

# CAN WE MAKE UNIONS STRONG AGAIN?

*A NEW DEMOCRACY Flyer*

U.S. unions, once fighting organizations of workers, have declined sharply. What's wrong with the unions? Can we turn them around?

## WHY ARE THE UNIONS SO WEAK?

Thousands of working people gave their sweat and blood to build the first industrial unions in the U.S. Once the CIO unions were established, however, the leaders changed from militant organizers to contract administrators working with management to ensure production. To gain greater control of the members, union officials discouraged membership participation and undermined shop-floor solidarity. Union officials turned from organizing workers against the company to managing workers for the company.

The problem with the unions was not just bad leaders. The problem was that there seemed to be no promising alternative to capitalism. Communism turned out to be a police-state. With no democratic alternative to the profit system, the welfare of workers seemed tied to the profitability of U.S. corporations. Union leaders saw no option but to work with the system. "What's good for General Motors is good for the country" was believed by union heads and government and business leaders alike. AFL-CIO leaders became eager supporters of capitalist power.

In the 1960s and early '70s, wildcat strikes swept the country, threatening the power of union bosses. The goal of union and corporate officials became the same: to destroy the growing power of the members.

Corporate and government officials soon went on the attack against workers. The attack succeeded because union officials cooperated with it. When Reagan fired 13,000 striking air traffic controllers, AFL-CIO leaders did nothing. The AFL-CIO has undermined numerous strikes, from Local P-9 to UAW 2036 to the recent grocery workers' strike.

The problem with the unions is not that they are weak but that they are on the wrong side.

## SOLIDARITY VALUES

The struggle in the workplace is part of a class war throughout society over what values will shape it, what goals it will pursue, and who will control it.

On one side stand corporate leaders, government officials, and masters of great wealth. They value inequality, competition, and dictatorial control. They

slash wages, ship jobs overseas, pit worker against worker in bloody wars to control us.

On the other side stand ordinary working people, who believe in equality, solidarity, and control from below. Every time workers slow down, or refuse overtime, or support each other on or off the job, or create supportive relationships with family and friends, they are resisting capitalist power and expressing their belief in equality and solidarity.

## AN ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM

Capitalism offers only more war, insecurity, and fear. We need a revolutionary and democratic alternative.

Solidarity values rooted in the lives of working people offer an alternative to capitalism. Democratic revolution means changing all of society to reflect the best values already present in working peoples' lives.

## CAN WE CHANGE THE UNIONS?

Decades of effort have shown that the unions cannot be reformed. Good people elected to union office get sucked into the pro-company culture of union officialdom. Unions linked to capitalism will always turn worker against worker and will always betray us.

We need a new organization which rebuilds the solidarity culture of friendship and support that is natural to working people and gives us our real strength. The new organization should:

- be independent of the unions;
- build solidarity across plants, across industries, across races and genders, across employed and unemployed, across generations, across borders;
- not try to change the unions, not run candidates for office, not negotiate contracts, not urge the unions to act but take action itself;
- unite working people in a struggle to revolutionize society and create a true democracy based on equality and solidarity.

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New Democracy works for democratic revolution. If you are interested, contact Tom Laney at (715)962-4365, [tlaney@pressenter.com](mailto:tlaney@pressenter.com) or Dave Stratman at (617)524-4073. See [newdemocracyworld.org](http://newdemocracyworld.org)