

This has been a very tough year for our country and the world. We can't escape the brutal realities of massive income and wealth inequality, climate change, Gaza, homelessness, and the threats to American democracy – and more. But, in the midst of all that, there is some very good news.

In a way we have not seen for decades, the working class of our country is fighting back against outrageous levels of corporate greed. Workers are organizing unions at the grassroots level, going out on strikes – and winning some great victories. Our job: continue and expand those efforts in 2024. Solidarity forever.

Attached is an op-ed I recently wrote for the Daily Beast.

My Hero of 2023 Is the Trade Union Movement

Senator Bernie Sanders | Published Dec. 22, 2023

The year 2023 will go down as one of the most difficult not only in the modern history of America, but in the modern history of the world.

In virtually every sector of society, the state of our nation and the world is in crisis—from climate change, to devastating wars, to our dysfunctional health care system, and to our failure to meet the child-care, educational and retirement needs of our people, the list of issues to be worried about seems endless.

But, in the midst of these challenging times, there is also some very good news that is bringing hope and encouragement to an American working class that has struggled for the last 50 years. And that is the resurgent, revitalized, and growing trade union movement in America.

The hero of 2023, in my view, belongs to not just one person, but the entire trade union movement—which has proven that when workers stand together in the pursuit of economic justice they can achieve what was once thought impossible.

All over this country, we are seeing workers standing up and fighting back against the unprecedented corporate greed taking place in America in a way that we have not seen in decades. And they are winning—big time.

When the Big Three automakers made \$250 billion in profits in the past decade, while the real wages of autoworkers plummeted by 30 percent over the past twenty years, the UAW said enough is enough. They waged a six-and-a-half-week strike against corporate greed and they won an historic contract that includes a projected 33 percent increase in wages over the next four years and an end to the disastrous two-tier wage system that treats newer workers like third class citizens.

These extraordinary gains won by the UAW are beginning to reverberate across the entire country. After the UAW negotiated a strong contract for its union workers, Honda, Toyota, Hyundai, and other auto companies immediately announced similar wage increases for their non-union workers in the U.S.

Today, the UAW is engaged in an impressive grassroots campaign to encourage autoworkers in U.S. plants owned by Tesla, Toyota, Volkswagen, Honda, Nissan, and other non-union companies to exercise their constitutional right to form a union and collectively bargain to improve their wages, benefits, and working conditions. What the new leadership at the UAW understands is that the only way that we are going to rebuild the American middle class is by expanding the trade union movement.

And let's be clear. The UAW is not alone. Not by a long shot.

When UPS made \$13 billion in profits last year and could afford to spend \$8.4 billion on stock buybacks and dividends, the Teamsters stood up and fought back. Thanks to their courageous efforts, the Teamsters won a new contract that will increase wages for part-time workers by an average of 48 percent, while substantially improving the wages and working conditions of full-time workers.

After the Teamsters won a strong contract to increase wages and benefits for union workers at UPS, Amazon increased wages for its non-union warehouse and delivery drivers—even as it continued to spend millions of dollars to prevent its workers from forming a union.

In other words, what we are seeing is that these historic union victories are not only improving the lives of their members, they are beginning to improve the lives of non-union workers all over the country.

Further, the trade union movement is not only gaining momentum in blue collar industries, it is making major inroads in white collar jobs and on college campuses.

This year the United Electrical workers organized more than 20,000 graduate students to join unions in colleges all across the country. Well-educated students are waking up to the fact that despite their education and stature at prestigious universities, they are NOT exempt from exploitation.

We're seeing writers and actors in the entertainment industry, with enormous courage, go on strike and win better wages, benefits, and historic protections with respect to Artificial Intelligence.

This year we have seen more and more workers in the high-tech industry take on corporate greed and demand a seat at the table at companies like Apple, Sega, Activision Blizzard, and Google.

Nurses have gone on strike in record numbers not so much to increase their wages and benefits, but primarily to improve the lives and the well-being of their patients by fighting for and winning safe nurse to patient ratios. The nurses at Robert Wood Johnson University hospital in New Brunswick, New Jersey, for example, won a major victory in improving patient safety after a 4-month strike.

Even young doctors who, in some cases, are working 80 hours a week at major medical facilities have voted to form unions so that they can provide better medical care to the people they treat.

In total, over 450,000 workers in America have gone on strike this year for better wages, benefits, and working conditions—up more than 900 percent compared to just two years ago.

Last year, union membership in America increased by 273,000 (to a total of 14.3 million workers), while employees in nearly 2,600 worksites in America filed petitions with the

National Labor Relations Board to form a union—up more than 50 percent from two years ago.

In other words, in America today, more workers want to join unions; more workers are joining unions; and more workers are going out on strike to improve their working conditions.

What makes these efforts so remarkable is that they have won these victories in the face of enormous obstacles from corporate America.

Today, large corporations are doing everything they can to intimidate, coerce, threaten, and prevent workers from exercising their constitutional right to form a union and negotiate a fair contract. Why?

It's not complicated. Corporate America understands that union workers earn nearly 20 percent more, on average, than non-union workers.

They understand that 64 percent of union workers have a defined benefit pension plan that guarantees an income in retirement compared to just 11 percent of non-union workers.

They understand that union workers are half as likely to be victims of health and safety violations compared to non-union workers.

And that is why major corporations all over this country are firing workers for the “crime” of supporting a union organizing campaign.

That is why major corporations like Starbucks, Amazon, and others have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on illegal union busting campaigns and anti-union law firms.

That is why over half of all employers in America threaten to close or relocate their businesses if workers elect to form a union.

That is why when workers become interested in forming a union, they almost always will be forced to attend closed-door meetings to hear anti-union propaganda; and their

supervisors will almost always be forced to attend training sessions on how to attack unions.

Even when workers overcome all of these incredible obstacles and win union elections, over half of workers who vote to form a union don't have a first contract a year later. That is unacceptable and has got to change.

As the chairman of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, I will be doing all that I can do to strengthen and expand the trade union movement—the true heroes and heroines in America not just in 2023, but in every year.

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