Participate at Your Peril: The Need for Resolution of the Conflict Surrounding Employee Participation Programs by the TEAM Act of 1997

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I. INTRODUCTION

The following scenario is not uncommon: a single parent who works the night shift in the manufacturing facility of a major American corporation is having difficulty because he cannot provide evening supervision for his teenage child. A strict seniority system controls shift assignments for the facility and any change in shift assignments would have an adverse impact on his co-workers. Management learns of the problem and forms a committee comprised of his co-workers and a management representative to address how to adjust work assignments to create more flexibility for this parent. While this activity seems reasonable, management at this company and management using similar techniques throughout the country are at risk of committing unfair labor practices under current labor laws.1

Recognizing that a significant advantage lies in a highly skilled and motivated workforce, many employers have implemented employee participation programs2 which foster communication between employ-


2. See H.R. REP. No. 104-248, at 9 (1996), available in 1996 WL 560823. There is no single dominant form of employee participation program. The most common forms of programs are: (1) joint labor-management committees, which discuss a wide range of workplace issues; (2) quality circles, which focus on the production process and ways to improve efficiency, as well as the quality of the final product; and (3) quality of work-life groups, which focus less on the actual production process and more on the work environment and ways to improve it. Id.; see John R. McLain, Participatory Management Under Sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) of the National Labor Relations Act, 83 MICH. L REV. 1736, 1738-41 (1985). For detailed examples of employee participation programs in both unionized and nonunionized settings, see Thomas C.
ers and employees on issues crucial to developing and maintaining competitive advantages. The use of these programs highlights the importance of employee insight on issues relating to productivity, efficiency, and quality as well as improvement of employee morale through increased involvement in management decisions.

Despite the apparent benefits that accompany programs designed to enhance the relationship between employers and employees, these programs are nonetheless threatened by sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which make it illegal for an employer to dominate a labor organization. Under the broad interpretation of the term "labor organization," employee committees may constitute statutory labor organizations. To the extent that an employer par-

Kohler, Models of Worker Participation: The Uncertain Significance of Section 8(a)(2), 27 B.C. L. Rev. 499, 510-14 (1986).


4. See Kohler, supra note 2, at 504. Supporters of employee participation programs cite efficiency, strengthened commitment, and increased productivity among employees as the prominent benefits of the programs. See Chris Doucouliagos, Worker Participation and Productivity in Labor-Managed and Participatory Capitalist Firms: A Meta-Analysis, 49 INDUS. & LAB. REL. Rev. 58, 58 (1996). Opponents argue that these programs reduce managerial power and burden the decision-making process. Id. An overwhelming number of employees support programs that give them a greater voice and facilitate management cooperation. H.R. REP. No. 104-248, at 5 (1996), available in 1995 WL 560823. Seventy-six percent of workers surveyed in 1994 believed that their involvement in decisions relating to production and operations would improve the competitiveness of their companies, and 79% reported having "personally benefited" from the process. Id. (citing Richard B. Freeman & Joel Rogers, Worker Representation and Participation Survey, Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, December 1994).

5. National Labor Relations Act, as amended, §§ 2(5), 8(a)(2), 29 U.S.C. §§ 152(5), 158(a)(2) (1994). Section 2(5) defines "labor organization" and section 8(a)(2) makes it unlawful for an employer to dominate or interfere with a statutory labor organization. Id. § 158(a)(2); see infra text accompanying note 42 for the text of § 2(5) and text accompanying note 69 for the full text of § 8(a)(2).


7. See, e.g., NLRB v. Cabot Carbon Co., 360 U.S. 203 (1959) (establishing a broad
ticipates in the formation and operation of these organizations, they are vulnerable to attack as illegal employer-dominated organizations. These broad statutory definitions create conflict for employers who desire to implement cooperative and participatory programs in the workplace.

The Electromation, Inc. decision of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB or Board) in 1992 bolstered the current conflict surrounding employee participation programs in the nonunion workplace. This decision created a chilling effect on employee participation programs, offering only minimal guidance as to when such programs will be legal. One proposed solution to alleviate the confusion surrounding these programs is a legislative amendment to the National Labor Rela-

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definition of "labor organization" by holding that the language "dealing with" in section 2(5) encompassed more than bargaining with the employer; infra notes 46-48 and accompanying text (discussing the Cabot Carbon decision).

8. See 29 U.S.C. § 158(a)(2). The attack on such organizations generally comes in the form of unfair labor practice charges filed by a union that desires to represent employees. See HARDIN, supra note 6, at 295.

9. See HARDIN, supra note 6, at 295. "The very breadth of the definition of [labor organization] has called into question a variety of 'participatory management' arrangements, bringing the section 8(a)(2) prohibition into conflict with emerging managerial techniques for enhancing employee involvement." Id. The adversary nature of the workplace in the 1930s warranted these broad statutory definitions, but they "no longer make sense in today's [cooperative] workplace." H.R. REP. No. 104-248, at 6 (1995), available in 1995 WL 560823.

10. Electromation, Inc., 309 N.L.R.B. 990 (1992), enforced 35 F.3d 1148 (7th Cir. 1994). In Electromation, the Board held that five employee "action committees" comprised of volunteer employees and members of management were labor organizations because they discussed matters involving employee dissatisfaction and that the employer unlawfully dominated these labor organizations because the employer created them and determined their structure and function. Electromation, 309 N.L.R.B. at 997; see infra notes 84-100 (discussing the Electromation decision).


12. See generally Elizabeth Walpole-Hofmeister, Employee Participation: Need for Labor Law Change Deated Before Senate Panel, Daily Lab. Rep. (BNA) No. 27, at D-14 (Feb. 9, 1996) (noting the dampened enthusiasm of employers for creating employee participation groups despite the relatively small number of domination cases before the NLRB).

The Teamwork for Employees and Managers Act of 1997 (TEAM Act) proposes to amend section 8(a)(2) of the NLRA to provide that an employer’s establishing, assisting, maintaining, or participating in any organization in which employees participate on matters regarding quality, productivity, and efficiency will not be an unfair labor practice. While proponents of the legislation feel that this is an important step toward improving the ability of American companies to compete in the global marketplace, opponents feel that this amendment would invite a return to the evils of “company unions” which minimize employees’ rights by giving them a false sense of protection.


15. H.R. 634, 105th Cong. (1997); S. 295, 105th Cong. (1997). Identical legislation, known as the Teamwork for Employees and Managers Act of 1996, passed both houses of Congress in 1996 but was vetoed by President Clinton. 142 CONG. REC. H8816 (daily ed. July 30, 1996). Many of the arguments made during the 1996 Act’s debates will be made again as the 1997 Act moves through the legislative process. The substance of the 1996 Act arguments will be used throughout this Comment to examine the anticipated arguments for and against the renewed legislation.

16. H.R. 634; S. 295. This legislation would make it less burdensome for employers to establish joint labor-management committees and employee participation programs for legitimate purposes by eliminating the fear of unfair labor practice charges. See id.; infra Part IV.

17. See 141 CONG. REC. E228 (daily ed. Jan. 31, 1995) (statement of Rep. Harris W. Fawell). In his remarks supporting the TEAM Act, Representative Fawell discussed the ability of foreign competitors to gain competitive advantages because of their extensive use of labor-management cooperation techniques and noted the competitive disadvantage of U.S. companies due to legal impediments to implementing such techniques. Id. Representative Fawell also characterized the statutory definition of labor organization as “a 60-year-old definition of labor organization [which is] colliding head-on with dynamic new concepts of doing business in today’s fast evolving, information-centered economy and society.” 141 CONG. REC. H9525 (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995).

18. See William Tench, ‘Worker Involvement’ Means Union Busting, NAT’L LJ., Aug. 14, 1995, at A18. Opponents suggest that the Act will undermine employee protections by allowing nonunion employees to establish sham unions and by allowing other employees to establish company-dominated organizations while their co-employees are seeking legitimate unionization. 141 CONG. REC. H9526 (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995) (remarks of Rep. Owens). Representative Owens argued that the TEAM Act would un-
This Comment explores the current conflict relating to employer-employee cooperative efforts and the need for the implementation of the TEAM Act. Part II discusses the legislative history of the National Labor Relations Act and examines the nature of the workplace at the time of its enactment. Part III discusses the judicial and administrative interpretations of sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) that led to Electromation and subsequent decisions. Part IV focuses on the TEAM Act of 1997 and the conflicting views regarding its passage, including an explanation as to why the TEAM Act is crucial to the success of American companies in the global marketplace. Part V concludes with the ramifications on the American workplace should the TEAM Act be defeated again.

II. THE LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF SECTIONS 2(5) AND 8(A)(2) OF THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT

The current dispute surrounding employee involvement programs closely parallels the disputes surrounding "company unions" at the time of the enactment of the National Labor Relations Act. Company-dominated unions, also known as "sham unions," were in-house labor organizations implemented and controlled by the employer. These organizations purported to represent the employees, but were actually an impediment to legitimate unionization. Company unions posed a serious

determine the success that collective bargaining has brought to the American workplace. Id. Section 7 of the NLRA guarantees workers the right to seek independent union representation. National Labor Relations Act § 7, 29 U.S.C. § 157 (1994). The union engages with the employer in the collective bargaining process to determine terms and conditions of employment, wages and general protection of the employees. Id. For a detailed overview of the NLRA and the collective bargaining process, see generally HARDIN, supra note 6.
19. See infra Part II.
20. See infra Part III.
21. See infra Part IV.
22. See infra Part V.
24. 78 CONG. REC. 3,443 (1934), reprinted in 1 NLRB, LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE NLRA, 1935, at 15-16 (1949) [hereinafter 1 NLRB 1935]. These company unions arose under the National Industrial Recovery Act, which permitted the abuses that the NLRA later sought to prohibit. See HARDIN, supra note 6, at 25-26.
25. 78 CONG. REC. 3,443 (1934), reprinted in 1 NLRB 1935, supra note 24, at 15-
threat to the employees' rights to freely choose representation during a period when they needed significant protection from their employers. In response to the concern regarding the prevalence of company unions, which undermined the NLRA's policy to promote industrial peace through the process of collective bargaining, Congress banned company unions by enacting sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) of the National Labor Relations Act.

A. Prohibition of the Company Union: Protection of Employees' Rights Under Sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2)

The specific purpose behind sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) of the Act was to prohibit company unions that were formed and dominated by employers and limited employees' right to free choice guaranteed by section 7 of the NLRA. At the time Congress enacted these provisions, the company union was a prevalent problem, and employer-employee relations were highly adversarial.

26. Id. Although the discussion focused on the concerns regarding company unions, Senator Wagner recognized that employee participation renders important benefits and that the highest degree of cooperation arises when the employee can freely choose to participate or withdraw. Id. at 24; see also CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN LABOR & EMPLOYMENT LAW, PROCEEDINGS OF NEW YORK UNIVERSITY'S 46TH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LABOR § 13.6, 346 (Bruno Stein ed. 1994) (noting that the proposition that important benefits arise from cooperative employment relationships is not a new one).

27. See 78 CONG. REC. 3,443 (1934), reprinted in 1 NLRB 1935, supra note 24, at 15-16 (remarks of Sen. Wagner). For an analysis of the origin of the prohibition on company unions, see Samuel Estreicher, Employee Involvement and the "Company Union" Prohibition: The Case for Partial Repeal of Section 8(a)(2) of the NLRA, 69 N.Y.U. L. REV. 125, 129-33 (1994). The preamble to the NLRA states that the policy of the United States is to facilitate the free flow of commerce by "protecting the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection." National Labor Relations Act § 1, 29 U.S.C. § 151 (1994); see also NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp., 301 U.S. 1, 33-34 (1936) (discussing the history and purpose behind the Act).

28. See 78 CONG. REC. 3,443 (1934), reprinted in 1 NLRB 1935, supra note 24, at 15-16; HARDIN, supra note 6, at 289 (describing the purpose of section 8(a)(2)). Section 7 of the NLRA explicitly grants employees the right to free choice of bargaining representatives. 29 U.S.C. § 157 (1994). This right lies at the heart of the NLRA.

29. 78 CONG. REC. 4,229 (1934), reprinted in 1 NLRB 1935, supra note 24, at 23-24. In his remarks, Senator Wagner noted that a 1933 study of 25% of mining and manufacturing workers revealed that 45.7% of the employees were bargaining individually and 45% were enlisted in company unions, while only 9.3% of employees were dealing through traditional trade unions. Id. at 23.

30. Id. The two assumptions underlying section 8(a)(2) were that employees prefer
This adversarial nature of the employment relationship, which fueled the passage of NLRA, also led to a broad statutory definition of a "labor organization" as "any organization of any kind . . . in which employees participate and which exists for the purpose . . . of dealing with employers" about certain work-related issues.31 Section 8(a)(2) makes it an unfair labor practice for an employer to "dominate or interfere with the formation or administration of any labor organization or contribute financial or other support to it."32 The evil that Congress sought to eliminate was the limitation that employer-dominated organizations placed on employees because they could not "cope with any issues that transcend[ed] the boundaries of a single business."33 Congress viewed the inability of these employees to gain knowledge from outside unions as a major impediment to industrial peace.34 Although Congress sought

31. 29 U.S.C. § 152(5). For the full text of section 2(5), see infra text accompanying note 42. In defining "labor organization," Congress sought to include any form of organization that could act as a bargaining representative for employees. See S. REP. No. 74-573, at 7 (1935), reprinted in 2 NLRB, LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE LABOR MANAGEMENT RELATIONS ACT, 1947, at 2306 (1948) [hereinafter 2 NLRB 1947]. Congress included the explicit reference to employee representation committees, which were a common form of company union, in the final version of the Act to ensure that section 2(5) encompassed the entire spectrum of possibilities and to specifically ensure that these types of organizations would be prohibited. See To Create a National Labor Board: Hearings on S. 2926 Before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, 73d Cong., 2d Sess. 241 (1934), reprinted in 1 NLRB 1935, supra note 24, at 272; Staff of Senate Committee on Education and Labor, 74th Cong., 1st Sess. (1935), reprinted in 1 NLRB 1935, supra note 24, at 1352.

32. 29 U.S.C. § 158(a)(2). For the full text of section 8(a)(2), see infra text accompanying note 69. As noted previously, the purpose of the NLRA was to protect employees' free choice. See supra note 27 and accompanying text. If the employer dominated the labor organization, then the representatives were really only the mouthpiece for the employer, thereby destroying section 7 rights.


34. Id.; see supra note 27 (discussing the preamble to the NLRA).
to eliminate the company union, it stressed that it did not intend to eliminate employee groups that were formed independently of the employer by the employees.35

B. An Early Attempt to Permit Employee Participation Under the NLRA

The concern over company unions continued to exist well into the next decade as evidenced by the defeat of proposed amendments to the NLRA when Congress passed the Labor Management Relations Act in 1947.36 One proposed amendment permitted an employer to form or maintain a committee of employees to discuss mutual matters of interest if no union had been recognized by the employer or certified by the NLRB.37 Although this amendment passed in the House, its ultimate defeat remained consistent with the desire to keep company unions out

35. 78 CONG. REC. 7,565, reprinted in 2 NLRB 1947, supra note 31, at 2333.
   Nothing in the bill prohibits the formation of a company union, if by that term is meant an organization of workers confined by their own volition to the boundaries of a particular plant or employer. What is intended is to make such organization the free choice of the workers, and not a choice dictated by forms of interference which are weighty precisely because of the existence of the employer-employee relationship.


36. 93 CONG. REC. 3,621 (1947), reprinted in LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE LABOR MANAGEMENT RELATIONS ACT, 1 NLRB 1947, at 601 (1948) [hereinafter 1 NLRB 1947]. Despite the defeat of an attempt to amend section 8(a)(2), enacted amendments expanded the scope of employer-employee communications by allowing employers to respond to their employees' grievance. See Smith, supra note 14, at 238.

37. H.R. 3020, 80th Cong. (1947), reprinted in 2 NLRB 1935, supra note 31, at 183. The amendment proposed the addition of section 8(d), which stated:

   (d) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, the following shall not constitute or be evidence of an unfair labor practice under any of the provisions of this Act . . . [f]orming or maintaining by an employer of a committee of employees and discussing with it matters of mutual interest, including grievances, wages, hours of employment, and other working conditions, if the Board has not certified or the employer has not recognized a representative as their representative under section 9.

Id.
of the workplace. These same arguments fuel the opposition to the Team Act of 1997.

III. JUDICIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INTERPRETATION OF SECTIONS 2(5) AND 8(A)(2)

The threshold determination that must be made before finding unlawful employer domination of an employee participation program is that the group constitutes a "labor organization" within the meaning of section 2(5) of the NLRA. If a "labor organization" does exist, then a determination must be made as to whether the employer dominates, interferes with, or supports the organization. Understanding the judicial and administrative interpretation of both sections is critical to an understanding of the current conflict surrounding employee participation programs.

A. The Broad Interpretation of "Labor Organization"

Section 2(5) of the National Labor Relations Act defines a labor organization as "any organization of any kind, or any agency or employee representation committee or plan, in which employees participate and which exists for the purpose, in whole or in part, of dealing with employers concerning grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours of employment, or conditions of work." In its first case, the National Labor Relations Board addressed whether an employee organization was a labor organization within the meaning of section 2(5). The Board held that the employee association

38. 93 Cong. Rec. 3,521 (1947), reprinted in 1 NLRB 1947, supra note 36, at 601. Representative Klein, in opposition to the amendment, remarked that it "revive[d] the right of an employer—long outlawed under existing law—to get him a company union for the purpose of bucking legitimate self-organization." Id. at 654. The arguments made against the early proposal to relax the ban created by sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) are very similar to those made against the TEAM Act. See infra note 149 and accompanying text.

39. See Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at E-7 (testimony of Jonathan P. Hiatt, General Counsel, AFL-CIO). Mr. Hiatt commented that the TEAM Act would "allow egregious forms of employer domination" and a resurgence of the company union. Id.

40. HARDIN, supra note 6, at 288; see infra text accompanying note 42.


43. Pennsylvania Greyhound Lines, Inc., 1 N.L.R.B. 1, 2 (1935). In that case, the
constituted an employee representation plan under section 2(5) because it was "entirely the creature of the management." Although the Board did not discuss the definition of "dealing with" in *Pennsylvania Greyhound Lines*, the meaning of that term is crucial to the analysis as to whether a labor organization exists.

In *NLRB v. Cabot Carbon Co.*, the Supreme Court interpreted the term "dealing with" to include more than mere bargaining. Yet, aside from its broad determination that a group that does not bargain with the employer may nonetheless constitute a labor organization, the Court failed to define "dealing with," leaving that determination for subsequent cases. Following *Cabot Carbon*, the Board and the courts continued to broadly interpret "dealing with," which in turn led to a broad interpretation of "labor organization." Perhaps recognizing that this broad interpretation put section 8(a)(2) in conflict with employer programs designed to enhance employee involvement, the Board later nar-
rowed the scope of the term "labor organization" by creating several narrow exceptions in a series of cases.  

One narrow exception permits employee groups to resolve grievances provided that management has no involvement. In two separate cases, the NLRB found that employee councils which heard employee grievances were not "labor organizations" because both councils had made independent decisions. In this respect, the councils were performing a management function, rather than "dealing with" management. In these cases, the Board affirmed the view that there is room for some employer-employee communication without the danger of creating a statutory labor organization.

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50. See Sparks Nugget, Inc., 230 N.L.R.B. 275, 276-77 (1977); Mercy-Memorial Hosp. Corp., 231 N.L.R.B. 1108, 1121 (1977); General Foods Corp., 231 N.L.R.B. 1232, 1234-35 (1977). These exceptions are relevant to the discussions surrounding employee participation programs because they provide competing arguments concerning whether or not certain types of programs are permissible.

51. Sparks Nugget, 230 N.L.R.B. at 276; Mercy-Memorial Hosp., 231 N.L.R.B. at 1108. This alleviates any "dealing with" management by the employees because the group acts independently. See id.

52. See supra note 51. In Sparks Nugget, the NLRB found that a joint employer-employee grievance council, structured almost entirely by management, did not "deal with" the employer. Sparks Nugget, 230 N.L.R.B. at 276. The committee met only to hear cases filed by individual employees and did not initiate grievances or recommend changes in terms or conditions of employment. Id. The Board based its finding on the fact that the council performed a "purely adjudicatory function," independently resolving grievances without any input from or interaction with management other than to report its decision. Id. In a vigorous dissent, Chairman Fanning stated that dealing with an employer regarding any one of the matters in section 2(5) is sufficient to support a finding that a labor organization exists, and he concluded that the committee involved clearly dealt with management with respect to grievances. Id. at 277 (Fanning, Chairman, dissenting).

Following Sparks Nugget, the Board departed again from the broad interpretation of "labor organization" with its decision in Mercy-Memorial Hosp. In Mercy Memorial Hosp., the Board held that a joint employer-employee committee that decided grievances was not a labor organization despite the fact that the grievance determinations were subject to appeal by the complainant and the committee had the "right and obligation," according to the employer's policy, to recommend changes in rules, regulations, and working conditions. Mercy-Memorial Hosp., 231 N.L.R.B. at 1108-09, 1121.


54. Mercy-Memorial Hosp., 231 N.L.R.B. at 1121. The administrative law judge in Mercy-Memorial Hosp. stated that "the committee was created simply to give employees a voice in resolving the grievances of their fellow employees . . . not by present-
Another exception created by the NLRB hinges on the absence of a representative relationship between an employee group and the employer. In finding that employee "teams" were not labor organizations, the Board in *General Foods* noted that the "essence of a labor organization" involves a representative relationship between the organization and the employees involved. In that case, the Board upheld the employer-created job enrichment program which included all members of the bargaining unit. The Board found that the teams' authority to regulate themselves resulted not from "dealings" between the teams and the company, but from unilaterally delegated authority; thus, the powers constituted additional job duties.

The Board's decisions in *Sparks Nugget*, *Mercy-Memorial*, and *General Foods* established exceptions to the definition of "labor organization," which extend to any organization whose purpose is limited to performing a managerial or adjudicative function. The Sixth Circuit also

55. *General Foods*, 231 N.L.R.B. at 1234-35.
56. Id. The employer created four operating teams and other ad hoc committees, whose membership came from different teams, to carry out specific and limited functions including assigning jobs, job rotations, and scheduling overtime. Id. at 1235. One group of employees interviewed job applicants, another inspected the plant and reported safety infractions, and all teams were authorized to set their team's work schedules. Id.
57. Id. at 1234-35. The lack of agency status is important because it shows that employees retained their freedom of choice of representatives under section 7. See Electromation, Inc., 308 N.L.R.B. 990, 998 (1992), enforced, 35 F.3d 1148 (7th Cir. 1994). The judge also found support for his decision in the fact that the employer's motive in organizing the teams had nothing to do with labor relations but rather involved efficiency. See *General Foods*, 231 N.L.R.B. at 1234. Opponents of the TEAM Act argue that the *General Foods* decision clearly permits employees to engage in "brain work" and to assist employers in making workplace decisions. Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at *10.
58. *General Foods*, 231 N.L.R.B. at 1235. Some commentators view this case as an example of the fact that employers can lawfully use employee participation programs, while others note the narrowness of the exception and point out that the case leaves questions unanswered. See Estreicher, supra note 27, at 140-41.
59. *General Foods*, 231 N.L.R.B. at 1235. The Board found that these managerial functions were "flatly delegated" to the employees and therefore no employer involvement existed in the performance of these job duties. Id.
60. Aside from these few cases narrowly construing the definition of labor organization, the Board has generally found that when an employer creates an organization and determines its structure and agenda so that the organization has no existence independent of the employer, the organization constitutes a labor organization. See, e.g., NLRB v. Ampex Corp., 168 N.L.R.B. 742, 746-47 (1967) (holding that an employee committee with no formal structure and random membership was a labor organization-
addressed the distinction between "legitimate managerial initiatives and impermissible support for an organization" by creating its own exception, refusing to enforce the Board's decision on the issue.\footnote{HARDIN, supra note 6, at 297; see Airstream, Inc. v. NLRB, 877 F.2d 1291 (6th Cir. 1989), denying enforcement to 288 N.L.R.B. 220 (1988); NLRB v. Streamway Div. of Scott & Fetzer Co., 691 F.2d 288 (6th Cir. 1982), denying enforcement to 249 N.L.R.B. 396 (1980).} Although the Board's decisions have been met with judicial approval in most jurisdictions, the Sixth Circuit, with its departure from Board interpretation, followed a different path.

In \textit{NLRB v. Streamway}, the employer established an in-plant committee, provided representatives, and adjusted its vacation eligibility policy after a committee meeting.\footnote{Streamway, 691 F.2d at 290.} Although the Board found that a labor organization existed, the Sixth Circuit determined that the committee was not a labor organization, but rather was merely a "communicative device."\footnote{Id. at 295; see also E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., 311 N.L.R.B. 893, 894 (1993) (noting that employee groups that simply share information with an employer would not be deemed labor organizations); Sears Roebuck & Co., 274 N.L.R.B. 230 (1985) (holding that an employer's "communications committee" was not a labor organization because the purpose of the committee was to be a management tool intended to increase company efficiency rather than to be a representative of the employees).} The court based its finding on the fact that the employee groups spoke directly with management on an individual, rather than on a representative, basis and that neither the employees nor the committee members considered the committee a labor organization.\footnote{Streamway, 691 F.2d at 295-96. Although the Board held differently, this outcome seems consistent with the Board's view in \textit{General Foods} that absence of a representative relationship precludes a finding of a labor organization. See \textit{supra} notes 55-59 and accompanying text.}

Similarly, in \textit{NLRB v. Airstream}, the Sixth Circuit declined to enforce the Board's order that an employee committee be disestablished because it was an employer-dominated labor organization.\footnote{Airstream, 877 F.2d at 1300.} In \textit{Airstream}, the employer formed a "President's Advisory Council," told the employees to choose representatives, and discussed an attendance bo-
nus system with the representatives. In determining that a labor organization did not exist, the Sixth Circuit followed its decision in Streamway, holding that even though the employer created the council at approximately the same time that an independent organizational drive was taking place, this council did not take any action during the pendency of the organizational drive and the action did not affect employees' rights.

The Sixth Circuit's approach in these cases indicates that the adversarial relationship between employers and employees is diminishing and that where a program involves legitimate managerial functions, the cooperative relationship should not be disturbed by a finding that a labor organization exists.

B. Approaches to Defining Employer Domination Under Section 8(a)(2)

Section 8(a)(2) of the National Labor Relations Act makes it an unfair labor practice for an employer to

- dominate or interfere with the formation or administration of any labor organization or contribute financial or other support to it; Provided, That subject to rules and regulations made and published by the Board pursuant to section 156 of this title, an employer shall not be prohibited from permitting employees to confer with him during working hours without loss of time or pay.

Three approaches for determining whether employer domination exists under section 8(a)(2) have evolved: the objective approach, the subjective approach, and a hybrid approach.

Under the objective approach, domination of a labor organization is inferred if management sets up the committees and management approval is necessary for committee action to be effective. In Newport News,
an employer created an employee committee to "give employees a voice in respect of the conditions of their labor and to provide a procedure for the prevention and adjustment of future differences." Several joint committees comprised of employees and management administered the plan, and the management representatives acted as a liaison between management and the representatives. Affirming the decision of the Board, the United States Supreme Court found that because the employer had created the committee and continued to require management approval before any committee action would be effective, it was employer-dominated.

In the 1950s, the Seventh Circuit departed from the Board's less flexible objective test in favor of a subjective or "actual domination" approach in Chicago Rawhide Manufacturing Co. v. NLRB. Rejecting a per se approach, the court focused on whether the employee organization was employer-controlled from the standpoint of the employees. In Chicago Rawhide, the court refused to enforce the Board's order for disestablishment, holding that an employees' association that worked out employee grievances was not a labor organization because the idea origin-

while the men are free to adopt any form of organization and representation whether purely local or connected with a national body, their purpose so to do may be obstructed by the existence and recognition by the management of an old plan or organization the original structure or operation of which was not in accordance with the provisions of the law.

Id. at 250; cf. Duquesne Univ., 198 N.L.R.B. 891, 892-93 (1972) (holding that only unlawful assistance, rather than domination, existed where the employees determined the structure and function of the employer-initiated committee). See generally HARDIN, supra note 6, at 298-305, for a detailed analysis of the domination approaches.

71. Newport News, 308 U.S. at 244.
72. Id. at 244-45.
73. Id. at 249.
74. 221 F.2d 165 (7th Cir. 1955).
75. Id. at 168. Although Chicago Rawhide appears to make it easier for employers to lawfully implement employee participation programs, the decision does not provide a sufficient basis to uphold these programs because the case did not involve the kind of employer involvement that is necessary to set up and maintain a successful program. McLain, supra note 2, at 1757-58.
76. The court noted that "[n]either mere cooperation, preference nor possibility of control constitute unfair labor practices; and the Board may not infer conduct violative of the Act from conduct that is not, unless there is a substantial basis, in fact or reason, for that inference." Chicago Rawhide, 221 F.2d at 168. In this case, the acts for which the employer was charged with domination constituted no more than cooperation with the employee association. Id.
nated with the employees and the employees did not believe that the employer controlled them. The Seventh Circuit continued to follow this approach, which several other circuits later adopted.

Just over a decade later, the hybrid approach emerged. The Sixth Circuit departed from the Newport News approach in Modern Plastics Corp. v. NLRB, where it applied an "objective test" and a "subjective test" to determine whether employer domination existed. In Modern Plastics, the company's plant consisted of six groups, each of which were represented by an elected committee representative. Under the hybrid approach, a finding of employer domination requires (1) an objective finding of actual domination, which may be established by evidence of anti-union bias, and (2) a subjective finding of active domination from the employees' point of view. Despite the fact that the employer established the employee committee and the committee engaged in collective bargaining, the court found no domination. The court based its decision on its findings that there was no anti-union animus shown by the employer and that the employees did not feel the employer dominated the committees.

77. Id. at 167-68.
78. See, e.g., Modern Plastics v. NLRB, 379 F.2d 201 (6th Cir. 1967); Continental Distilling Sales Co., 348 F.2d 246 (7th Cir. 1965). In 1977, the Ninth Circuit also departed from the Newport News "objective test" and instead applied a relaxed "subjective test" to determine whether an employer dominated an employee committee. Hertzka & Knowles v. NLRB, 503 F.2d 625, 630 (9th Cir. 1974), denying enforcement to 206 N.L.R.B. 191 (1973). In Hertzka & Knowles, the court determined that a finding of domination requires actual domination, as determined from an employee's perspective, rather than inferred domination. Id. at 630. In this case, the court found no domination because employees still had retained freedom of choice. Id.
79. Modern Plastics, 379 F.2d at 204. Similar to the test used in Modern Plastics, the NLRB applied a more relaxed totality of the circumstances test in Duquesne Univ., 198 N.L.R.B. 891, 893 (1972), where it found only unlawful assistance because the employees, rather than the employer, determined the structure and formation of the committee. Id.
80. Modern Plastics, 379 F.2d at 202. The employee committee served as the bargaining representative for the employees for over ten years, negotiating with the company on "a number of collective-bargaining agreements" when an outside union sought to organize the company's employees. Id.
81. Id. at 204 (citing Chicago Rawhide Mfg. Co. v. NLRB, 221 F.2d 165 (7th Cir. 1955)).
82. Id. The court noted that the company and the committee worked well together for many years and that permitting the Board to disrupt that relationship simply because another union wanted to come into the company would be a disservice to the employees. Id. at 204-05.
83. Id.
C. The New Era of Electromation, Inc.

Electromation, which represents the Board's reaffirmation of previously established interpretations of sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2), bolstered the current controversy surrounding employee participation plans. In Electromation, the management of the company involved employees in company decisions by creating five "action committees" for which management set the goals and responsibilities. Both the employees and management representatives served on these committees. The NLRB found that these committees constituted labor organizations because they were dealing with the employer concerning conditions of employment. The NLRB further found that the employer dominated the organizations because management organized the committees and determined the nature, structure, and functions. The majority opinion emphasized that the bilateral mechanism by which employees made proposals to management, which could then be accepted or rejected, was the crucial element in establishing the "dealing with" requirement under section 2(5). While the four opinions in Electromation provided little guidance

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86. Electromation, 309 N.L.R.B. at 991.
87. Id. The five action committees were created to handle the following issues: (1) absenteeism and infractions; (2) a no-smoking policy; (3) a communication network; (4) pay progression for premium positions; and (4) an attendance bonus program. Id. at 997.
88. Id.
89. Id. These management controls were inconsistent with the structural independence required by Newport News. See supra notes 70-73 and accompanying text. Despite the Board's finding of an unlawfully dominated labor organization, the majority opinion suggested that where the purpose of the committee is limited to improving quality or efficiency, or to act as a communicative device to promote efficiency or quality, a violation would not be found. Electromation, 309 N.L.R.B. at 997 n.28. This suggestion undermined the arguments made by proponents of the TEAM Act that the Electromation decision prevents employers from implementing such programs. See infra notes 178-80 and accompanying text. When viewed in light of the chilling effect that Electromation has had on employers and the reduction of employee participation programs in its wake, the TEAM Act would still serve an important purpose by removing that chilling effect. See Dinnen, supra note 85, at E8.
90. Electromation, 309 N.L.R.B. at 997. The Board noted that the only purpose of the committees was to deal with the dissatisfaction of employees through the cre-
for employers as to the applicable criteria for determining whether an employee participation committee is a dominated labor organization, the concurring opinions shed some light on the types of committees that may be acceptable under the NLRA.\textsuperscript{91}

In his concurring opinion, Member Devaney emphasized that section 8(a)(2) should not be a barrier to employee participation programs as long as the programs do not impair the right of employees to their free choice of a bargaining representative.\textsuperscript{92} Member Devaney contrasted the type of action committee involved in Electromation with committees concerning "productivity, efficiency, materials conservation, safety and the like."\textsuperscript{93} He noted that precedent suggests that an employee group may be lawful where it exists only for employee goal-setting and self-regulation, to perform managerial functions and grievance resolution, or to act as a management tool to increase efficiency in communications.\textsuperscript{94}

Member Oviatt emphasized practical guidelines, and he stressed a wide range of lawful activities he viewed as untouched by the decision, such as quality circles, problem-solving structures, and committees to create better communications.\textsuperscript{95} In his view, the critical question in cases involving violations of section 8(a)(2) for employee participation programs is whether the purpose is to "deal with" any of the enumerated subjects in section (2)(5).\textsuperscript{96} Further, Member Oviatt specifically recognized that programs such as quality circles, quality of work-life programs, and employee-management cooperative programs do not implicate section 2(5).\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{91} For a detailed analysis of the Electromation decision, see generally Steven I. Locke, Keeping Sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) of the NLRA Intact: A Fresh Look at Worker Participation Committees Through Electromation, Inc., 10 Hofstra Lab. L.J. 375 (1992) (discussing Electromation).

\textsuperscript{92} Electromation, 309 N.L.R.B. at 1003. This view follows the Sixth Circuit approach in NLRB v. Streamway, 691 F.2d 288 (6th Cir. 1982), denying enforcement to 249 N.L.R.B. 396 (1980).

\textsuperscript{93} Electromation, 309 N.L.R.B. at 1003.

\textsuperscript{94} Id. at 1001-02; see supra notes 51-68 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{95} Electromation, 309 N.L.R.B. at 1004.

\textsuperscript{96} Id. These matters include "grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours of employment or conditions of work." Id. (quoting § 2(5)).

\textsuperscript{97} Id. The employee committees that are established for the purpose of creating better communications between the employer and employee, although viewed as protected by Member Oviatt, are the exact type of committees that are in the most danger of being perceived as labor organizations under section 2(5).
Finally, Member Radabaugh, going beyond a mere analysis of existing law, suggested that section 8(a)(2) should be reinterpreted by the legislature in light of the growing importance of employee participation programs and cooperation between labor and management. He also offered a four-part analysis for determining whether employee participation programs are lawful. In Member Radabaugh's view, the four factors for consideration, none of which are dispositive, are (1) the extent of the employer's involvement in implementing the committees, (2) whether the employees reasonably perceive the participation program as a substitute for collective bargaining through an independent union, (3) whether employees have been assured of their Section 7 right to choose representation by an independent union, and (4) the employer's motives in establishing the employee participation program.

One year after the Board decided Electromation, it faced a somewhat different situation in E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., where it had the opportunity to provide some concrete guidance regarding the definition of a labor organization and the employer domination analysis. In that case, employees in a unionized company participated in safety committees, which made proposals to management for their approval or rejection. Based primarily on the fact that management could reject the proposals, the Board found that the committees constituted labor organizations. The Board emphasized the existence of a bilateral mechanism between two parties as the focal point in determining that the groups were "dealing with" the employer, and stated that a "bilateral mechanism" ordinarily entails a pattern or practice in which a group of employees, over time, makes proposals to management, management

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98. Id. at 1013.
99. Id. In proposing this test, Member Radabaugh sought to accommodate labor-management participation while keeping employees' section 7 rights intact. Id.
100. Id. Opponents of the TEAM Act cite the lack of preservation of employees' section 7 rights as the major flaw in the Act. See infra notes 149-50 and accompanying text.
102. Id. at 894, 895-97. This case provided the Board the opportunity to address issues raised by employee participation programs in the unionized workplace. Id. at 893-98.
103. Id. at 894-95.
104. Id. at 895.
responds to these proposals by acceptance or rejection by word or deed, and compromise is not required.\textsuperscript{105}

Expanding on this definition in an attempt to provide the guidance lacking in Electromation, the Board articulated three employment situations that fail to meet the requirements of "dealing with." First, "brainstorming" is not akin to "dealing with" because the employees are not making proposals.\textsuperscript{106} Second, a committee whose purpose is sharing information with the employer is not dealing with the employer.\textsuperscript{107} Third, the Board noted that suggestion boxes are clearly not mechanisms for "dealing with" the employer, despite the fact that employees make proposals, because they are not making them as a group.\textsuperscript{108} Based upon this analysis, the Board found quarterly all-day safety conferences held by the employer permissible because the conferences amounted to brainstorming sessions during which attempts were clearly made to prohibit discussion of bargaining issues.\textsuperscript{109}

Even though E.I. du Pont took place in a unionized setting, this decision provided a small amount of guidance to employers regarding permissible forms of communication. Many believe that this guidance falls short, as evidenced by proposals to amend the NLRA to enable employers to involve employee groups in decision making without fear of committing unfair labor practices.\textsuperscript{110} Opponents of the TEAM Act argue that E.I. du Pont shows that employers can implement employee participation structures under existing law without this fear.\textsuperscript{111} This decision, however, only provides a narrow exception to the expansive reach of the Electromation decision.\textsuperscript{112}

D. Employee Participation in The Wake of Electromation

Since the decision in Electromation, the need for clarification of the legality of employee participation programs has become evident.\textsuperscript{113} In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105} Id. at 894.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Id. at 894-95.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Id. The Board noted that the "dealing" element is absent when, without evidence of a pattern, the employee group proposes ideas informally to management followed by management's response of acceptance or rejection. Id.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Id. at 896.
\item \textsuperscript{110} See infra Part IV.
\item \textsuperscript{111} See infra notes 182-83 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{112} See supra notes 103-09 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{113} The Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations suggested in its January 9, 1995, report that Congress clarify the NLRA and remove legal obstacles to enable employers to freely engage in participation programs. See Cimini & Muhl, supra note 14, at 78 (summarizing the Dunlop Report).
\end{itemize}
recent years the Board has considered charges involving the employee involvement efforts of some leading companies in the country and questioned the legality of these efforts.114 Continuing its reliance on the Electromation decision, the Board found that employee participation programs constituted illegally dominated labor organizations in four of six recent rulings.115

In Keeler Brass Automotive Group,116 the Board held that a grievance committee comprised of elected employees was an employer-dominated labor organization and ordered its disestablishment.117 The Board, relying on its interpretation of “dealing with” in Electromation,118 found a bilateral mechanism existed by which the committee engaged in a pattern or practice of submitting proposals to management for approval or rejection.119 In further reliance on its decision in Electromation, the Board found that management dominated the organization because it initiated the committee and determined its structure, function, and continued existence.120

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114. See H.R. Rep. No. 104-248, at 13-14 (1995), available in 1995 WL 560823 (noting the section 8(a)(2) charges against Donnelly Corporation and Polaroid Corporation, both of which the Department of Labor cited as one of the 100 best companies to work for in America, as well as against EFCO Corporation).


117. Keeler Brass, 317 N.L.R.B. at 1114, 1116. It is interesting to note that the Board deciding Keeler Brass consisted of four Board members who were not on the Board at the time of the Electromation decision. See id. at 1110; Electromation, Inc., 309 N.L.R.B. 990 (1992), enforced, 335 F.3d 1148 (7th Cir. 1994).

118. See supra note 84-90 and accompanying text.


120. Id. at 1115. The Board noted that the employer’s involvement could not be “characterized as mere cooperation.” Id. at 1115 n.21 (quoting Electromation, Inc. v. NLRB, 35 F.3d 1148, 1165-66 (7th Cir. 1994) (distinguishing Chicago Rawhide Mfg. Co. v. NLRB, 221 F.2d 165 (7th Cir. 1955))); see supra notes 88-90 and accompanying text.
In *Webcor Packaging, Inc.*, the Board upheld a finding that an employer-established plant council, which offered recommendations to management about proposed changes in working conditions, was not merely a communications mechanism but rather was engaged in the pattern or practice of making recommendations for management's consideration. Again following *Electromation*, the Board found domination of the committee because the employer founded the committee and determined its structure and function.

Similarly, in *Dillon Stores*, the Board held that an employee-elected associates committee, which discussed and made regular proposals regarding a wide range of work issues including scheduling and sick leave reimbursement, constituted a labor organization because the employer could accept or reject its proposals. Additionally, the Board found that management dominated the committee because the employer initiated the committee and determined its structure and function.

Finally, in *Reno Hilton Resorts Corp.*, the Board upheld a finding that quality action teams established by the employer were labor organizations. Despite the fact that most of the meetings covered other topics, the team dealt with management "concerning wages, hours and other terms and conditions of work." The Board also determined that management dominated the quality action teams because the company's general manager determined their size and structure, paid employees to attend the meetings, and developed the agendas for the meetings.

While four of the six recent cases in which the Board found employer-dominated organizations contained very similar situations, the two cases in which the Board did not find labor organizations involved significantly different scenarios. In *Stoody Co.*, the Board found that an em-

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122. Id. at 1204. The Board noted that the council had no effective existence independent of the management's involvement and approval. Id. Employees will not be independently implementing most employee participation programs because the nature of the employment relationship will still require that employers be involved with the group's regular operations.
123. Id.
125. Id. at 1251-52.
126. Id. at 1252.
128. Id. at 1157.
129. Id. at 1156-57. Section 2(5) defines a labor organization as an organization that exists, even in part, for the purpose of dealing with the employer concerning "grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours of employment, or conditions of work." 29 U.S.C. § 152(5) (1994).
131. See *infra* notes 132-38 and accompanying text.
ployee handbook committee, created to review the company handbook for consistency with current work practices, was not a labor organization. The Board emphasized the fact that management specifically instructed the committee not to discuss wages, benefits, or working conditions. The Board also stated that it "support[s] an interpretation of the Act which would not discourage such programs," but the Board cautioned that recurring instances of employee participation committees making proposals to management on mandatory subjects would support a finding that a labor organization exists.

In Vons Grocery Co., the Board held that a brief discussion on a mandatory topic by a quality circle group, which was established to discuss specific operational issues, did not render the group a labor organization. The Board noted that the group did not have a pattern or practice of making proposals on mandatory subjects and that making one proposal on a condition of work did not constitute a pattern of dealing with the employer within the meaning of section 2(5).

In light of the confusion created by Electromation and the indications that the Board will continue to adhere to that decision, the need for a legislative amendment to the NLRA has become increasingly clear. Enactment of the TEAM Act would remove the legal uncertainty surrounding these programs and enable employers to involve employee groups in decisions concerning areas of mutual interests, including product quality, productivity, and efficiency.

IV. THE TEAMWORK FOR EMPLOYEES AND MANAGERS ACT OF 1997

The introduction of the Teamwork for Employees and Managers Act of 1997 in the House and the Senate in February 1997 signaled the rec-

133. Id. at 19-20.
134. Id. at 20-21. The Board did note that it is difficult to separate such issues as operations and efficiency from the matters of wages, benefits, or working conditions. Id. at 20.
135. Id. at 20-21.
137. Id. at 53-54.
138. Id. at 54.
139. See infra Part IV.
141. 143 CONG. REC. E187 (daily ed. Feb. 6, 1997) (statement of Rep. Fawell); 143
ognition of the continuing need to resolve the legality of employee participation programs. Identical legislation, known as the TEAM Act of 1995, passed both houses of Congress in 1996, only to be vetoed by President Clinton.\textsuperscript{142} The 1997 Act once again proposes to amend section 8(a)(2) of the National Labor Relations Act to “allow labor management cooperative efforts [in the nonunion workplace] that improve economic competitiveness in the United States.”\textsuperscript{143} The stated purpose of the Act is to protect employers from governmental interference while not compromising employees’ section 7 rights to be protected from coercive and deceptive employer practices.\textsuperscript{144} Many oppose the Act, claiming that it amounts to union-busting and will open the door for the return of “company unions,” which the NLRA sought to prevent in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{145} The text of the Act would amend section 8(a)(2) to include the following:

\textit{Provided further,} That it shall not constitute or be evidence of an unfair labor practice under this paragraph for an employer to establish, assist, maintain, or participate in any organization or entity of any kind, in which employees who participate to at least the same extent practicable as representatives of management participate, to address matters of mutual interest, including, but not limited to, issues of quality, productivity, efficiency, and safety and health, and which does not have, claim, or seek authority to be the exclusive bargaining representative of the employees or to negotiate or enter into collective bargaining agreements with the employer or to amend existing collective bargaining agreements between the employer and any labor organization, except that in a case in which a labor organization is the representative of such employees as provided in section 9(a), this proviso shall not apply.\textsuperscript{146}

The TEAM Act proponents recognize that a shift in employment relations from adversarial to cooperative efforts has taken place over the last six decades.\textsuperscript{147} This Act removes the barriers employers previously

\textsuperscript{143} H.R. 634 § 2; S. 296 § 2. In its findings, Congress presents compelling reasons for opening the door to expansive employee participation programs, including the demands of global competition, enhanced productivity and competitiveness, and a generally positive impact on workers. H.R. 634 § 2; S. 296 § 2. Changes in the workplace in response to “escalating demands” of the global economy necessarily involve enhanced role for employees. H.R. 634 § 2; S. 296 § 2.
\textsuperscript{144} H.R. 634; S. 295. The Act provides that employees will retain their right to choose an independent union and further provides that the Act is not applicable to unionized workplaces. See id.
\textsuperscript{145} See Tench, supra note 18, at A18. The force of the arguments against the Act rely on a backward-looking analysis of the events and conditions of the 1930s that led to company unions and the need to ban employer domination. See 141 CONG. REC. H9531 (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995) (remarks of Rep. Gephardt).
\textsuperscript{146} H.R. 634 § 3; S. 295 § 3.
\textsuperscript{147} Congress enacted the NLRA based on the adversarial model of employment
faced to initiating cooperative efforts in the workplace, including joint problem-solving and productivity, and quality improvements. On the other hand, the pro-union opponents of the Act fear that its passage only encourages employers to implement and dominate employee participation programs in an effort to impede legitimate union organizing efforts.

If the TEAM Act fails, its demise will be attributed to both the perceived lack of specific protection against an employer's attempts to implement employee participation programs in the face of union organizational drives and to the use of broad language to describe the types of matters these groups could address.

Despite the polarization of views regarding the TEAM Act, both sides recognize the importance of employer-employee participation and the need to find ways to improve efficiency, productivity and quality so that American companies may compete effectively as we enter the twenty-first century. The main point of contention lies in the determination

relations. See supra notes 30-31 and accompanying text. More than six decades later, the time has come for a change from the labor era and top-down decision making to a workplace era where employee involvement in decision making is the norm. See H.R. REP. No. 104-248, at 5-6 (1995), available in 1995 WL 560823.


149. David Warner, Giving Employees a Voice on the Job, NATION'S BUS., Sept. 1995, at 38; see Administration: Reich Reaches Out to Labor Unions for Help in Combatting GOP Proposals, 189 Daily Lab. Rep. (BNA) No. 189, at A-2 (Sept. 29, 1995) [hereinafter Reich Reaches Out]. Opponents believe that the TEAM Act would undermine employee protections in two major ways. First, the Act would allow "nonunion employees to establish sham unions," and, second, the Act would allow "other employees to establish company-dominated alternative organizations while employees are in the process of [seeking independent union representation]." 141 CONG. REC. H9526 (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995) (remarks of Rep. Owens). If the TEAM Act passes, many fear that employee participation programs will merely be used by "unscrupulous managers to bypass legitimate worker representative organizations." 141 CONG. REC. H9532 (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995) (statements by Rep. Skaggs). These arguments are very similar to those made during the Taft-Hartley debates. See supra notes 36-38 and accompanying text. Employees today, however, are more aware of their rights to organize under the NLRA and could probably determine if a "company union" existed that was not working to their benefit. See Gillian Flynn, Is Pro-Worker Good Business?, 75 PERSONNEL J. 66, Oct. 1, 1996, at 66.

150. See H.R. 634; S. 295; supra text accompanying note 146.

of how to achieve those goals in a way that minimizes the intrusion on employees’ rights to free choice of representation.

A. Analysis of the TEAM Act

Three key provisions, when combined, will permit employers to lawfully implement employee participation programs. The first provision deals with the role of the employer in creating the programs. Whereas the current section 8(a)(2) prohibits an employer from “dominate[ing] or interfer[ing] with the formation or administration of any labor organization,” the proposed revision would permit employers to “establish, assist, maintain, or participate in any organization of any kind.” Although this language appears broad, the clauses following that language reduce its scope by limiting the permissible organizations to those in which employees participate in equal numbers as managers.

The second major provision of the Act involves the matters upon which employee participation programs may make decisions. The Act provides that employee participation groups may “address matters of mutual interest.” Although the Act specifically mentions issues involving the overall productivity, efficiency, and safety in the workplace, the Act does not place a limit on the types of issues that may be discussed. This lack of specificity will permit discussions pertaining to the mentioned topics to encompass discussions on issues involving the terms and conditions of work. As noted by former Board member Charles I. Cohen, discussions of these previously off-limits subjects are inevitable in light of the fact that work conditions affect productivity and efficiency, and therefore, they should be permissible. An employer’s ability to discuss these issues with employees will enable the employer to realize the full potential of these programs.

153. H.R. 634; S. 295.
154. H.R. 634; S. 295. This limitation provides that managers will not outnumber the employees in any given group, thereby avoiding outright domination. See H.R. 634; S. 295. Although this clause alone does not guarantee that the managers on the committee will refrain from presenting the employer’s view, to the extent that employees are not satisfied with outcomes, they will always be able to seek union representation. See H.R. 634; S. 295; infra note 159.
155. H.R. 634; S. 295.
156. See H.R. 634; S. 295.
157. See H.R. 634; S. 295. Even the NLRB acknowledges that discussions of this type will inevitably arise when addressing issues such as productivity and efficiency. See Stoody Co., 320 N.L.R.B. 18, 19 (1995).
158. Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at E-4.
The third key provision, which requires that the employee participation organizations not "have, claim, or seek authority to be the exclusive bargaining representative of the employees or to negotiate or enter ... or amend collective bargaining agreements," addresses the concern that employers may attempt to use employee participation programs to destroy employees' rights to independent union representation. Employee participation programs are not a substitute for independent representation. Further, the language of the Act indicates that the amendment to section 8(a)(2) will not apply in unionized companies.

Enactment of this Act will permit employers to lawfully engage in bilateral communications with their employees to further the goals of enhanced productivity, quality, and safety. To the extent that discussion of these issues requires discussions relating to the terms and conditions of work, such communication will be permitted under the Act, and justifiably so.

Under the Act, several of the post-Electromation cases in which the Board found unlawful employer domination of employee participation programs would have had a different and better outcome. For example, where employee grievance committees do not fall within the narrow exceptions created by the Board because of the fact that they involve bilateral communications between the employer and employees, such committees would now be permitted to lawfully engage in communications with the employer. Similarly, employer-established councils that offer recommendations to management on terms and conditions of work for management consideration also would be lawful. Clearly, the

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169. See H.R. 634; S. 295. The fact that a lawful employee participation group cannot seek to be the exclusive bargaining representative should put to rest the stated fear of TEAM Act opponents that the Act would permit a return to the "sham unions" of the 1930s. See H.R. 634; S. 295. The continued opposition to the Act in light of this clause emphasizes the fact that its opponents fail to recognize the ability of employees to seek representation if they find it necessary.

160. See H.R. 634; S. 295.

161. See supra notes 51-60 and accompanying text.

162. See H.R. 634; S. 295. For example, the type of employee grievance committee involved in Keeler Brass Automotive Group, 317 N.L.R.B. 1110 (1995), would now be permissible. See H.R. 634; S. 295; supra notes 116-20.

163. See H.R. 634; S. 295. The same situation was present in Webcor Packaging, Inc., 319 N.L.R.B. 1203 (1996). In that case, the Board held that the employer-created council's pattern of making recommendations to management constituted an unfair labor practice. Id. at 1204; see supra notes 121-23 and accompanying text. Dillon Stores, 319 N.L.R.B. 1245 (1995), and Reno Hilton Resorts Corp., 320 N.L.R.B. 1154
TEAM Act fosters the type of employer-employee communication that both proponents and opponents of the Act agree are needed.164 Nonetheless, opponents of the TEAM Act ignore the realities of the workplace of the 1990s and blindly argue that this Act would destroy workers' rights.165

B. The TEAM Act Will Enhance Employees' Voices in the Nonunion Workplace

Under the TEAM Act, employers would be free to implement employee participation programs provided the employees participate to the same extent as managers and provided that these organizations do not attempt to perform the functions of a traditional bargaining representative.166 Although almost 30,000 employers already have employee participation programs in place, the Act would protect these employers from unfair labor practice charges for illegal domination.167 Giving employers and employees the freedom to work in this cooperative manner will have great advantages in terms of productivity, quality improvement, and employee morale.168 The Act will permit employers and employees to realize these advantages by explicitly protecting employees' right to choose union representation while empowering them to become involved in decisions affecting their work.168

Employers are not the only parties who want the freedom to engage in employee participation programs. Indeed, an overwhelming number of employees favor employee participation programs that will give them the ability to communicate with management while allowing them to retain their section 7 rights.169 Passage of the TEAM Act would send employ-
ees the positive message that their input is vital to the success of the companies for which they work.\textsuperscript{171}

Parties on both sides of this debate agree that employees deserve to have a "voice" on the job.\textsuperscript{172} The debate rages on, however, mainly because the two sides cannot agree from whom this voice should be heard. The proponents of the TEAM Act believe that the workers have the power and should have the ability to use their own voices through employee participation programs.\textsuperscript{173} Opponents fail to acknowledge that this voice does in fact exist.\textsuperscript{174} Representatives of organized labor believe that this voice will only be effectively heard if it comes from an independent source—namely the union.\textsuperscript{175}

The reality under the TEAM Act is that employees can still seek that independent voice—\textit{if they need it}.\textsuperscript{176} Just as employees have sought union representation when they have felt that they have been treated unfairly in the past, employees in companies with employee participation programs can still seek an independent voice if the participation does not work.

\begin{itemize}
\item in decisions relating to production and operations would improve the competitiveness of their companies, and 79% reported having "personally benefitted" from the process. H.R. REP. NO. 104-248, at 5 (1995), available in 1995 WL 560823 (citing Freeman & Rogers, \textit{supra} note 4. Employee support for the Act also emanates from the fact that employees have a vested interest in improving the competitiveness of their companies and the stability of their futures. 141 \textit{CONG. REC.} H9525 (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995) (remarks of Rep. Stenholm).
\item See Selected Testimony, \textit{supra} note 1, at *4, E-1 to E-2, E-7.
\item \textsuperscript{176} \textit{Id.} at E-1 to E-2 (testimony of J. Thomas Bouchard, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, IBM). Mr. Bouchard noted that although IBM has been successful with the employee participation programs it has implemented, the employees could do much more to help management make IBM a better place to work. \textit{Id.} at E-2. He noted that the TEAM Act would empower them to make these improvements. \textit{Id.} at E-2 to E-3. IBM is also a member of the TEAM Coalition, an organization which represents more than 250 businesses that strongly support the TEAM Act. \textit{Id.} at E-1, E-7.
\item \textsuperscript{174} \textit{Id.} at E-5 (testimony of Jonathan P. Hiatt, General Counsel, AFL-CIO). Mr. Hiatt stated that "employee involvement is most effective, and most durable, when it is nurtured through collective bargaining, where workers speak with an independent voice." \textit{Id.}
\item \textsuperscript{175} \textit{Id.}
\item \textsuperscript{176} The TEAM Act in no way prohibits employees' freedom to exercise their Section 7 rights and seek union representation. See H.R. 634; S. 296.
\end{itemize}
C. The TEAM Act Means Facilitated Communication for Employers and Employees

Currently, the law involving employee participation programs significantly inhibits employees from effectively communicating with management. Implementation of the TEAM Act would undoubtedly dissipate the adverse impact of Electromation on employers' efforts to implement employee participation programs. In Electromation and cases following that decision, the existence of a labor organization basically turned on whether the employees engaged in a pattern or practice of making proposals to management that management could then accept or reject, and a finding of employer domination turned on whether the employer organized and determined the nature, structure, and function of the employee group. The TEAM Act explicitly removes those considerations from the analysis of the lawfulness of employee participation groups that address issues of quality, productivity, efficiency, safety, and health. A problem arises because two-way communications involving productivity, efficiency, safety, and health will inevitably cross the line into the "off limits" topic of terms and conditions of work.

Opponents of the TEAM Act cite cases in which the NLRB has permitted employee participation as the basis for their argument that employees can effectively participate under current law. Yet, in these so-called "safe haven" cases, the form of permissible communication was drastically limited. For example, opponents cite E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. as providing a safe haven under which employees can present ideas to management through suggestion boxes, brainstorming, and information-sharing committees. Nevertheless, these methods do not ad-

177. See supra Parts III.C-D.
178. See Barriers, supra note 148. Instead, employers will be attempting to implement programs that they feel are consistent with the TEAM Act and which would pass any scrutiny under that law.
179. Electromation, Inc., 309 N.L.R.B. 163, 173 (1992), enforced, 35 F.3d 1148 (7th Cir. 1994); see Keeler Brass Automotive Group, 317 N.L.R.B. 161 (1995); E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., 311 N.L.R.B. 893 (1993); see also supra Parts III.C-D.
181. See Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at E-4.
182. See id. at E-5 to E-6; see also Simmons Indus., Inc., 321 N.L.R.B. No. 32 (1996) (upholding informational committees that addressed product quality and efficiency); General Foods Corp., 231 N.L.R.B. 1232 (1977) (same). Although employee participation may be legal under the statutory framework of sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2), they are not legal under the interpretation of the NLRA, which proponents of the TEAM Act argue has been improperly interpreted. 141 CONG. REC. (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995) (remarks of Rep. Goodling); see infra notes 204-10 and accompanying text (discussing guidelines for employers in the event the TEAM Act is not enacted).
183. See Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at E-4; supra notes 101-09 and accompa-
dress the heart of this issue—cooperation. Suggestion boxes preclude group meetings, and brainstorming and information-sharing sessions on issues such as productivity and efficiency will inevitably deviate into discussions of prohibited subjects because the productivity and efficiency of an operation depends on people—and the way people work depends on the structure of their jobs. Thus, it would be impossible for employees to fully address issues involving efficiency and productivity without crossing over the line into the area of terms and conditions of work because increasing productivity may require changing the way the work is done.

Opponents of the Act also cite the relatively low number of unlawful domination cases before the NLRB as proof of their contention that the participation programs which the TEAM Act purports to make lawful are already lawful. The NLRB process is complaint-driven, however, and there is little incentive for employees to challenge workplace structures which meet their interest in having a greater involvement in the workplace.

Further, the Electromation decision has had a chilling effect on legitimate employee involvement programs and employers’ plans to expand such programs, thereby reducing the number of potential complaints.

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184. See Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at E-4.
185. Id. In Stoody Co., 320 N.L.R.B. 18, 19-20 (1995), the NLRB found that an employer who disbanded a handbook committee after one meeting did not engage in an unfair labor practice. The employer disbanded the meeting because at the first meeting the employees and a manager discussed the company’s vacation notification policy, a term and condition of work. Id. at 19. The Board found that the meeting was an “isolated” instance and therefore fell outside of the definition of “dealing with” management. Id. at 20. Nevertheless, as former Board Member Charles I. Cohen noted, “[N]o employer wants to set up a committee and then disband it every time a ‘condition of work’ is raised. . . . That kind of sterile, start-stop arrangement is wholly ineffective.” Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at E-5. Mr. Cohen endorsed the TEAM Act as a “meaningful safe haven” that will permit companies to seek effective employee cooperation and ultimately increase their competitive advantages. Id. at E-5 (emphasis added).
188. Id.; see Dinnen, supra note 85, at E8.
D. The TEAM Act Retains Protection of Employee Rights

The authors of the Act recognized that an abusive employer may use the TEAM Act to compromise employees' section 7 rights and therefore devised language excepting from the permissible groups those that "have, claim or seek authority" to act as the employees' bargaining representative or desire to amend or negotiate collective bargaining agreements. Through this language, the Act protects the existing rights of employees to seek formal union representation at any time. Further, the Act does not apply to unionized workplaces. Professor Charles Morris stated that the effect of the TEAM Act could, in some situations, allow workers to use the TEAM Act to their advantage, indicating that the TEAM Act "is really a bill of rights for employees." Despite the protections in the Act, opponents insist that implementation of the TEAM Act will undermine employee protections by allowing employers to establish sham unions, thereby creating the illusion of employee protection, and by allowing employees to implement company unions while other employees are seeking outside union representation. This perceived failure of the Act to explicitly protect against such occurrences poses a threat to its passage.

E. The TEAM Act Will Not Result in the Return of Sham Unions

Perhaps the most insulting aspect of the TEAM Act opponents' argument that the TEAM Act will bring back sham unions is their failure to acknowledge that the sophistication and education levels of the employ-

191. See supra notes 146 and 159 and accompanying text.
194. See 141 CONG. REC. H9526 (daily ed. Sept. 27, 1995) (statement of Rep. Owens); This Team Is a Loser, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, Oct. 4, 1995, at 6B, available in WESTLAW, 1995 WL 3347 220; Reich Reaches Out, supra note 149, at A-2. The defeat of the TEAM Act of 1995 arose from the fear that the relaxation of § 8(a)(2) would lead to the resurgence of the company union. See id. However, this argument ignores the fact that employees today are significantly more sophisticated and educated than those in the 1930s. See Flynn, supra note 149, at 66.
ees of the 1990s are significantly greater than their counterparts of the 1930s. Six decades later, employees now know they have rights and they know how to exercise them. Further, with the proliferation of the mass media over the last six decades, there is no longer the sense that employers can get away with egregious conduct. Clearly these external checks on an employer's conduct will remain intact should the TEAM Act become law.

F. The TEAM Act Will Permit American Companies to Effectively Compete in the Global Economy

Although involving employees in employment decisions that affect their life is a crucial benefit of the TEAM Act, this benefit in turn will create an advantage for American companies seeking to establish a strong position in increasingly competitive markets. Indeed, the key to global success in the future will be productivity and efficiency. To the extent that employees are involved in making important decisions, they will continue to help their companies achieve success.

Major companies that now use employee participation programs laud the benefits these programs bring not only to the workforce within the company, but to the company as a whole. In a recent statement to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, J. Thomas Bouchard, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at IBM, described the company's success with teamwork and stressed the fact that IBM would like to implement and expand its employee participation programs. Employees know what they need to make their lives better. If they can be involved with making those changes, then the work environment will be enhanced, and, as a result, productivity and efficiency will be increased. This is just one example illustrating why senior management of major companies, recognizing the significant advantages of a highly skilled and motivated workforce that comes with employee participation, strongly support initiatives which remove legal barriers to participation programs.

195. See Flynn, supra note 149, at 66.
196. See O'Connor, supra note 3, at 901.
197. See Selected Testimony, supra note 1, at E-1 to E-2.
198. Id. Mr. Bouchard noted the restrictions that current law places on the ability of teams at IBM to maximize their potential in terms of making IBM a better place to work. Id.
199. See id.
G. Life Without the TEAM Act—"A Legal Never-Never Land"\(^{201}\)

Without the TEAM Act, employers would be left to rely on the fragmented guidance offered by established case law interpreting sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2) of the NLRA.\(^{202}\) Employers would be required to model their employee participation programs after the limited types of programs that have withstood scrutiny under sections 2(5) and 8(a)(2).\(^{203}\) As discussed throughout this Comment, that would not be an easy task. Employee participation programs would have to be narrowly constructed and would never realize their full potential.

Based upon the existing interpretations, however, there are several precautionary measures that an employer may implement to ensure that its employee participation program will withstand challenge.\(^{204}\) First, employers that create employee participation programs should make it clear to employees that they are not required to participate.\(^{205}\) Second, to the extent managers participate in a program, they should not constitute a majority of the members of the program.\(^{206}\) Third, management should establish open enrollment for employee participation rather than selecting the employees.\(^{207}\) Fourth, the employees must not act as a representative of other employees and must not engage in any discussions involving mandatory bargaining subjects.\(^{208}\) In addition, the employer should make it clear to the employees that their right to organize and bargain collectively is in no way impeded by the employee participation program.\(^{209}\) Employers may also avoid challenge by creating specific ad hoc groups that relate to a particular production, efficiency, or quality issue and then disbanding them.\(^{210}\)
V. CONCLUSION

Employee participation programs are and will continue to be an effective way for companies to improve productivity, efficiency, and quality of their products, which will in turn help them compete in the global marketplace. Although certain characteristics of these programs currently render many of them unlawful under the National Labor Relations Act,\textsuperscript{211} employers should continue to implement programs that are consistent with the purpose of the NLRA—the protection of employees’ rights.\textsuperscript{212}

Opponents of the TEAM Act should consider the people they claim to protect. Many of these workers desire a voice on the job, and many have successfully been heard by way of employee participation programs throughout the country. Although these programs do exist, their full potential is overshadowed by archaic laws that fail to recognize the reality of the new workplace.

The passage of the former TEAM Act by Congress signified the recognition that employee-employer relations have shifted from adversarial to cooperative. Under this Act, employers will be able to involve employees in many important facets of the company, without the fear of facing unfair labor practice charges, provided that they do not violate the specific protections in the Act. The time has come for employee empowerment and involvement in important aspects of production that will allow American companies to become a stronger, more competitive force in the global marketplace. The passage of the TEAM Act will be a crucial step in reaching that goal.

MICHELE L. MARYOTT

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\textsuperscript{1} note 1, at E-4.
\textsuperscript{211} See supra Part III (discussing case law prohibiting use of employee participation programs).