

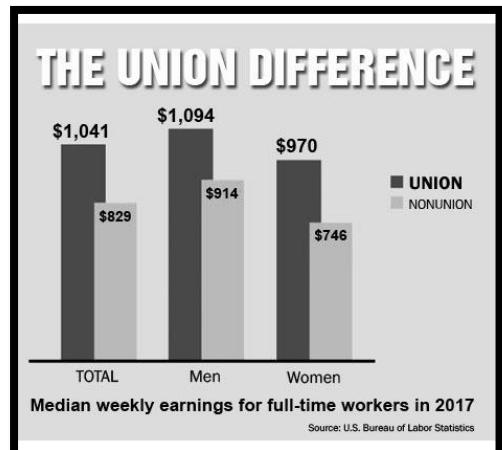
There is no strong socialist movement without a militant and powerful labor movement. DSA recognizes that if it is to become a socialist organization truly rooted in a multi-racial working class, it must expand its work both among unionized workers and among those currently without union representation. – DSA Convention, 2017

Why Unions Matter

In the U.S. unions have been, and are now, imperfect institutions: women and/or people of color have not always been welcome in them, and organized labor's bureaucracy often impedes, rather than promotes, member activism. But nonetheless they are *the* mechanism by which the working class exercises its collective might to check capital's rapacious exploitation. **Unions – especially rank-and-file oriented, militant ones – empower workers to speak out against unfair treatment and stand up for their rights.** These facts and figures make that clear.

Union members get more money from the boss:

- Overall, **union members earn 26% more per week than non-union fulltime workers do.** Among workers in the same occupation with comparable skills, unionized workers earn over 13% more than non-union employees.
- **Union members have greater access to employer-provided health insurance,** and unionized employers contribute nearly 80% more toward employee health insurance than non-unionized employers do.
- **They get more paid sick days, vacations and holidays.** Nearly 90% of unionized workers have paid sick days, for instance, compared to 69% of non-union employees.
- **They have a better shot at a pension:** 90% of union workers have retirement plans, compared with 75% of nonunion workers. Union members are far more likely to be covered by the more-advantageous defined-benefit pension plans.



The union wage advantage is even greater for women and people of color:

- **Black workers are more likely than white workers to be in a union,** and are more likely to be low-and middle-wage workers, who get a bigger pay boost for being in a union than do higher-wage workers.
- **Women union members get paid 30% more a week than non-union women.** And the gender wage gap between unionized women and men is about half the size of the wage gap among non-union workers.
- **As a group, Latinos gain the most:** Latino union members earn 43% more than non-union Latino workers.

But dollars and cents differences don't tell the whole story. By challenging management's unfettered and arbitrary authority, unions democratize the workplace. They defend workers' dignity, safety, and self-respect:



- **Without a union, job insecurity is the reality:** employers may demote, pass over, suspend or fire workers at will (unless employers clearly violate laws prohibiting such actions based on race, religion, disability, or other protected identities). Favoritism, not fairness, governs the workplace. Union contracts, however, require employers to provide performance-related rationales for discipline or dismissal; seniority provisions outline transparent, universally-applied rules for pay scales, promotions and layoffs.
- **Union representatives serve as workers' advocates in disputes with management.** In a nonunion workplace, if a worker's rights are violated – if she's shortchanged on overtime, for instance, or demeaned or sexually harassed by her boss – she must pursue her grievance on her own.

- **Union members have more control over their time spent on, and off, the job.** Union members get more advance notice about their schedules than nonunion workers do; are more likely to have input into when and how long their break times are; and have more say in the number of hours and/or how fast they are required they work.
- **Unions protect low-wage workers.** Employees covered by union contracts are half as likely to be the victims of wage theft (to be paid an effective hourly rate that is below the minimum wage).
- **Union workplaces are safer.** Union members are shielded from repercussions for reporting workplace hazards and injuries. Union advocacy ensures that safety equipment must be paid for by employers, rather than workers themselves. Unions apprise workers of health and safety regulations, and union representatives generally have the right to participate in workplace injury investigations, giving workers more clout to control on-the-job conditions. Unionized construction sites and mines see many fewer deaths and injuries than non-union ones.



Unions also make things better for the entire working class. And as the only major institution not dependent on the business community's largesse, they stand as the principal bulwark against corporate political power:



- **Where unions are strong, wages are higher for all workers.** Fulltime workers in states without "Right to Work" statutes take home, on average, \$1,500 more per year than those in "Right to Work" states.
- **Unions have provided the organizational savvy, the financial backing, and the foot soldiers to bring about crucial social reforms throughout our history:** the 40-hour week, child labor prohibitions, Social Security, workmen's compensation and unemployment insurance, farm worker protections, and much more. Unions were integral to the civil rights movement and made possible the Equal Pay Act and the Voting Rights Act in the 1960s.
- **Unions today are on the front lines of essential struggles:** Fight for \$15; immigrants' rights; paid family leave; Medicare for All; battling school closures and cuts to social services; combating workplace sexual assault; and resisting corporate-friendly trade deals like NAFTA.
- **Union members, because their incomes are higher and they have more time off, are better able to participate in political and community activities** (and maybe get involved with DSA). The decline in unionization has meant less working-class participation in civic life, which has contributed to the rightward tilt in American governance.

For decades, the American labor movement has been too quiescent. But unions have radical potential.

- **They are the only institutions capable of halting production** – the source of the bosses' wealth – and can create social disruption on a large scale.
- **Through unions, workers develop class consciousness.** Even the most cautious unions are predicated on the concept that employers and workers have distinct interests. Union actions on the job, whether they take the form of grievance disputes or strikes, immerse workers directly in the dynamics of class struggle.
- **Unions are among the few American institutions that bridge racial, gender and ethnic lines,** engendering solidarity to counter the divisiveness that increasingly fractures our society.
- **Unions promote the value of mutuality and cooperation,** principles that undermine the bedrock capitalist tenets of avarice, competition and self-interest.
- To become genuinely democratic and radical, unions need socialist members. And to challenge capitalist hegemony, socialists need unions. ***So it's simple: to DSA, unions really matter.***