UNIVERSITE Joseph KI-ZERBO
Office du Baccalauréat

Séries : G1-G2-H

Année 2020
Session Normale
Epreuve du 1er tour
Durée : 2 heures
Coefficient : 2

EPREUVE ECRITE D'ANGLAIS

Cette épreuve comporte deux (2) pages

Unions and Workforce

In a book on organized labour, "what do Unions do?" a group of authors argues that unions play two principal economic roles. They provide workers with a voice; through a union, frustrated workers, who might otherwise simply quit, can communicate their dissatisfaction to the firm. Communication can raise efficiency by boosting morale, and by helping firms to retain workers and identify and fix problems of labour. But unions also function as monopoly providers of labour. By controlling labour supply they are able to extract rents – and thus raise members' compensation – reducing economic efficiency.

The book was published in 1984, at a critical moment. Across the rich world the share of workers covered by unions had fallen steadily from their post-war peaks outside a handful of northern European countries. Declines in the employment share of highly unionized industries, like manufacturing, bore some of the blame. But government policy also played a role. The mood turned against labour in the 1980s, first in America and Britain, then elsewhere; politicians seized on the moment. In 1981 President Ronald Reagan, who once led America's actors' union, summarily fired 11,000 striking air-traffic controllers. In the years since, labour has spoken softly. America experienced an average of 16 major work stoppages affecting 1,000 workers or more each year from 2001 to 2018, down from 52 per year between 1981 and 2000, and 300 per year from 1947 to 1980.

Unions, though weakened, survive. In America they represent 37% of public – sector workers and 7% of private-sector ones. In 2018 nearly half a million American workers were involved in work stoppages, the most since 1986. That militancy owes something to labour-market conditions. One might expect periods of economic strength to be placid ones, because firms can be conciliatory. When profits are high, they can afford pay rises – whereas in times of economic stress, holding the line on pay may mean the difference between survival and failure. Moreover, the opportunity cost of a work stoppage is higher when demand is robust. When consumers are impatiently waiting for new cars, lost production time is very costly. Reflecting this, GM suffered operating losses of nearly 2 billion during the recent stoppage, according to one estimate, or nearly twice the sum of wages lost to workers.

But strong labour markets lend more encouragement to frustrated workers than pause to firms. Striking workers face the loss of pay and, potentially, of employment – threats that frighten less when good jobs are plentiful. Workers can more credibly withhold their labour from firms when there are no long lines of unemployed workers waiting to replace them. A strong jobs market may also give workers more to bargain for. Fighting over a larger share of a firm's earnings makes little sense when there are no earnings to fight over. GM filed for bankruptcy in 2009, but has since reorganized and begun turning a healthy profit.

Adapted from The Economist, November 2019

A. Guided Commentary

1) Relying on the text, give two (2) advantages of communication for firms and workers. (2 points)

2) Find out in the text the two (2) economic roles played by unions according to a group of authors referred to in the text. (3 points)

3) Basing on the text, cite two (2) facts which prove that labour went through a difficult time in the 80's. (3 points)

4) Referring to the text, give three (3) difficulties brought by strikers to their firms. (3 points)

5) Relying on the text provide two (2) advantages strong labour markets may provide to workers. (3 points)

A) Essay: (6 points)

In your opinion, what should be the actions and limits of trade unions? Justify your answer in sixty words.
