



POLICY FOCUS

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Today's Labor Unions: Infiltrated by the Democratic Socialists of America, Influenced by China

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HIGHLIGHT

Labor unions used to fight for a better work life. Now, they often fight for partisan politics and a radical agenda to overturn the economic system that makes America the land of opportunity. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are salting American labor unions with organizers to foment class warfare in workplaces, undermine American businesses, and take over strategic industries from the inside.

INTRODUCTION

Labor unions have been credited with shaping work life in America. Yet, union participation has hit record **lows** in recent years as Americans no longer see the value these middlemen offer. American workers negotiate the pay and benefits that suit their unique situations. They reject being forced into labor unions.

Labor unions have also done themselves a disservice by aligning themselves almost exclusively with Democratic candidates,

politics, and policies, despite membership **across the political spectrum**. Their partisanship has given them immense power and influence in politics, but also made them a target of the most radical political movement of our age.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) **aims** to overturn American capitalism and replace it with socialism. The DSA has increasingly infiltrated labor unions to recruit supporters and leaders, disrupt workplaces in strategic industries, foment class warfare, attract support for its political candidates, and shape public policy to advance its agenda. Labor unions are a key vehicle for the DSA to gain control of the means of production in key industries and then redistribute resources and wealth for their inexhaustible wish lists.

At the same time, the DSA is **forging ties** with foreign influences, namely China, in solidarity with the global socialist movement. The Chinese Communist Party seeks to use the DSA to rehabilitate its image with the Left, while wielding influence in American politics, business, and policy to its advantage.

Today's labor movement is not the same as bygone eras. This increasingly radicalized labor movement is working against the economic system that makes opportunity possible in America to the detriment of us all.

DWINDLING UNION MEMBERSHIP

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14 million American workers—10 percent of the U.S. labor force—belong to a private- or public-sector labor union. This is less than a third of the share of union workers from peak membership levels in 1945, when **34.2 percent** of workers belonged to unions.

The union membership rate among public-sector workers (**32.9 percent**) is five times higher than the rate for private-sector workers (5.9 percent). Education and protective service occupations (i.e., law enforcement, firefighters, correctional officers, and security guards) have the heaviest concentrations of unionized workers (over 30 percent unionized). Construction, transportation, production trades, social service, and some healthcare occupations also have unionization rates above 10 percent, but unionization in most other industries is minuscule.

Demographically, today, unions skew male and middle-aged. Women are less likely to be union members than men (**9.6 percent vs. 10.4 percent**). The gap between union membership rates for men and women has narrowed from 10 points to just one percentage point over the past four decades, as men's participation in unions dropped. Among age brackets, workers aged 45 to 54 had a union membership rate of 12.6 percent, nearly three times that of 16–24-year-olds, and the highest of all working-age workers.

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WORKER FREEDOM OVER UNION COERCION

Abstract support for labor unions stems from the history of workplace wins that reshaped work life for Americans during the 20th century. While private employers such as Henry Ford implemented reforms—such as the 8-hour shift, shortened workweek—and higher wages to attract workers, to their credit, labor unions made a 40-hour workweek, weekends off, extra pay for overtime work, greater workplace safety, and limits to child labor into national issues. Labor union participation has declined in recent decades in part because the unions had already succeeded in winning important worker protections, leaving workers to no longer see unions as critical to their careers and pay advancement.

Today, Americans value worker freedom over union representation. They are content to negotiate the unique terms of their employment, such as pay, schedules, and benefits, directly with their employer rather than through a middleman. Tens of millions of workers cannot even be unionized because they are classified as independent contractors, not employees.

American workers expect the right to decide for themselves whether to join a union. Nearly universally (**90 percent**), voters oppose government mandates for union membership but want workers

to decide for themselves whether to join a union. Similarly, workers reject some tactics unions employ to force unionization in the workplace. Some 82 percent say they want insight into whether unions are placing members or paid organizers inside non-union workplaces as a “salt” to get hired and organize workers from the inside. By a significant margin, American workers also demand greater transparency into how union dues are spent (**85 percent**).

Potential union members find labor unions’ partisan political involvement, which is almost exclusively used in favor of Democratic politics and candidates, repulsive. During the 2023-24 election cycle, the four largest public sector unions—the National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)—sent over **\$107 million** to federal, state, and local candidates according to analysis by the Commonwealth Fund. Almost every dollar (95.8 percent) went to Democrats; just 4.2 percent went to Republicans. Still, this is only a slice of the overall \$915 million these unions spent on elections and advancing progressive ideology during that campaign cycle.

Labor unions are hugely influential in American politics, which makes them

targets for co-option by influences both within and outside our borders. Today, we see this most notably from the Democratic Socialists of America and China.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA (DSA)

The DSA is the largest socialist organization in America with a self-reported membership of over 100,000. The DSA **aims** to replace capitalism with a communist economic model in which they “collectively own” key economic drivers such as energy production, private property, and transportation. Their aim is clear: “establishing worker and social ownership of the economy.”

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they could not tax enough wealth to fulfill their wish lists without targeting middle-class workers and asset holders and destroying the ladders of opportunity and wealth-building along the way.

Dating back to the 1970s, the DSA gained little attention or support in America until Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’s unsuccessful presidential run in 2016, which drew enough support from young Americans that he almost defeated the establishment party favorite, Hillary Clinton. Since then, America has witnessed the election of younger DSA members to prominent public offices, including current Democratic congressional representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14) and Rashida Tlaib (MI-12) and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, expanding the DSA’s political influence and clout.

Winning political offices is just one strategy that the DSA uses to reshape America. The DSA links arms with various domestic ethnic, religious, environmental, social, and economic justice movements—from LGBTQ to Black Lives Matter—to gain visibility and push ideas.

The DSA also has a specific labor **strategy** to put socialists in positions of power in the private sector to undermine businesses, gain control of industry, and foment class struggles in workplaces. They aim to create a “sea of class struggle for socialists to swim in” and lure the majority of the working class

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to their movement and to support their policy solutions and candidates. In this way, they can grow their numbers and influence, gain power, win elections, shape policy, and revolutionize America.

The Rank-and-File Strategy

The DSA has synthesized its labor efforts under a national strategy called the **Rank-and-File Strategy**. Here, in the U.S., the DSA is organizing teachers in schools, finding workers in various industries to organize, salting employees in non-union workplaces to force unionization votes, hosting job fairs, and providing organizers with on-the-ground support for strikes and actions by workers at Starbucks, Amazon, Apple, and more. The intention is to use those union workers to also push socialist ideas, policy goals, and campaigns in their workplaces.

There is an emphasis on targeting “strategic workplaces” which are based on criteria that include economic leverage, social/political leverage, demographics, ease of entry, working conditions, and the presence of DSAers already employed there. Strategic industries in bygone eras were concentrated in blue-collar jobs and economic linchpins, including auto, steel, the Post Office, trucking, and telephone. More recently, the focus has been on K-12 education, health care, and logistics.

Going forward, emphasis seems to be on national sectors that can have broad and cascading impacts on the economy, such as the Postal Service, grocery and retail chains, airlines, telecom, and warehousing and transportation. They point to two examples of how a “**huge profit center**” in the U.S. economy can be brought down while workers “feel

their power”: the 1997 **15-day walkout** at UPS by 185,000 Teamsters members that halted 80 percent of UPS parcel volume and cost the company roughly \$780 million, and the 2019 **40-day strike** at General Motors by roughly 48,000 United Automobile Workers (UAW) members that cost GM up to \$4 billion. In these instances, DSA chapters had rank-and-file members in the striking unions, coordinated communication networks, and joined workers in the picket lines—demonstrating how interwoven the DSA is with union actions.

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The economic consequences of the DSA’s labor strategy are significant, but flying under the radar is the potential for the DSA to undermine our national security. As they target the defense industry for union unrest, work stoppages not only cost taxpayers billions; they risk military readiness. The U.S. is actively engaged in military conflict in the Middle East and stands as a guard against totalitarian regimes. Our ability to defend ourselves and protect our allies depends on a military that is equipped to meet any new challenge. However, our national defense has become vulnerable to domestic revolutionary influences that aim to destroy our institutions, including the military-industrial complex that keeps us safe at home and in leadership abroad.

Case Study: Boeing & the DSA

In 2024, **33,000** Boeing employees went on strike following a breakdown in contract negotiations for machinists in a Seattle, Washington factory. The seven-week strike began after nearly all the machinists rejected the company's offer to raise pay by 25 percent over four years—below the union's demands for a 40 percent wage increase over three years. Stopping commercial aircraft production was costly. Boeing reportedly lost \$50 million a day. The network of suppliers producing parts for Boeing's aircraft assembly created a massive downstream effect in almost every state, potentially causing “hundreds of billions of dollars in impact,” according to DSA sympathizers. The Biden administration stepped in several times to mediate because of the government's interest, to no avail. The threat of laying off 17,000 workers finally nudged workers to accept a favorable deal.

The DSA's rank-and-file strategy was on display in this Boeing strike. As United Kingdom-based socialist organization Counterfire **explained**, DSA chapters in the area had members among Boeing's union workers. They worked collaboratively across chapters with national support during the strike; shared news and advice across Signal chats; arranged meetings; and mobilized dozens of members to picket sites.

Their end goal is not simply more pay for workers, but complete ownership of Boeing. As the DSA organizer wrote, “Boeing should probably be owned by and accountable to the public ... Having a militant base and a socialist base in aerospace unions is a key step towards any just transition.”

FOREIGN INFLUENCE: CHINA

Disturbingly, the DSA is forging relationships with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in an effort to gain legitimacy, advance socialism globally, and build allies against the U.S. capitalist system. For decades, the DSA has been working internationally with global union movements and to build awareness in the American Left of international labor solidarity.

However, the new class of Democratic Socialists has a romanticized view of

China only made rosier by lavish trips funded by the CCP. Newsweek **uncovered** DSA meeting notes in which members described their contacts with eager Chinese officials, plans for future trips and robust itineraries, and requests from the Chinese to set up exchanges with DSA members. Ironically, these conversations under the name of “anti-imperialism” also focused on sensitive topics that the Chinese wanted the DSA to avoid, such as the CCP's threat to invade Taiwan and its treatment of religious minorities like the Uyghurs.

Separately, DSA members have been pledging allegiance to the CCP. The London Times **reported** that over a dozen members of the DSA have pledged to “support the People’s Republic of China and to promote understanding of Chinese socialism.”

For the Chinese, DSA leaders present a valuable public relations tool to whitewash the totalitarian regime’s image with the American Left and shift their perceptions of the nation from foe to friend. Leading DSA members who have visited China have spoken glowingly about the “strong democracy” they observed, even going as far as to downplay the treatment of Uyghurs. In meetings, DSA members laid out plans for articles, books, documentaries, and teach-ins about their positive experience in China.

As DSA-backed elected officials in the U.S.—such as Mayor Mamdani and his supporters—assume authority, they may seed CCP-friendly narratives into the public discourse or avoid other topics unfriendly to the imperial power, such as Taiwan and slave labor. This allows the CCP to gain new influence over American politics and public policy while also exploiting the growing rift in the body politic to its advantage.

The movement’s alignment with the CCP has created dissent in the DSA. A few members have voiced concern that an authoritarian government like the CCP contradicts their democratic values. However, objectors have been silenced.

CONCLUSION

The contraction of the U.S. labor movement is the result of growing worker freedoms to negotiate their own terms of work and new models of work outside the traditional employer-employee model, and a rejection of the partisan Democratic takeover of unions. Instead of adjusting to the needs of workers in an evolving economy, the unions are allowing themselves to be infiltrated and co-opted by the Democratic Socialists of America, whose goal is to destroy American capitalism and do so to the benefit of our biggest global adversary, China.

American workers deserve transparency from unions about who they align with and the real outcomes being pursued. Instead, they’re being deceived and used as pawns in a larger fight against the system that creates opportunity for their mobility and prosperity.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Get Informed:

Learn more about today's labor unions; visit:

- [Institute for the American Worker](#)
- [Union Members Summary | U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- [Time Magazine: Inside the DSA's Push to Remake the Democratic Party](#)

Talk to Your Friends:

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

Become a Leader in the Community:

Get a group together each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

Remain Engaged Politically:

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

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