among workers in education, training and library occupations, and protective service occupations have the highest unionization rate at over 35%.
 - Unionization rates in the private sector have declined from 16.8% in 1983 to 6.6% in 2014.
 - In 2014, median weekly earnings for nonunion workers were 79% of earnings for union members.^{vi}

- Historic Labor Legislation and International Standards
 - 1935: National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) gives private sector employees the right to organize into trade unions, encourages collective bargaining and allows collective action. Creates the National Labor Relations Board.
 - 1938: Fair Labor Standards Act establishes first minimum wage and 40-hour week
 - 1947: Taft-Hartley Act amends NLRA by adding restrictions on unions including prohibiting certain kinds of strikes and boycotts, monetary donations by unions to federal political campaigns and “closed shops” (in which only union members can be hired). It allowed states to pass “right-to-work” laws that outlaw closed union shops. Today 25 states—mostly southern and western, although recently some northern ones—have adopted “right to work” laws.
 - 1948: The United Nations General Assembly adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 23 states that everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions.

- Definition of “alt-labor”: Nonunion worker organizations, such as worker centers and worker alliances.^{vii}
 - According to Dr. Janice Fine, prominent scholar on worker centers, in 1992, there were fewer than five centers nationwide. As of 2007, there were at least 160 worker centers in over 80 cities, towns, and rural areas. In 2013, she estimated there were over 200.
 - Alt-labor groups lack the legal structure and tools of traditional unions, such as union contracts, collective bargaining and union dues. They use other approaches to improve working conditions, wages and benefits such as providing worker rights education and job training; raising public awareness about model employers and employers in need of improvement; organizing worker and public protests; educating policymakers; and engaging in legal action through the courts.
 - Examples include National Guestworker Alliance, Restaurant Opportunity Center (ROC), National Domestic Workers Alliance, National Day Laborers Organizing Network, National Taxi Workers Alliance and the Workers Defense Project.

ⁱ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release, The Employment Situation Summary (March 2015).

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, The Economics Daily, Occupational employment and wages in 2014 on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2015/occupational-employment-wages-2014.htm> (visited April 20, 2015).

^{iv} U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics, May 2014 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates – United States (All Occupations).

^v Gerald Mayer, “Union Membership Trends in the United States,” August 31, 2004, Cornell University ILR School.

^{vi} Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Members Summary,” January 23, 2015, *Economic News Release*.

^{vii} Coined by writer and former union organizer, Josh Eidelson, in 2013 article in *The American Prospect* titled, [“Alt-Labor.”](#)