



# THEM AND US UNIONISM

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Cover: Mural at UE Hall in Chicago, Artists John Pitman Weber and Jose Guerrero. Photo: J Burger.

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# THEM AND US

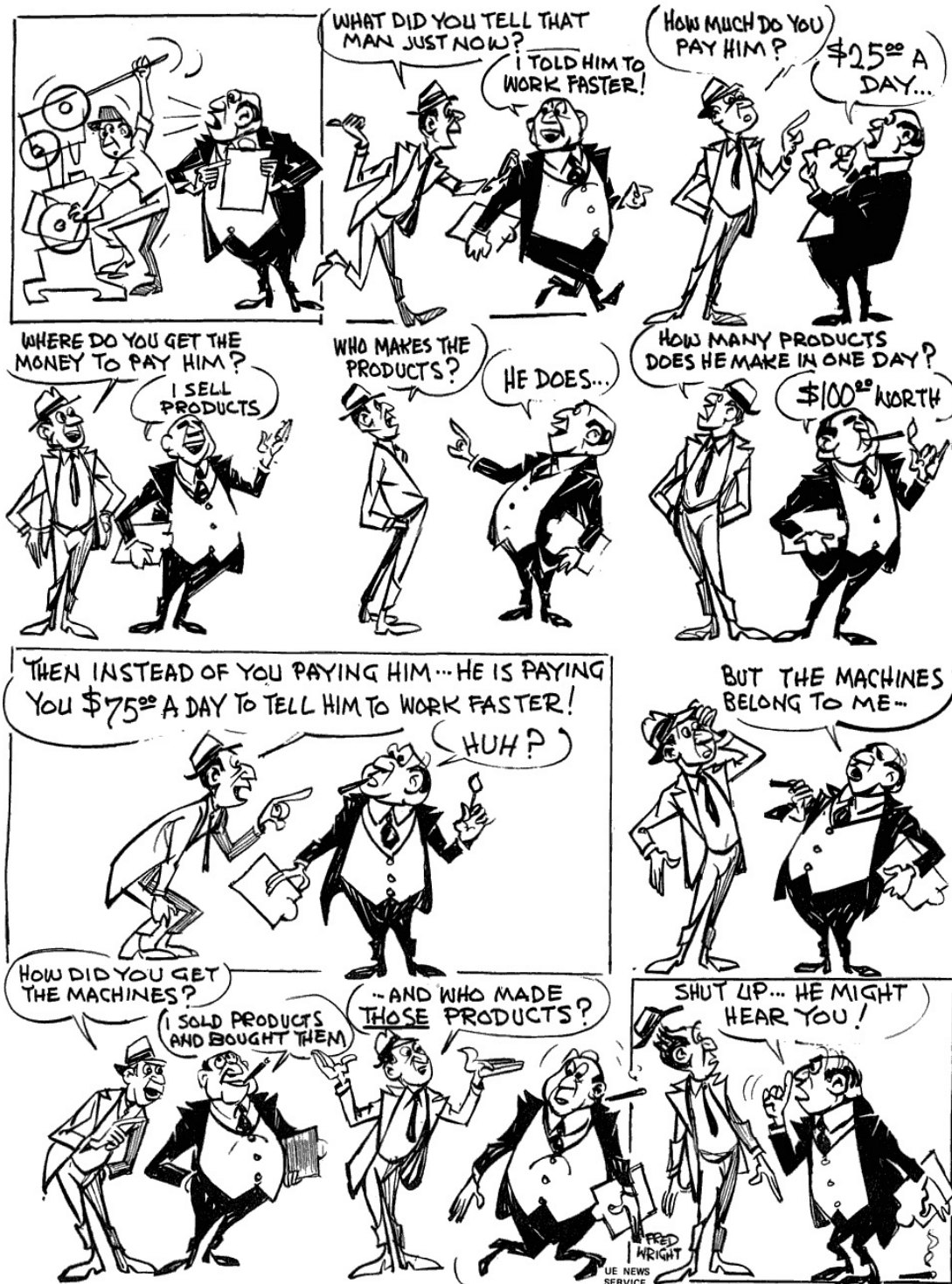


**UE WAS FOUNDED** by workers who understood how the economic system we work under — capitalism — actually works, how it functions to allow bosses (them) to make money off of workers (us), and how bosses maintain their power by trying to divide workers. Profits come from the products and services that we produce with our labor. The less employers pay us, or the faster they make us work, the more profits they make. That understanding is why UE has been able to win gains for our members, resist employer attacks, and play a leading role in the broader labor movement. It is why working people need unions like UE now more than ever.

Capitalism divides society into two main groups. One is those who live by owning, either directly or through financial instruments like stocks or private equity, the factories, land, buildings, vehicles, machines, intellectual property, mineral and drilling rights, and other types of property that are used to produce the goods and services we need to live. This small group can be called the capitalist class, “the 1%,” or the billionaire class.

The other is those of us who live by working, popularly referred to as the working class or “the 99%.” This far larger group must sell our labor in order to pay for food, clothing, and the other necessities of life. Not all members of the working class are working at any given time, but those who are not — children, the unemployed, and retirees, as well as people with disabilities that prevent them from working — rely on wages earned by family members, retirement benefits or savings earned from working, or social programs won by the working class through political action.

Through creativity, skill, intelligence, and hard work, workers turn the property owned by capitalists into products and services. We are paid a wage for our time working, but the



Illustrations by Fred Wright, UE NEWS cartoonist from 1949 until his death in 1984.

capitalist sells the product or service for more than what it costs to create and keeps the difference as profit. The lower the wage paid to the worker, the more profit made by the capitalist. This conflict of interest is a permanent feature of our economic system.

This understanding of the economic system has allowed UE to develop the key organizational approaches needed to take on the bosses and win real gains for workers. The preamble to the UE constitution contains the core UE principles of *aggressive struggle*, *rank and file control*, and *uniting all workers*. Over decades of experience taking on some of the most powerful corporations in the world, UE members have also learned the crucial importance of *political independence* and *international solidarity*. It is these five core principles that make UE so effective and consistent at leading struggles for justice for working people both in the workplace and in society more broadly.

Despite attacks from employers, the government, and even other unions, UE has survived because the working people who founded UE, who kept UE alive, and who make up UE today know *which side they are on*.

# UE'S FOUNDERS

We, the Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE) realize that the struggle to better our working and living conditions is in vain unless we are united to protect ourselves collectively against the organized forces of the employers.

Realizing that the old craft form of trade union organization is unable to defend effectively the interests and improve the conditions of the wage earners, **WE THE ELECTRICAL, RADIO AND MACHINE WORKERS (UE)** form an organization which unites all workers on an industrial basis, and rank-and-file control, regardless of craft, age, sex, nationality, race, creed, or political beliefs, and pursue at all times a policy of aggressive struggle to improve our conditions.

We pledge ourselves to labor unitedly for the principles herein set forth, to perpetuate our union and work concertedly with other labor organizations to bring about a higher standard of living of the workers.

— Preamble to the UE Constitution



**WATCHING UE'S** founders today, we might think they were crazy. Forty-three workers from as far away as Fort Wayne, Indiana and Camden, New Jersey

plowed through a March 1936 snowstorm to meet in Buffalo, New York. Their goal was to set up a national union to organize the hundreds of thousands of workers in the electrical, radio, and, soon, machine tool industries into a new union, which came to be known as UE.

The workers who undertook this gigantic task were inspired by the need to build an industrial organization (meaning all workers could be part of the union), controlled by the members, with complete equality for all who worked in that industry. Many of these workers were also inspired by their experiences organizing with radical unions like the Industrial Workers of the World and the socialist and anarchist ideas that were widespread in working-class communities in the early 20th century.

UE's founders were determined to avoid the

bureaucratic, top-down control that was characteristic of the existing craft unions (where only skilled workers could belong). And, this group of workers was just as determined to bring into their movement the hundreds of thousands of workers whose need for organization had been, up to that time, ignored — or who were explicitly excluded from existing unions because of their race, gender, political beliefs or religion.

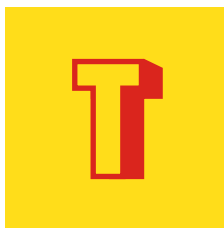
UE is now in our ninth decade, and counts among our members workers from many industries and sectors. We build electrical equipment and machines, and we run machines to make auto parts, locks, plastic products and many other goods. We are also social workers, health-care technicians, clerical workers and education paraprofessionals. We work for schools and universities, state and municipal governments, and federal contractors. We process, distribute and market food, and serve lunch to school children. UE members repair roads, transport railroad workers, and build locomotives. UE has truly become a “Union for Everyone.”



# THEM: THE ORGANIZED FORCES OF THE EMPLOYERS

*The bosses understand the class nature of our society and will do everything they can to protect their end.*

— Boris Block,  
UE Secretary-Treasurer, 1981



**THE PREAMBLE** to the UE constitution declares that “the struggle to better our working and living conditions is in vain unless we are united to protect ourselves collectively against the organized forces of the employers.”

UE recognizes that working people are overworked, underpaid and treated poorly at work not just because individual employers are greedy — though many are — but because they operate in a system that demands ever-increasing profits. Corporations are under constant pressure from their shareholders to maximize profit, and even more so from competitors. If one employer opts to pay their workers a

decent wage, they will be undercut in the marketplace by another which does not.

Corporate domination of society also affects those of us who don’t work directly for corporations. Capitalists constantly attempt to privatize any part of the public sector that they think they can turn into a source of profit, and to starve those parts they can’t by cutting taxes. They oppose the public sector not only because they want to evade taxes but also because a robust and successful public sector demonstrates the possibility of a different way of organizing society. This is why capitalists constantly pressure the public sector, nonprofit organizations and cooperatives to be “run like a business.”

Though employers compete against each other for profits, they organize and act in unity



against any challenges to their interests as a class, such as workers organizing unions or laws that give more power to workers. In the early twentieth century, this took the form of “black-lists,” where employers would agree among themselves not to hire any workers known to be union activists or sympathizers. When workers did organize and strike, employers used their political power to enlist courts, police, the national guard and hired thugs to break up picket lines, jail leaders and in some cases murder strikers and their families.

After the growth and success of UE and other industrial unions in the mid-20th century, corporations attempted to limit the scope of unionism to wages and benefits. Corporations worked with the government and compliant unions in an attempt to crush unions like UE that insisted on contesting management’s power in the workplace and maintaining independent political positions.

Although most unions accepted this “truce,” the companies merely bided their time, because even a “loyal” union that doesn’t directly challenge corporate rule still limits the amount of profit employers can extract from workers, and represents a threat to their power. Beginning in the 1970s, corporations attacked unions by moving production (often to countries where

unions were repressed by U.S.-funded military dictatorships), stoking a “taxpayer revolt” against the public sector, and funding the rise of a multi-million-dollar industry of professional unionbusting.

The “organized forces of the employers” extend beyond the workplace as well, into government, media, and even culture. Corporations and the wealthy spend enormous sums to buy politicians and otherwise influence political decisions. Most of our media is owned by large corporations, and “public” media is reliant on large donations from corporations and the wealthy. Movies, television shows and most other forms of culture are produced and controlled by entertainment conglomerates.

This corporate influence on all levels of society has a direct impact on our working and living conditions. Laws are passed to weaken existing unions and make it harder for workers to organize new ones. Wars are fought and trade agreements are negotiated to ensure corporations have access to cheap overseas labor. The media cover celebrity scandals and political horse races, not issues of importance to working people, and popular culture encourages us to pursue individual success — and feel guilty when we fail to achieve it — instead of collective struggle.



# US: THE WORKING CLASS

*It is we who plowed the prairies,  
built the cities where they trade*

*Dug the mines and built the workshops,  
endless miles of railroad laid*

*Now we stand outcast and starving,  
mid the wonders we have made*

*But the union makes us strong*

— “Solidarity Forever”

by Ralph Chaplin



**WHAT DOES IT MEAN,** then, to “protect ourselves collectively against the organized forces of the employers”?

For UE it has meant, above all, building and maintaining an organization that is *independent* of the employers. Unlike other unions, UE does not engage in “partnerships,” or “win-win bargaining” with the boss because we understand that labor and capital have opposing interests that cannot be brought into harmony and that only through struggle against those who control the economy can workers improve our conditions.

UE also emphasizes that we must protect ourselves *collectively* — that “the struggle to better our working and living conditions is in vain unless we are united.” The power of working people to advance our interests, resist employer attacks on our conditions, and reshape our

society to serve the many, not only the few, can only be realized when we are united in purpose and action. Recognizing that employers are always seeking to divide us, UE places special emphasis on maintaining unity across divisions of race, gender, sexuality, age and national origin, as well as skill and job classification.

Building collective power requires true democratic practice, so that workers feel ownership of their union. Democracy is more than just holding votes — it is an active commitment to make sure that as many members as possible are informed and participating in their union. High levels of membership participation, and the willingness of UE members to stand up for a union that they control, is what allows us to keep our organization independent of the bosses.

In addition to working to unite our own membership, we work constantly to bring the unorganized into our ranks through organizing. While some other unions have, over the past two



Local 634 Picketers Hold Signs Outside a Meeting, 1948.

decades, put increased emphasis on organizing, UE has held since our inception that organizing the unorganized is our primary task.

Beyond our own ranks, UE seeks to unify the greatest possible number of working people in our struggles by reaching out to other unions and the community. This means not only inviting others to join our struggles, but being there for other union and community struggles. Whenever there is a picket line or demonstration for issues of importance to working people in a UE community, UE signs can usually be found. This is the true meaning of solidarity: treating an injury to any member of the working class as an injury to the whole class.

UE also believes it is important for working people to contest the organized forces of the employers in the worlds of politics, media and culture. We engage in *independent political action*, based on what our members and working people actually need — not on what is expedient for particular politicians or political parties. This includes taking an independent stand on foreign policy, based on solidarity with working people in other parts of the world. The UE NEWS and UE social media provide not only news about UE, but independent, working-class analysis of news, politics, and culture.

# THE WEAKENING OF THE U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT

*The problems of the United States can be ... summed up in two words: Russia abroad, labor at home.*

— GE CEO Charles E. Wilson, 1946

*In 1947 while the Taft-Hartley bill was before Congress, the three officers ... went into the CIO Executive Board, and we had the unmitigated gall to propose, while the bill was still going through Congress, that the CIO recommend to all affiliated unions that they take the referendum to shut it down. Take a vote first. Do it in a democratic way but shut down every plant in the country.*

— James Matles, UE Secretary-Treasurer, 1975



**UNFORTUNATELY**, most of the U.S. labor movement moved sharply away from Them and Us Unionism after World War II, and this move was part of a coordinated strategy by the employers. Workplace leaders, elected officials, and whole unions such as UE who embraced the principles of Them and Us Unionism were labeled as “Communist” or “Un-American.” In 1947, with most unions offering only token opposition, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which outlawed labor’s most effective tools and required loyalty oaths for union officials that could be used to attack militant unionists.

In 1949 and 1950, UE, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and nine other unions were expelled from the Congress of Industrial Organizations for “communist domination.” The CIO then joined forces with employers, the government, and the craft unions in the American Federation of Labor to try to destroy Them and Us Unionism through firing and blacklisting of union leaders, government



UE members picket the Federal Building in Chicago to protest attempts by the House Un-American Activities Committee to break their 1952 strike against International Harvester.

subpoenas and other forms of harassment, and raiding.

This witch-hunt against Them and Us Unionism was successful in taming the militancy and unity that had won the 1946 strikes in auto, steel and electrical manufacturing — the very strikes that consolidated industrial unionism. UE leaders at the time warned that the CIO had “lost its spark. We saw a change in our CIO associates from organizers and picket line leaders to labor statesmen.” The mainstream of the labor movement embraced the idea that workers and bosses share common interests, became even more tightly joined at the hip with the Democratic Party, and ceded the right to make all decisions about the economy and foreign policy to employers and the government.

When the employers ditched any pretense of a “labor-management accord” and launched all-out attacks on the labor movement in the 1970s and 80s, the mainstream of the labor movement had little idea how to respond. Without an accurate analysis of capitalism, or the ability to formulate an alternative vision, unions were unable to respond effectively or build public support for any kind of fightback. The only response many union leaders could muster was to offer deeper concessions.

# UE CORE PRINCIPLES

**Aggressive  
Struggle**

**Rank and  
File Control**

**Political  
Independence**

**International  
Solidarity**

**Uniting All  
Workers**



Image: Mural at UE Hall in Chicago, Artists John Pitman Weber and Jose Guerrero.  
Photo: J Burger.

# Aggressive Struggle

*If we don't fight, we know we'll lose.  
But if we do fight, at least we know there's a  
chance we can win. And if we fight  
and lose, then at least we have our dignity.*

— Ricky Maclin, UE Local 1110, 2009



**THE VERY NATURE** of a corporation in the capitalist system requires it to constantly strive for a higher and higher profit, so under capitalism workers have to constantly struggle against the employers' drive to increase the amount of profit they extract from us.

Corporate domination of our society means that even employers who do not need to seek profits, such as schools and universities, state and municipal governments, nonprofits and cooperatives, tend to emulate corporations in their treatment of workers. Managers in the public, non-profit, and cooperative sectors look to corporate managers as models. City councils,

school boards, and non-profit and cooperative boards are often filled with management, lawyers, and other corporate types.

This fundamental difference of interest between employers and workers is why UE rejects “win-win bargaining,” “interest-based bargaining,” “quality circles” and employee stock ownership plans. All of these schemes are attempts to trick workers into believing that the best way to improve their conditions is to work to improve the boss's profits, rather than fighting to get more from the boss. Instead, UE embraces militancy and uncompromising defense of our members' interests.

The backbone of our rank-and-file organization are stewards, our “first line of defense.”

## UE CORE PRINCIPLES

### REPUBLIC WINDOWS AND DOORS OCCUPATION

In 2008, members of UE Local 1110 made history by occupying their workplace, Republic Windows and Doors. Their militancy and unwillingness to simply accept the closure of their factory captured the imagination of a nation reeling from financial collapse, won an endorsement of their cause from the president-elect, and forced one of the nation's most powerful banks to come to the table and negotiate.

UE members won a \$1.75 million settlement – and eventually, a reopening of their factory – by forging unity across lines of race, immigration status and gender, and by refusing to play by the rulebook for bankruptcy, which normally has “workers lose” as the last rule.



UE workers occupying Republic Windows and Doors in 2008.

Stewards are elected to actively fight for the rights of UE members on the job. Unlike some other unions with few or no stewards, UE strives to have one steward for each supervisor. Rather than rely on legalistic approaches, UE stewards are trained on how to organize their co-workers to harness their workplace power to settle grievances. As the main link between the members and their union, UE stewards play a crucial role in building unity and involvement — and maintaining the rank-and-file nature of UE.

UE members engage in aggressive struggle in a variety of ways: petitions, mass grievances, and wearing t-shirts and buttons in the workplace demonstrate unity to the boss. Picketing, marches on the boss, and mass attendance at meetings of city councils, school boards or boards of directors demonstrate members' willingness to take militant action. Ultimately, we believe that workers' greatest power comes from our ability to withhold our labor through strikes and other concerted activity.

Unlike many unions, UE does not hire lawyers to lead negotiations. Good contracts are won not by legal cleverness but by mobilizing the membership to put pressure on the employer. UE's philosophy is that it is always better to solve problems *organizationally* — by mobilizing our members around an injustice — than through legalistic procedures like arbitrations or labor board charges. Like many UE principles, this goes against the grain of our legalistic and lawsuit-happy society.

UE's commitment to aggressive struggle extends beyond contract negotiations. Employers are constantly trying to extract more work from us through speed-up, short-staffing, and often by outright violating the contract. This requires a strong steward system that can contest the employer's power in the workplace. We also engage in aggressive struggle in the political arena, because what we win in our contracts can be taken away by the actions of government — especially for public-sector workers.

# Rank and File Control



UE members running their union at the 2019 UE convention. Photo: Al Hart.

*We are going to have a union based on rank and file democratic principles ... that is not dedicated to serve a political machine ... that is going to serve the economic and legislative interests of our members.*

— Julius Emspak,  
UE Secretary-Treasurer, 1949



**UE'S ORIGINS** and development differed sharply from most other unions. Many American unions have been built from the top down, depending on organizers, lawyers and outside financial help. This limits both their independence and involvement by members. To a far greater extent, UE was built by workers organizing themselves, local by local, from the bottom up.

This gives our union a much different character. UE locals are built on self-reliance, and the entire union depends on the democratic agreement of its locals and members to organize and grow as a national union. To facilitate this, UE provides education programming for

local officers and stewards so that they have the skills they need to run their local, go toe-to-toe with the boss in grievance meetings and contract negotiations, and advocate for the union in public.

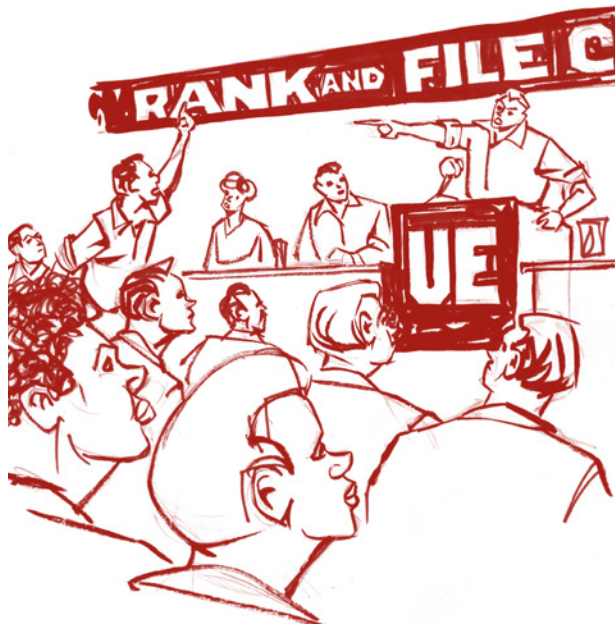
Those who founded our union in 1936 emphasized the principle of rank and file control because of their own experience and their knowledge of trade union history in the U.S. Some had belonged to company unions or to American Federation of Labor craft unions where the rank and file were expected to pay their dues but not speak up when union policy affecting their lives was being decided.

Building and maintaining a union on such grounds is a very difficult task because



## GET SOMETHING OUT OF THE BOSS, NOT THE UNION

During his farewell speech at the 1985 UE convention, retiring UE Secretary-Treasurer Boris “Red” Block, a diligent guardian of UE’s democratic principles and financial integrity, quoted an “old-time labor guy” to make a point about perks and salaries for officers: “I didn’t join this union to get something out of the union. I joined this union to get something out of the boss.”



it challenges the whole direction of society. Rather than prioritizing individual interests, we seek solutions that benefit workers collectively.

UE locals are autonomous bodies, chartered by the national UE. High levels of membership participation are encouraged and made possible by the structure of our local unions. Regular membership meetings are held where the rank and file acts on all matters affecting the operation of the local. This includes everything from the election of officers, to collective bargaining, to the decision to call — or end — a strike.

The primary function of the national union is to organize all workers around the policies and programs adopted by the national convention. The national union provides advice and assistance to locals and regions, so that members can make fully informed decisions on matters that affect their locals, and active support when the members and locals need it. The national union also organizes new members, because we understand the fundamental reality that the wages and living conditions of all workers are directly tied to the level of unionization.

In a rank-and-file union, the staff hired by

the national union play a special role. UE staff have two main responsibilities: to build the union and maintain a healthy UE structure. They train members on how to run their union and engage members and locals in dialogue to get to a democratic consensus on decisions. They can provide help and advice on programs and policies, but UE’s constitution prohibits them from dictating the decisions of UE locals, regions, or the national union. Ultimately, the running of our union is left to the members, as it has been since 1936.

UE members pay dues so that we have a strong organization that can win better wages, benefits and working conditions from the boss, not so union officers can get big salaries or perks from the union. The UE constitution bars officers and staff from earning wages higher than workers who earn the highest wage rate in the workplaces we represent. The UE follows a practice of “open books and tight fists” — expenditures beyond routine expenses must be approved by the membership, and trustees elected from among the membership perform regular audits at all levels of the union.

# Political Independence

*We have to constantly be organizing that independent power base that is not trapped in that lesser of two evils bag, because that leads us nowhere.*

— Amy Newell, UE  
Secretary-Treasurer, 1988.



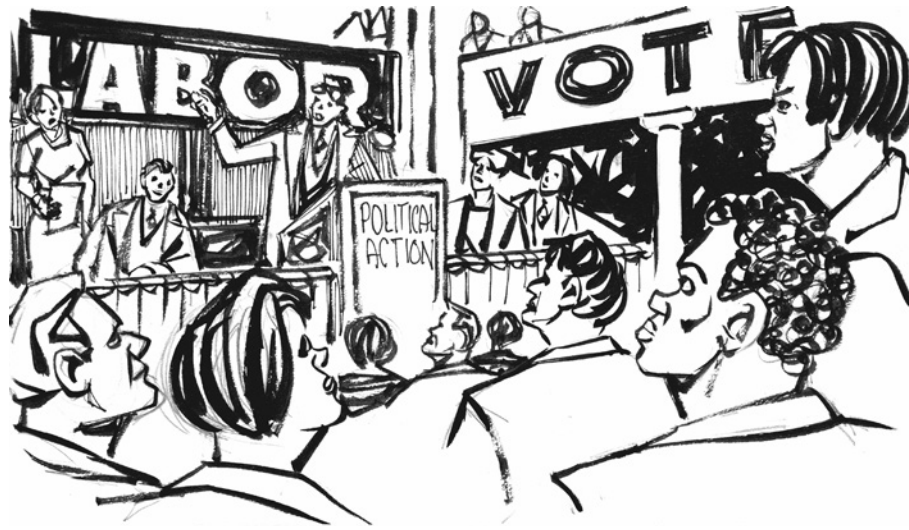
**THE ECONOMIC POWER** of employers has always been translated into dominant political power as well. The victories we win at the bargaining table can be either taken away or reinforced by the action or inaction of our government (local, state and national), and the power of government has often been used to break strikes.

There are also issues and problems that we face which cannot be addressed at the bargaining table, and as working people we have the right to expect that our governmental bodies and representatives will respond to the needs of the people. Consider how labor laws, tax laws

or our nation's health care and social security systems affect our lives as workers.

In examining political issues, the UE recognizes that these, too, reflect the conflicting interests of employers and workers. Even as we are engaging our employers in our workplaces, these same employers are attacking us on a second front, using their financial resources to pay thousands of lobbyists and make millions in political contributions. Their goals are laws and policies which boost their profits, usually at our expense.

We fight on this second front through *independent political action* — the organized effort of working people to make our voices heard by our elected public officials in order to win government policies and programs which



### A PARTY OF OUR OWN

Throughout our history, UE has held that workers need our own political party. In the 1990s, UE worked with a number of other unions to found the Labor Party, under the slogan “The Bosses Have Two Parties, We Need One of Our Own.” Although the Labor Party experiment was ultimately unsuccessful, UE members and locals have been active in numerous other efforts to promote independent, pro-worker alternatives to the two major parties, and played a key role in electing Independent Bernie Sanders to Congress in 1990 and the Senate in 2006.

benefit working-class people. We do this by organizing opportunities for our members to communicate with their elected officials directly, like political action days at state capitals and in Washington, DC, protests in the streets, and civil disobedience. UE political action *does not* include giving large sums of money to candidates in hopes that they will represent our interests when in office. In fact, we don’t even maintain a political action fund.

Unlike most unions, UE recognizes that both major political parties in our country are dominated by corporate interests, which is why we insist that unions must take independent positions on political issues based on the interests of our members, and not follow the lead of political parties or

politicians. While we recognize that sometimes we have to choose the lesser of two evils, we only endorse politicians who have a demonstrated record of standing with UE and the labor movement and working people more generally.

We also promote political solutions for the problems faced by UE members and working people more broadly. A prime example of this is our decades-long support for a universal, single-payer healthcare system, now commonly referred to as “Medicare for All.” We demand Medicare for All because it would take healthcare off the bargaining table, ending our employers’ constant demand for healthcare concessions, and also because it would benefit the entire working class.

# International Solidarity

*Unity and solidarity across borders is the only real possibility to confront in a meaningful way the new power of capital.*

— Bertha Lujan, Frente Auténtico del Trabajo, UE Convention 1994



**OUR LIVING** and working conditions are directly linked to those of other workers around the world. Globalization and the so-called “free trade agreements” that have proliferated since the 1990s have made that clear. General Electric CEO Jack Welch famously said in 1998 that “ideally you’d have every plant you own on a barge,” so it could be moved to wherever wages are the lowest. As long as there are places where workers toil for starvation wages without health and safety protections, it’s hard to achieve or maintain good wages or conditions anywhere.

Poor wages and working conditions in other countries are not natural or inevitable — they

are often the result of military intervention by the US government. Our government has supported and instigated coups against pro-worker governments in Central and South America, the Middle East, and elsewhere, and waged wars in Korea, Vietnam, and twice in Iraq to defend the profits of US corporations. UE has consistently opposed all forms of military adventurism that put the children of working people in harm’s way while benefiting only the wealthy and corporations.

Aggressive struggle to improve our conditions in a global economy demands that we unite with workers in other countries. To put this into practice, UE rank-and-file members have visited and built relationships with unions



## ALLIES ACROSS THE BORDER

In the early 1990s, as the US government was negotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), UE was clear that it was corporations, not Mexican workers, who were the real threat to our jobs. UE developed a “strategic organizing alliance” with the independent Mexican union Frente Auténtico del Trabajo to jointly oppose NAFTA and carry out joint campaigns against shared employers such as General Electric. UE’s ongoing relationship with the FAT is widely seen as a model of international labor solidarity.

in Mexico, Canada, Japan, Italy, Brazil, India, the Philippines, and other countries. These exchanges are often with other workers who share the same employers or work in the same sector of the economy.

UE believes that the future of the labor movement depends on a real commitment to international labor solidarity, not only to prevent downward pressure on wages and working conditions from employers threatening to move, but also to address the global challenge of climate change in ways that benefit, rather than harm, workers.

UE’s international work has led to numerous concrete actions to improve UE members’ and

other workers’ lives and conditions. Exchanges between public-sector workers helped lead to the International Worker Justice Campaign in the early 2000s, which brought international attention to the state of North Carolina’s denial of collective bargaining rights to public-sector workers. In 2019, when members of UE Locals 506 and 618 struck their new employer, Wabtec, unions that represent Wabtec workers in numerous other countries sent letters supporting UE members, which helped these locals settle their strike with a better contract. Decades of international solidarity from UE contributed to Mexican workers’ successful struggle in 2019 for an improved labor law.

# Uniting All Workers

*I am certain that all men of goodwill are eternally grateful to that section of the labor movement which is working so courageously to end discrimination on the job for all people.*

— Martin Luther King Jr. letter to UE Director of Organization James J. Matles, November 25, 1957



Fourteen-month struggle brings first UE contract at the Lanterman Regional Center in Los Angeles, 2019.



**UE'S FOUNDERS** had experienced unions that were “unions” in name only, as they were based on perpetuating division among working people instead of uniting them. The year the UE was founded there existed unions whose constitutions limited membership on the basis of craft, age, sex, race, religion, political belief, and even the state of a worker’s health! It was that experience that led them to write into the preamble to the constitution that they would seek to unite all workers, “regardless of craft, age, sex, nationality, race, creed or political beliefs.”

The preamble pledge to engage in aggressive struggle on behalf of all workers led to

historic achievements. In 1945, the National War Labor Board upheld UE’s charge that both General Electric and Westinghouse discriminated against women, with lower rates of pay for women regardless of the job content. Although the board’s authority to enforce its findings expired with the end of the war, UE’s case was a pioneering effort in the struggle for equal pay. By 1957, UE had succeeded in winning nondiscrimination clauses in almost every one of its hundreds of contracts — except Westinghouse. A national campaign to win such a clause from Westinghouse, an issue no other union negotiating with the company took up, won support from prominent black leaders including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and was eventually successful in 1963.

### UNITY CHANGES THE BALANCE OF POWER

As UE Local 1121 was going into contract negotiations with Aramark Laundry Services in La Crosse, WI in 2017, the boss was actively playing groups within the diverse workforce against each other, targeting the Hmong women who make up a significant portion of the workforce for significant harassment.

The union leadership focused on uniting the members as the key to successful negotiations. The first event the local organized was a potluck meal and discussion of demands at the Hmong Community Center in La Crosse, with translation provided. What was planned as a quick lunch turned into a several-hour conversation with Hmong workers and white workers about their shared concerns and what demands to bring to the company. From that moment on, the local leadership made sure that their outreach and shop-floor activity involved all elements of the diverse membership.

The grand culmination of the contract struggle was a walkout in which 100 percent of the union workforce

ceased work, punched out, marched out of the building and held a bilingual rally – the first walkout in the local's more than 20 year history. The balance of power at Aramark had just shifted in the workers' favor.

Company negotiators dropped concessionary demands, agreed to the union's final wage demand of \$1.20 increase over three years, and even reached a compromise on health insurance. The local's united struggle had won everything they had demanded and then some.



Local 1121 members discuss the tentative agreement.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as employers began to employ larger numbers of undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other countries, UE stressed the importance of fighting for immigrant workers' rights and won contract language protecting our immigrant members from workplace raids. The union demanded unconditional amnesty for immigrant workers, realizing that otherwise employers could exploit them as a permanent source of low-wage labor, and that this would drive down wages and working conditions for all workers. UE has remained in the forefront of immigrant rights struggles, developing innovative strategies to organize immigrant workers in a variety of sectors.

Discrimination not only divides workers, making it harder to unite against the boss, but also enables bosses to pay lower wages to workers of color, immigrant workers (especially undocumented immigrant workers), women and workers from other oppressed groups. The increased levels of exploitation against oppressed groups of workers have, over generations, created deep inequalities of wealth and power that we must fight against in order to unite the working class to achieve a just society.



**UNDERSTANDING** the nature of our economic system and the need to consistently adhere to our core principles has been the basis of UE's record of struggle going

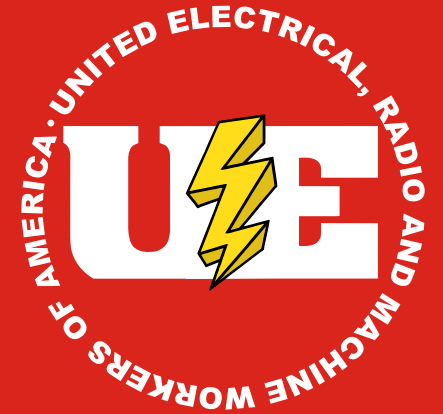
on nine decades.

For the past several decades labor leaders and academics have proposed a wide variety of strategies to rebuild the U.S. labor movement: from better communications work, to giving more money to politicians, to restructuring the labor movement and its federations, to investments in staff-driven organizing efforts. But none of it has worked, because none of those strategies recognize that the core issue facing unions, today and throughout history, is the fundamental difference of interests between workers and employers in the capitalist system.

The tremendous problems that face working people in our country, and around the world, call for a labor movement that understands this fundamental difference of interest, and can carry out aggressive struggle against the organized forces of the employers on all fronts. This booklet represents the story of one union, and the conclusions that UE members have drawn from decades of aggressive struggle to improve our conditions, but we believe that our story has valuable lessons for all worker organizations.

The labor movement we need must be a militant movement, built from the bottom up, and it must be based on clear-cut principles: aggressive struggle, rank-and-file control, political independence, international solidarity and uniting all workers — in other words, Them and Us Unionism. UE is dedicated to helping achieve that kind of a labor movement.





Learn more about UE: [WWW.UEUNION.ORG](http://WWW.UEUNION.ORG)

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