

Maintaining Political Muscle is Key for Union Survival

Organized labor should play a huge role in politics. Jobs are a vital element in the economy, and unions are crucial to surviving the ever-present threat of workers' rights being eroded at the local, state and national levels. The benefits and protections that organized workers enjoy are hard won over decades of bitter battles, yet there are political and/or corporate interests lurking around every corner eager to take back those gains. Some may question how much of a chapter's coffers must be dedicated to political funds, but there could not be a more important line item in a union's budget.

We have reached a treacherous point today in labor relations both at the state and national level. It seems as if we as a country and as a world power are slowly but surely slipping into a public and financial era reminiscent of the gilded ages of the 1890s or the prosperous yet delusional and short-lived 1920s. In these times, the average Joe was nothing but property of corporations, and was irreversibly bound by contract to a factory-level job. These corporations sullied the idea of a democracy by operating as separate and unregulated entities with no motive of protecting the average man. These corporations had their hands dirty with government corruption more than at any other time in history. It was only after a rather turbulent history of strikes and boycotts when these corporations put in any miniscule effort to provide fair compensation for their laborers. This pivotal change would never had been possible without unions like the AFL or even the short-lived Knights of Labor.

The main motivation of businesses had made itself inherently clear long ago: efficiency. Corporations' idea of an optimum efficiency unfortunately involves the mass exploitation of cheap laborers. However, in the years following the Great Depression, during WWII and the next two decades, organized labor unions were finally able to help heal many of the wounds caused

by this exploitation. If it weren't for unions, minimum wages would never rise, workers would never have healthcare and would have no power in collectively bargaining with management. In an ideal workplace, a union should allow the workers to have enough collective power to equal that of their employers – on the board of directors, or seats at the legislative table. For too long corporations and governments have had unfair political leverage, so unions in the past have had to level the playing field by flexing political muscle and working tirelessly to influence politicians. This continues today. Politics, and influencing politicians, is a way to *educate* the public so they know which candidates cannot only preserve jobs requiring manpower, but also preserve humane and sustainable working conditions.

This world vision of true power to the people may unfortunately be fading. While most public sector jobs still give workers the right to unionize, many multi-national corporations seem to be slipping out through loopholes of a once fairly regulatory government. Union membership has slowly but drastically fallen over the last sixty years and corporations have once again started to cut corners for efficiency. It is as if we are slipping back to the destructive mindsets of the 1890s or 1920s. Corporations have once again turned into political machines and have turned workers against unions through tools such as negative advertising, calling attention to their wallets – the fee they pay out of their paycheck each month. This has created an environment where unions must fight even to just stay afloat. This is why unions have been forced to start grass roots movements to combat politicians who would see the demise of unions in place of corporate expansion. As soon as unions fall into oblivion, we as American working people will once again be reduced to capital assets. We cannot backtrack and devolve into such living and working conditions -- organized labor must maintain a high profile in the public eye and stay involved in politics more than ever. Our future as a civilized country depends on it.