

How to stand against the rich: organize

Today, the top 1 percent of Americans have more wealth than the bottom 90 percent combined. CEOs in the U.S. make at least 300 times more than the average worker. The most powerful in our country have the ear of our politicians while the rest of us sit and hope for the best. What are we the people to do?

Organize. The best way to fight for ourselves is to do what our grandparents did back during the Great Depression. Unite and join a union.

During the Great Depression, more people joined unions than any other time in history. As the Depression took its toll, many Americans realized the only way they would be able to survive was if they organized. Unemployment was at 25 percent and companies used that figure to make their employees work as hard as possible for as little as possible. The workers had no say — if they wanted to keep their jobs, they worked in unsafe conditions for long hours and little money.

Workers realized the most effective path to good jobs with fair wages was by joining unions. The combination of desperate workers and the passage of the Wagner Act, which gave workers the right to join unions and bargain collectively, catapulted the number of union workers from less than 3 million to over 9 million in just a few years.

Today, workers are suffering again. The government is too wrapped up in politics to offer any real solutions and companies are focused on profits over people. These are the times when we see the power and purpose of the unions.

While unions seem to be somewhat of a (strange) scapegoat for corporations and politicians for our nation's ills these days, the public should remember that when looking for someone to stand by the side of the average worker, unions will always have their back.

Unions provide the power and voice needed to help workers. Especially now, without representation, everyone

is just two weeks away from a pink slip — for any reason. Your pay and benefits can be cut, workload dramatically shifted and hours changed without any notice or reason. The lives of thousands of workers can be decided on by the power of one CEO. The only way to stand a chance against the rich and powerful is to stand together as one.

In the face of increased unemployment and the endlessly increasing power of the corporations, unions continue to fight hard to protect our rights. While corporations have their lobbyists and the extremely wealthy have easy access to politicians, the unions give voice to the masses. They fight in the State House and the White House, and they also fight in the board rooms.

If you are fortunate enough to be a member of a union, you have that protection. You have someone who is fighting for your rights. You have a group with a voice in our government. You belong to an organization whose stated mission is to improve the lives of working families.

If you are a member of a union, you most likely earn 30 percent more than your nonunion counterparts, you most likely have health insurance and pension benefits and you have protection from unfair and unannounced firings. You are part of an extended family united in the desire for respect, fair working conditions and stronger communities.

Today, while we all worry about our jobs and our families' futures, our unions are becoming, once again, more important in our lives. Just like during the Great Depression, when the economy gets tough, the unions start fighting. Not for the politicians. Not for the corporations. Not for the very wealthiest Americans. But for you. Organize, join a union and be heard.

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