

# *The Importance of Unions*

Today's Labor Movement and the Task at Hand



Why are you in the union?



**Labor Union** – An organization of workers formed to assert their power and protect and further their rights and interests

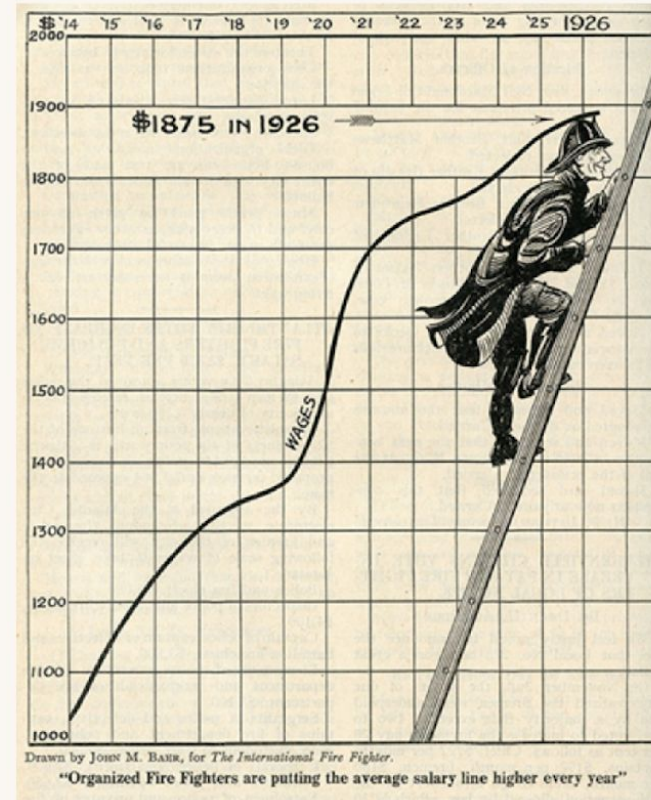
# Union Power -

The capacity of unions to *represent workers' interests*, to *regulate work*, and to *effect social change*



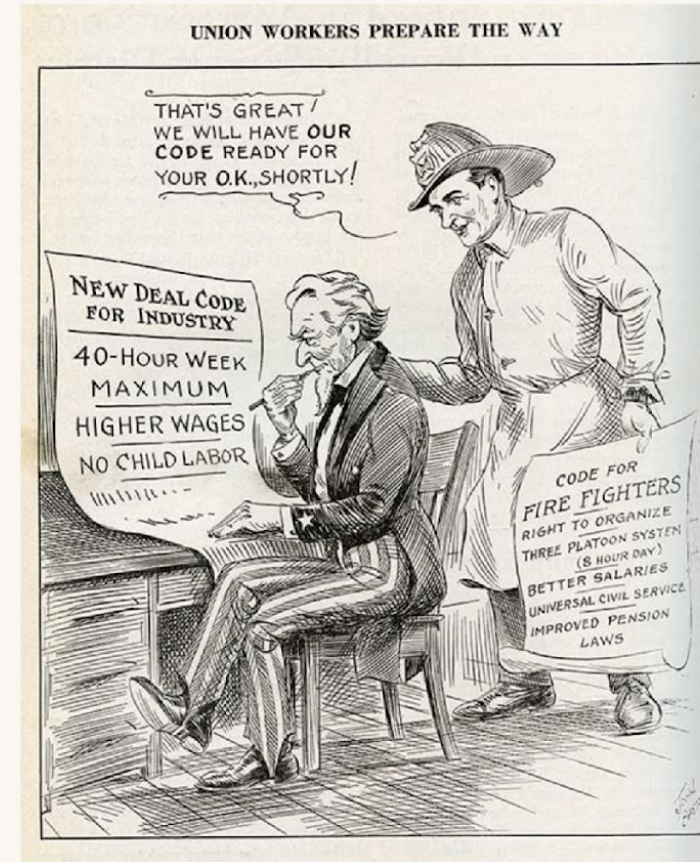
# A Short History Of U.S. Labor Unions In The 20th Century

- Prior to the 1930s
- 1930s
- 1940s-1970s
- 1970s to the Present



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  - Rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations
  - Mass Strike Wave, 1930-1935
  - 1935 National Labor Relations Act
  - Surge in Union Membership
  - WSCFF established 1939



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YEARS	STRIKES	STRIKERS	STRIKE DAYS
1930	637	183,000	3,320,000
1931	810	342,000	6,890,000
1932	840	324,000	10,500,000
1933	1,695	1,170,000	16,900,000
1934	1,856	1,470,000	19,600,000
1935	2,014	1,120,000	15,500,000



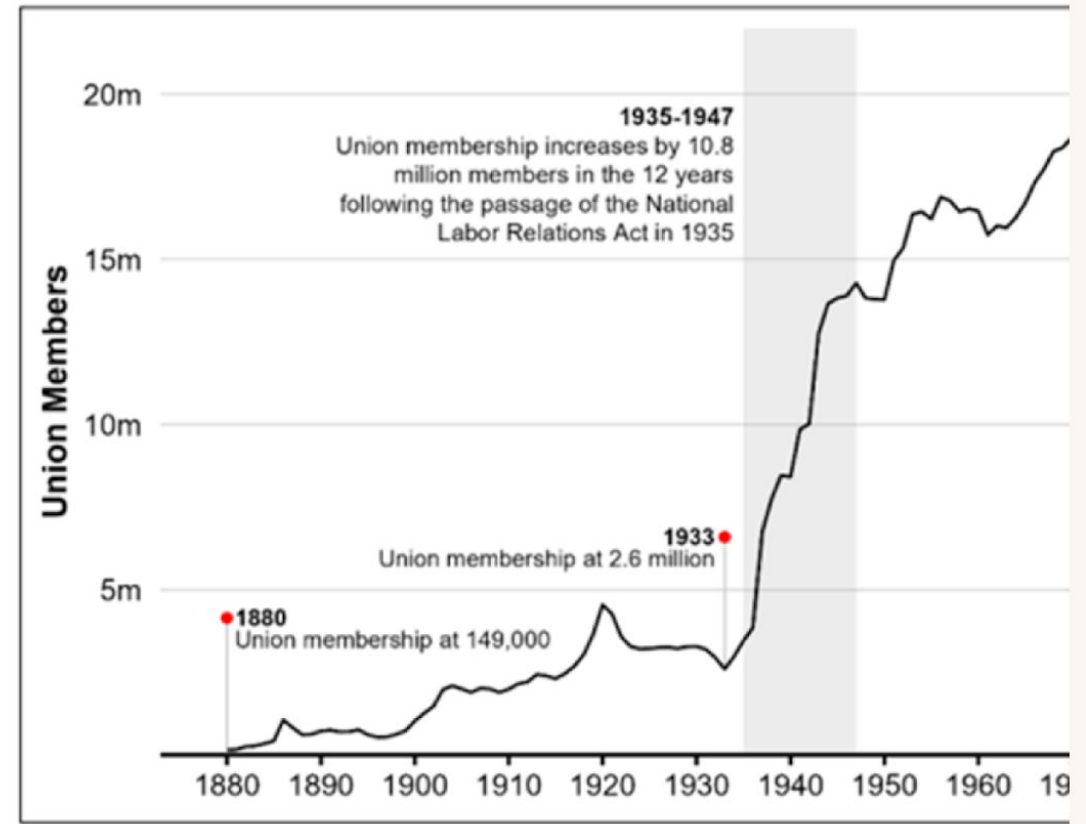
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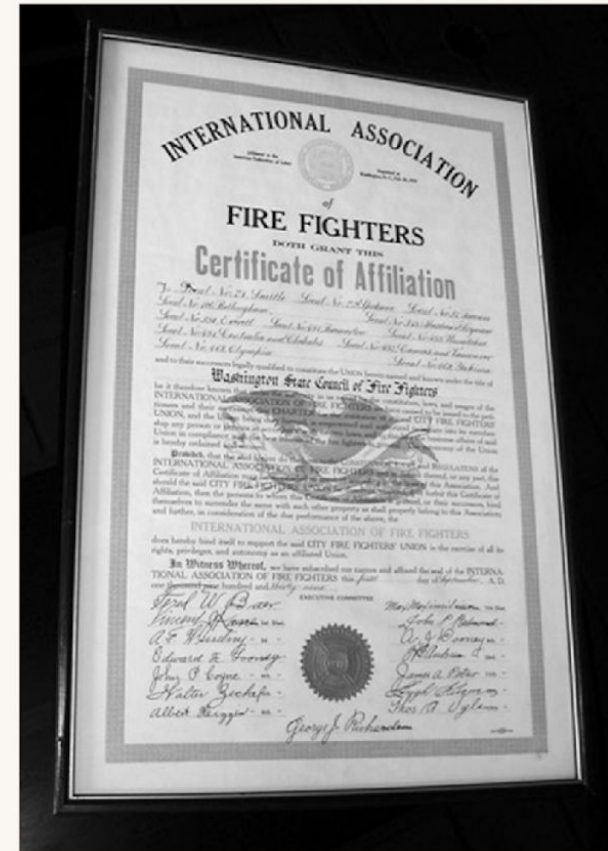


# 1930s: Surge In Union Membership



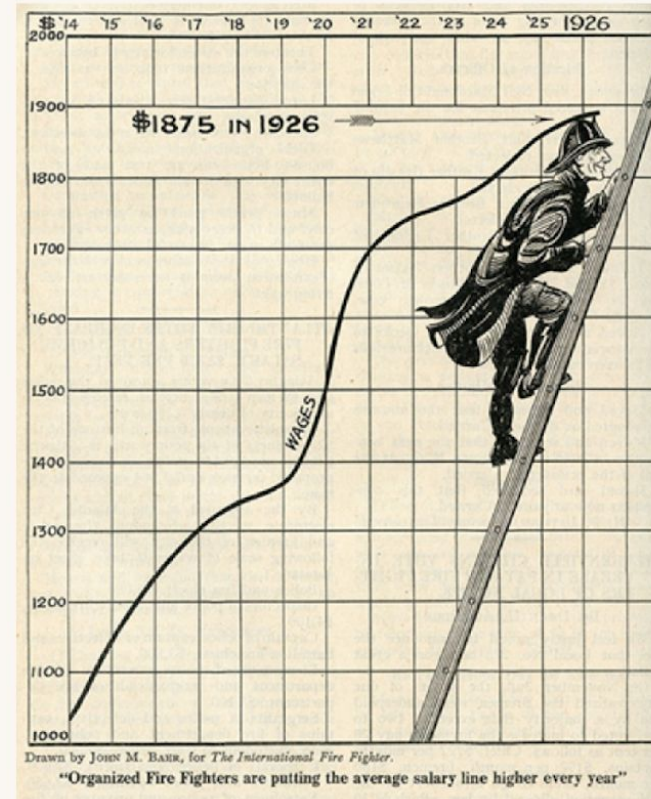
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- 1940s-1970s
  - High unionization rates
  - Wealth equality
  - Racial exclusion
  - Unions under attack:
  - 1947 Taft-Hartley Act
  - “Right to Work”
  - 1955 AFL-CIO merger
  - Peak of labor’s political influence

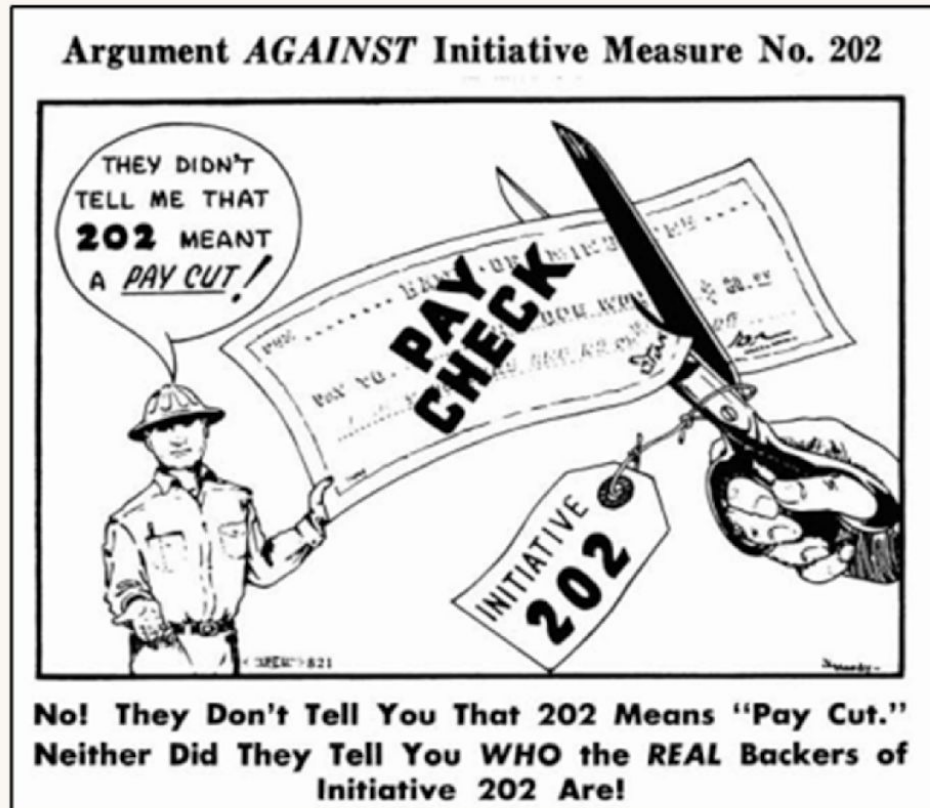


# *A Short History Of U.S. Labor Unions In The 20th Century*



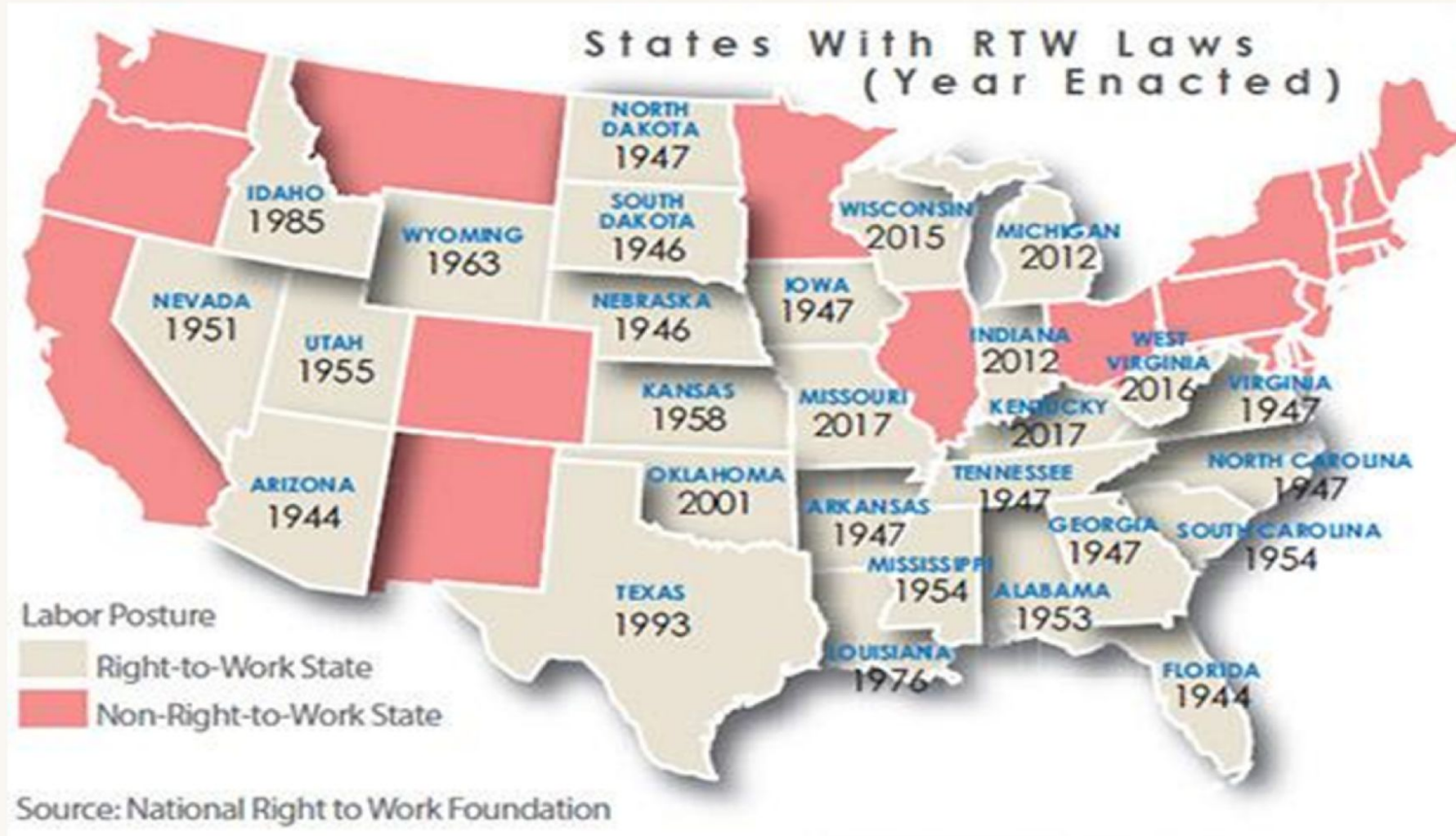
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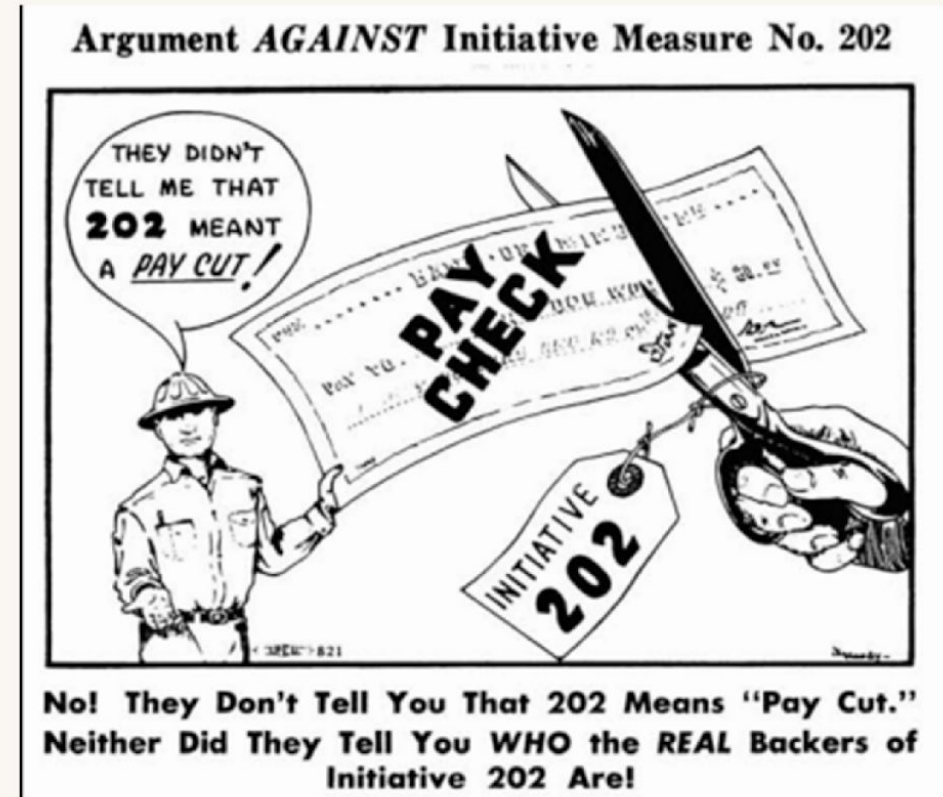




- First enacted in the south
- RTW laws ban collective bargaining agreements that require employees to pay dues or fees to a union

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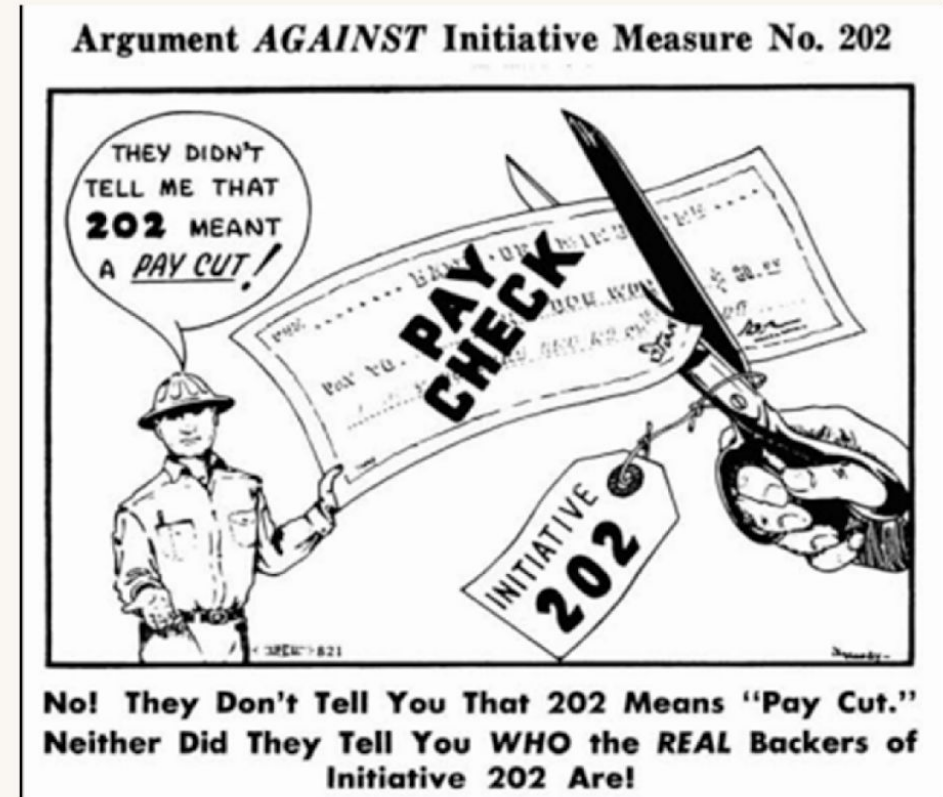
- 1970s to the Present
  - Business organized politically
  - Challenges to job segregation
  - U.S. manufacturing restructured
  - Rise of global supply chains
  - Decline of private sector unions
  - Rise of public sector unions



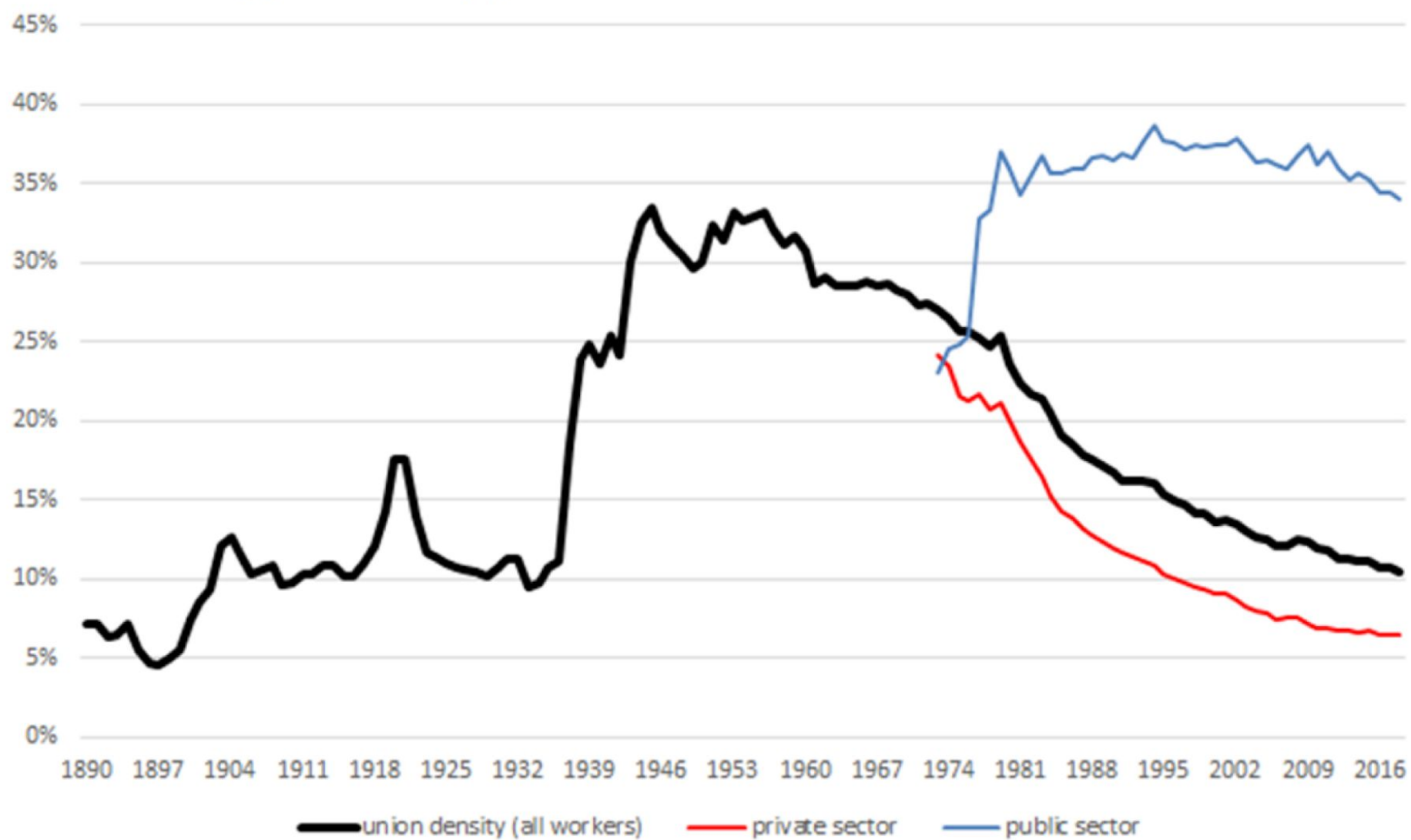


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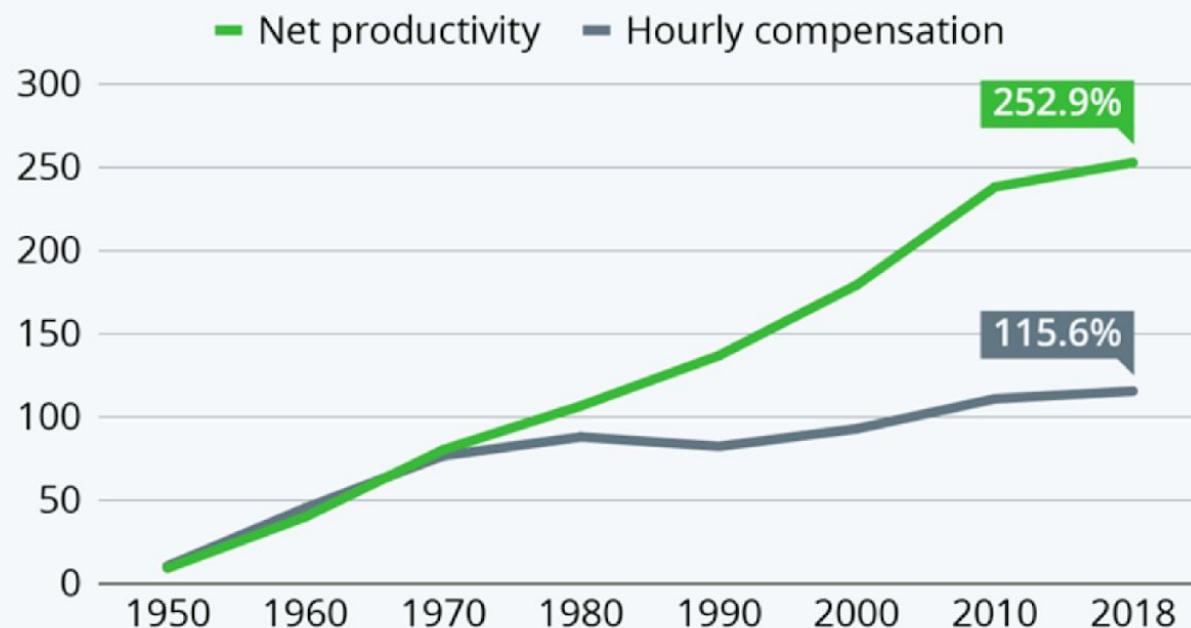
Union Density (membership), 1890-2018



# Productivity Soars, Wages Stagnate



Percent growth in U.S. productivity and  
hourly compensation, 1950-2018



Data on wages from workers in private sector compared  
to productivity in total economy.

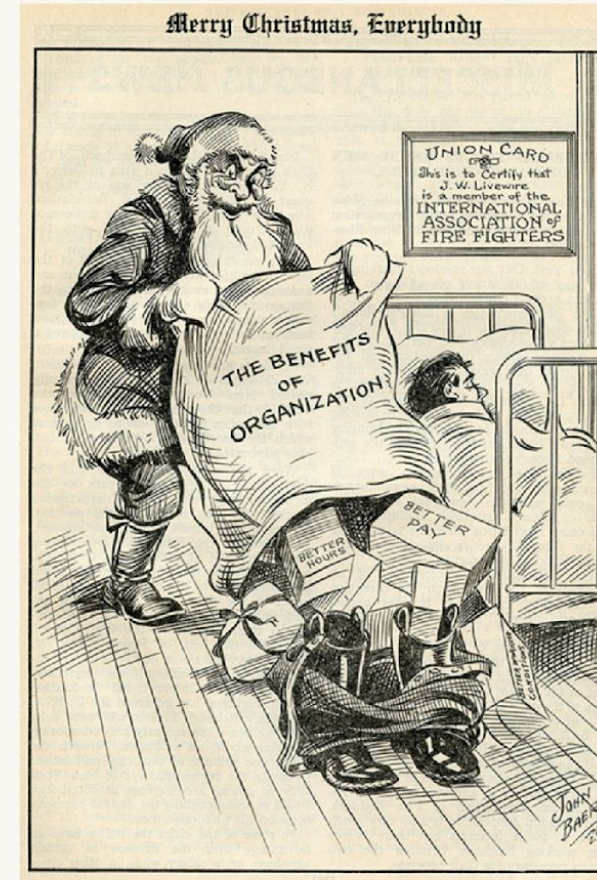
Source: Economic Policy Institute





# Lessons Of Labor History

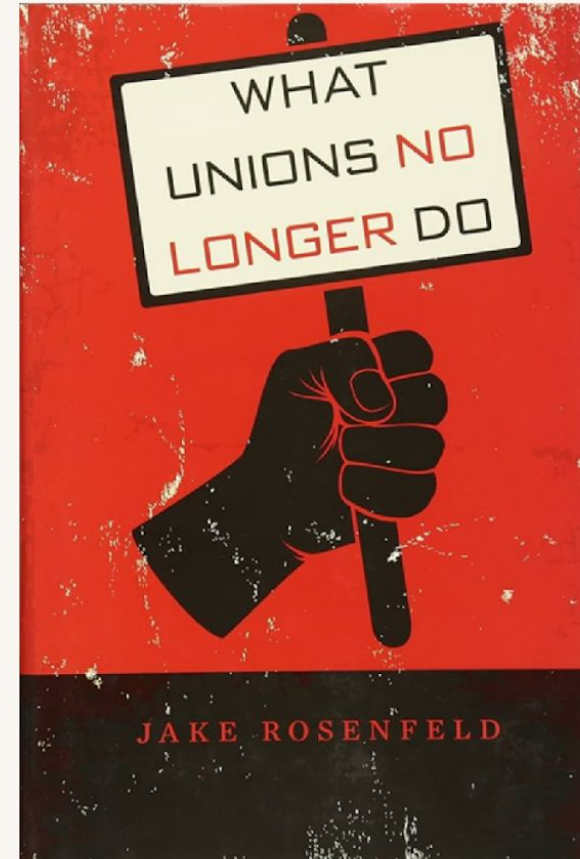
- Union Wage Premium
- Health and Safety
- Economic Inequality
- Political Participation



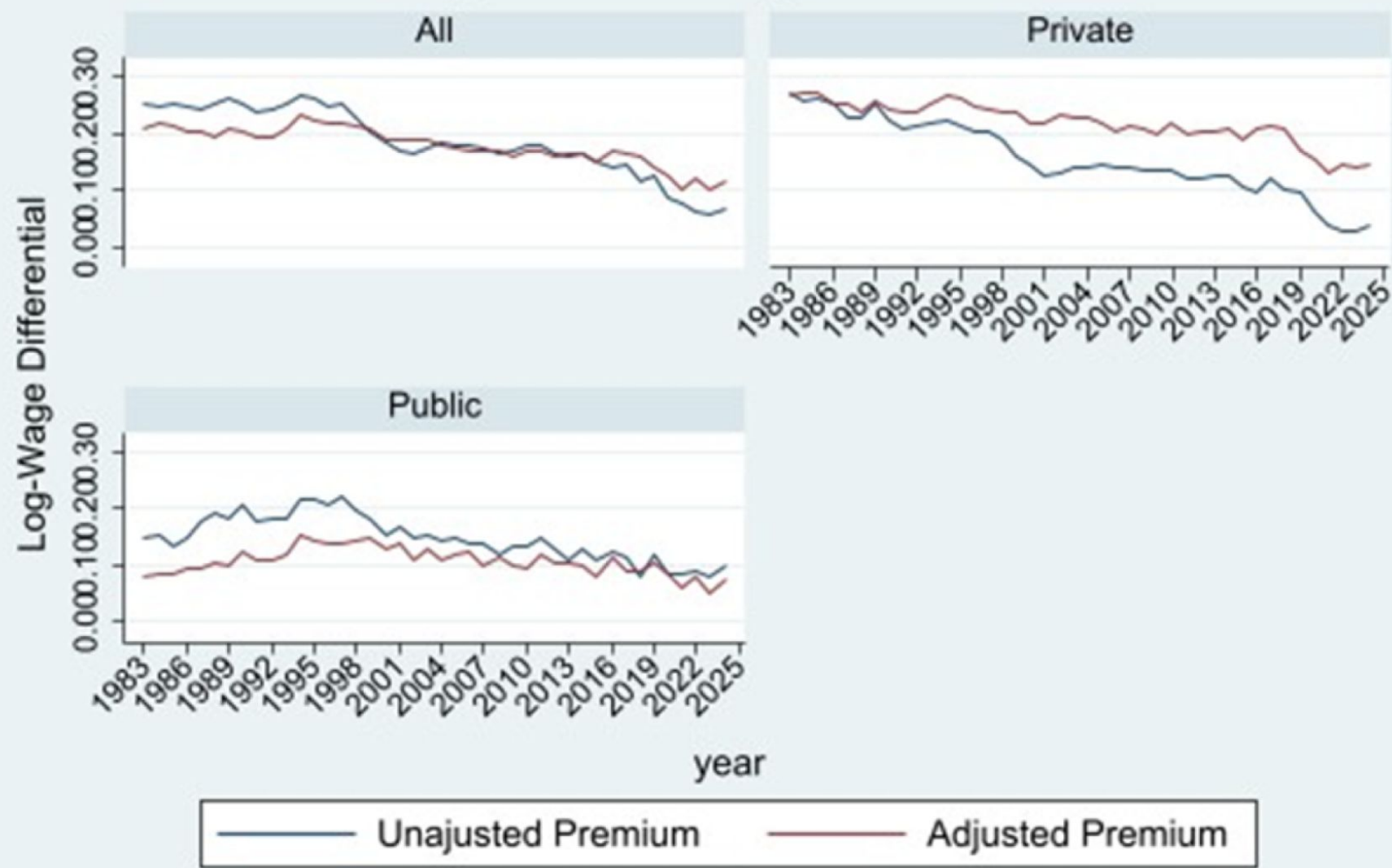
# Lessons Of Labor History

- Union Wage Premium
  - Historically (1983-2009), public sector union wages are 15-20% higher than non-union public sector workers.

(Jake Rosenfeld, *What Unions No Longer Do*)



## Union Wage Premium by Sector: 1983-2024



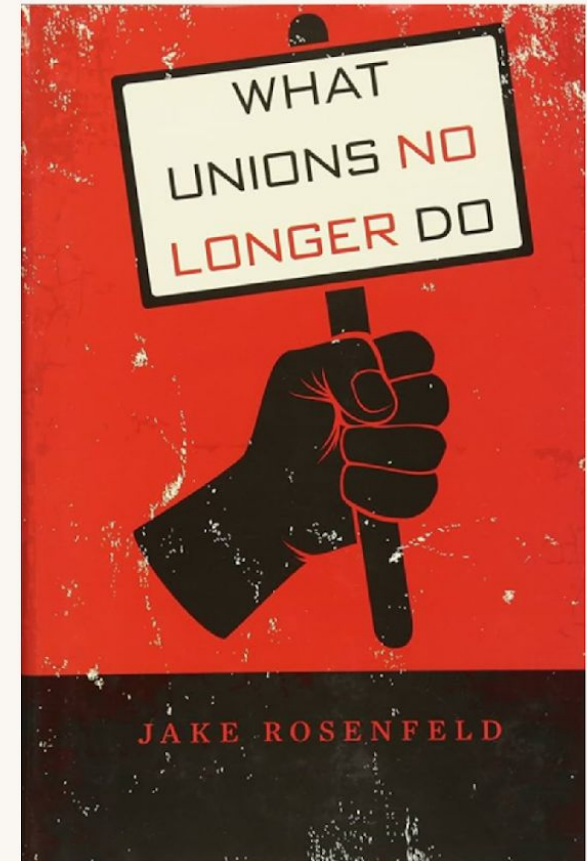
Adjusted premium controls for worker and job characteristics.



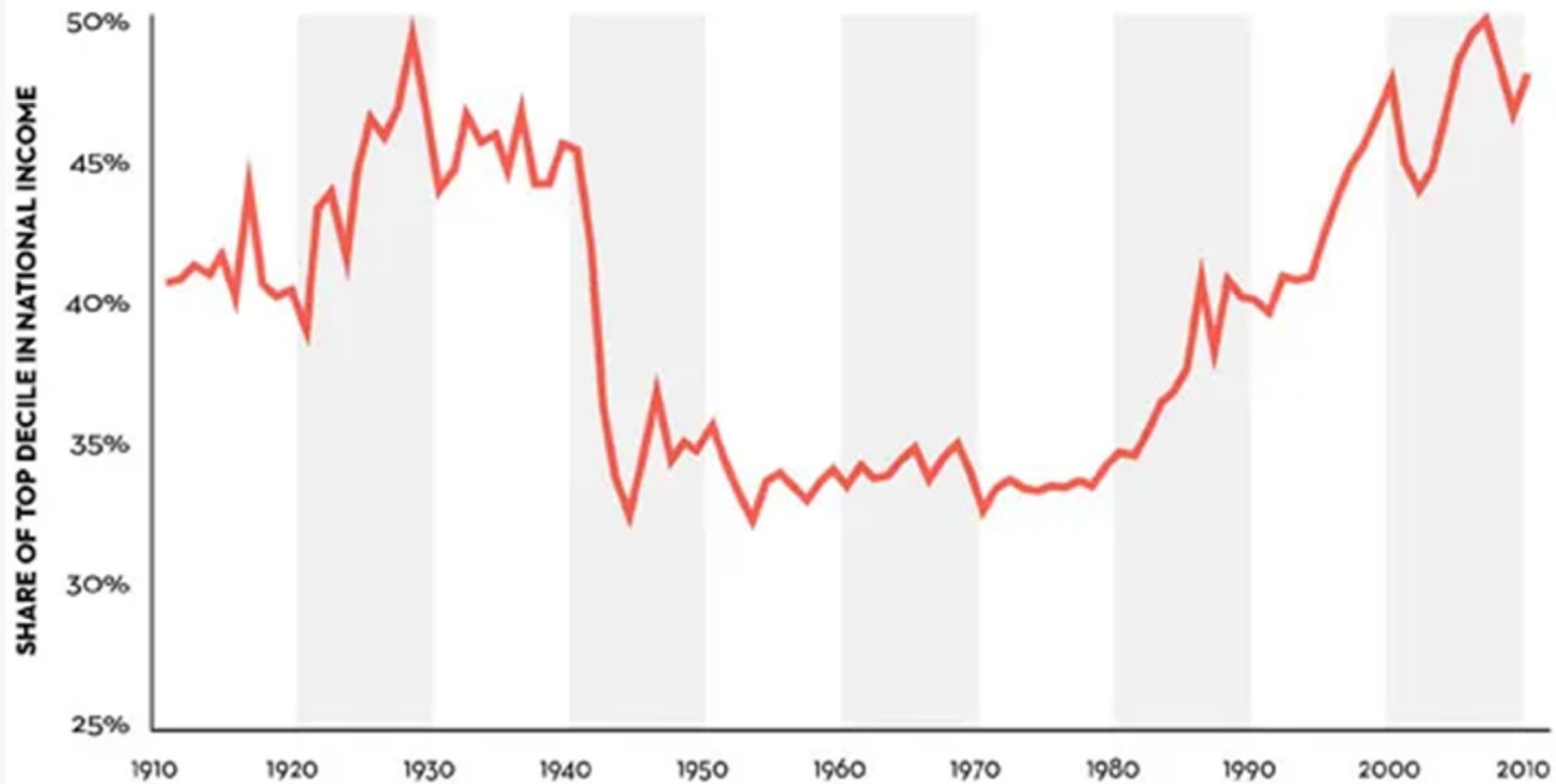
# Lessons Of Labor History

- Health and Safety
- *“If you are a public-sector worker who belongs to a union, it is almost certain that your employer offers health insurance to at least some of the employees at your worksite.”*

*(Jake Rosenfeld, What Unions No Longer Do)*

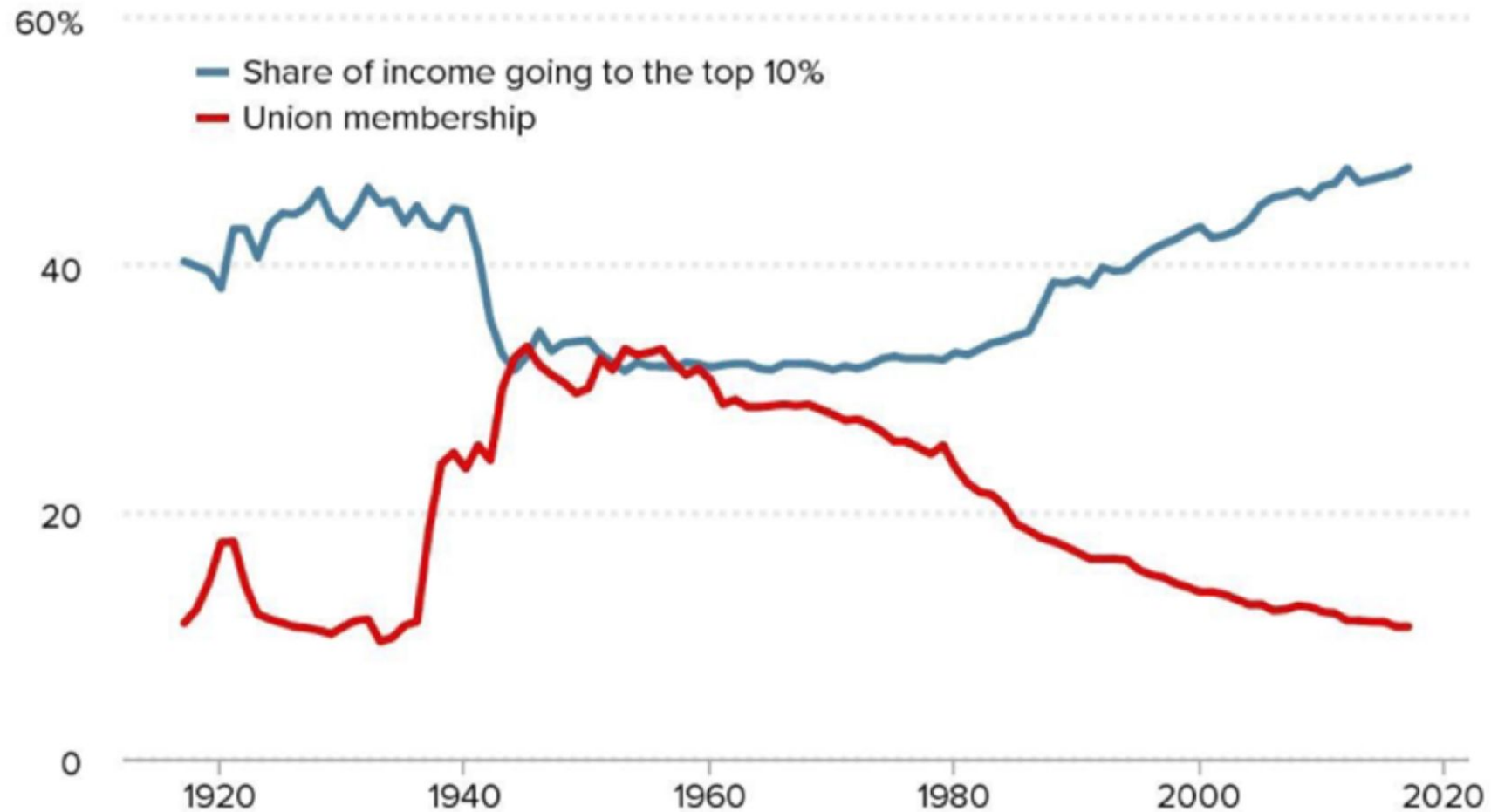


## INCOME INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES, 1910-2010



## As union membership declines, income inequality rises

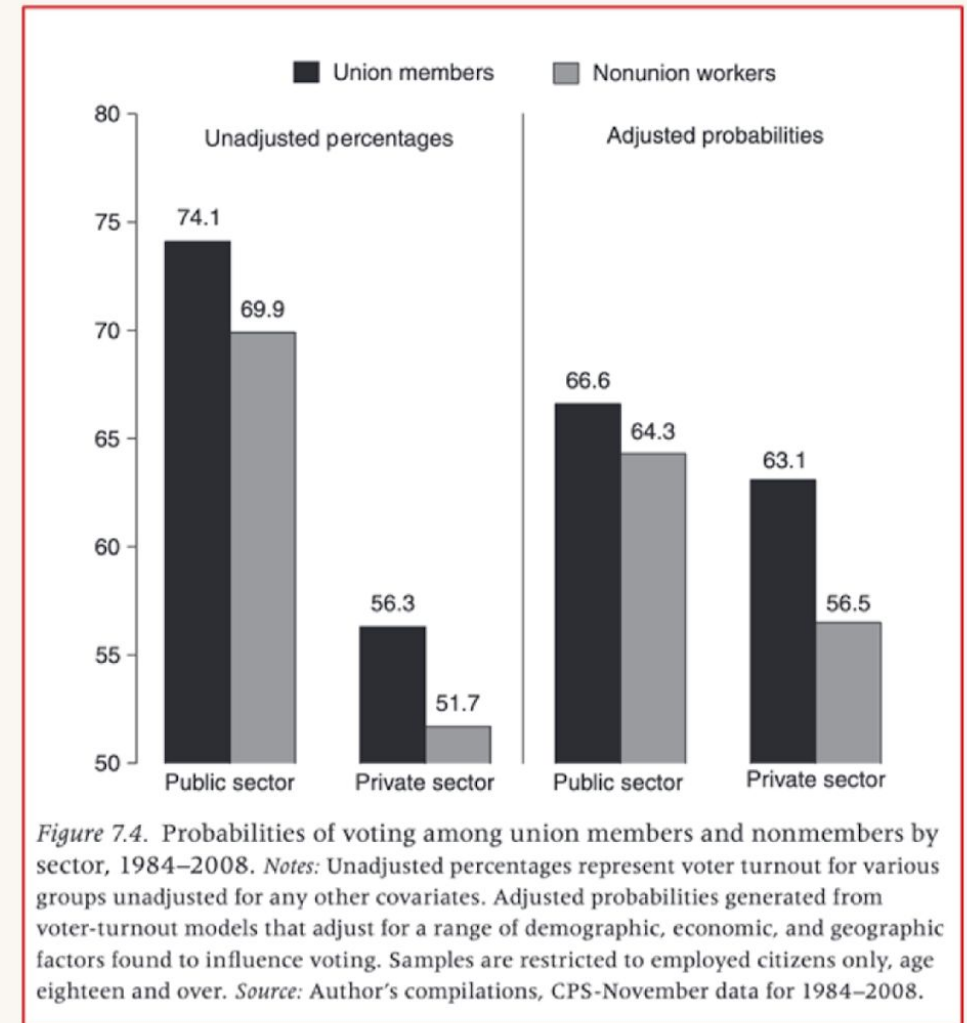
Union membership and share of income going to the top 10%, 1917–2017





# Lessons Of Labor History

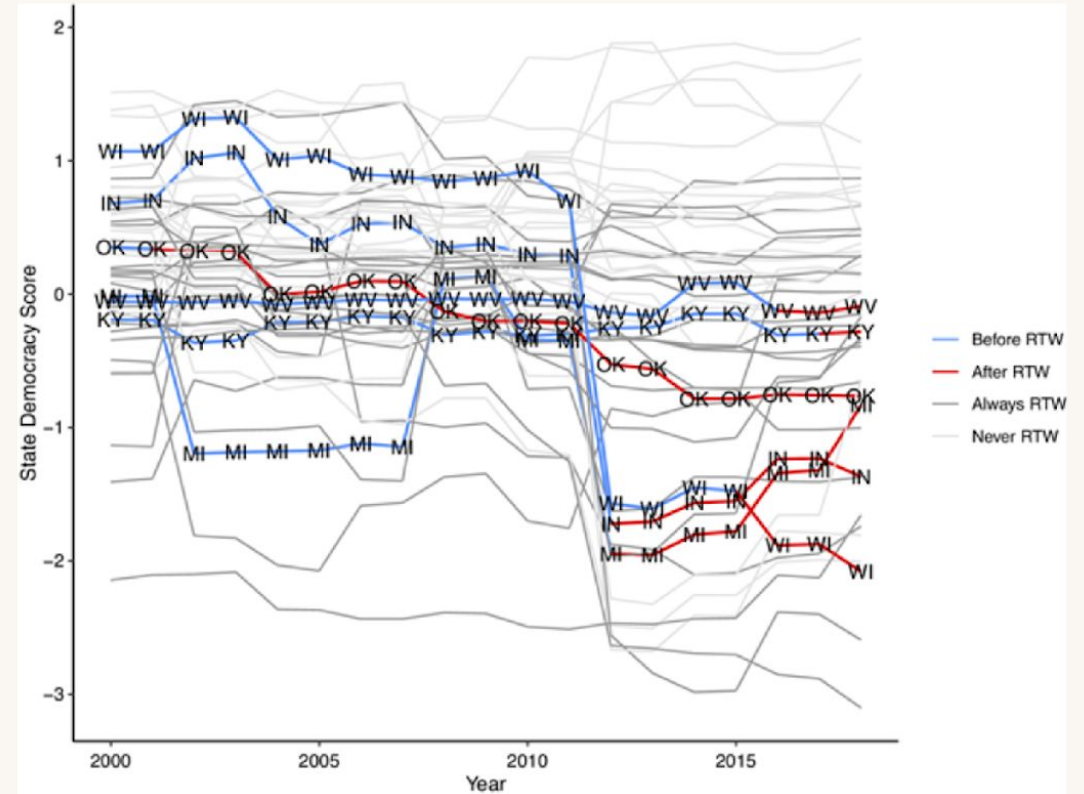
- Political Participation
- “Unions are uncommon among organizations in that historically they helped equalize [political] participation across socio-economic divides.”
- (Jake Rosenfeld, What Unions No Longer Do)



# Lessons Of Labor History

- Political Participation
- “States that adopt Right To Work laws reduce their electoral democracy scores by about 0.5 standard deviations relative to states that do not.”

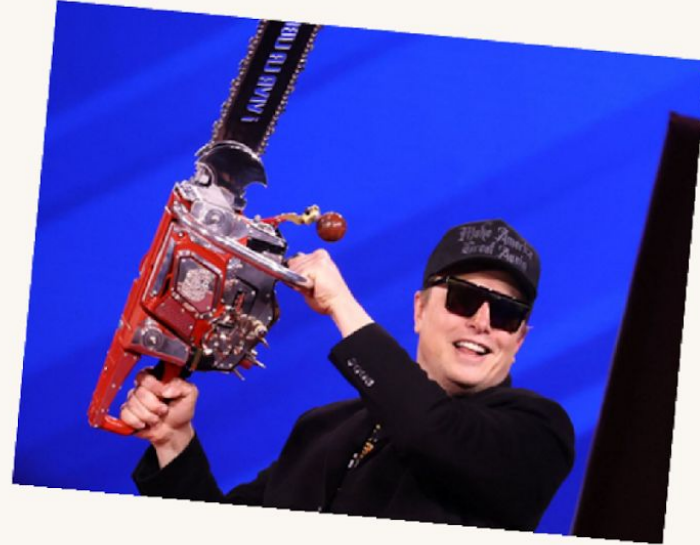
Paul Frymer, Jacob M. Grumbach, and Charlotte Hill, “Right to Work or Right to Vote? Labor Policy and American Democracy”



# Today

Apr 1, 2025 - Politics & Policy

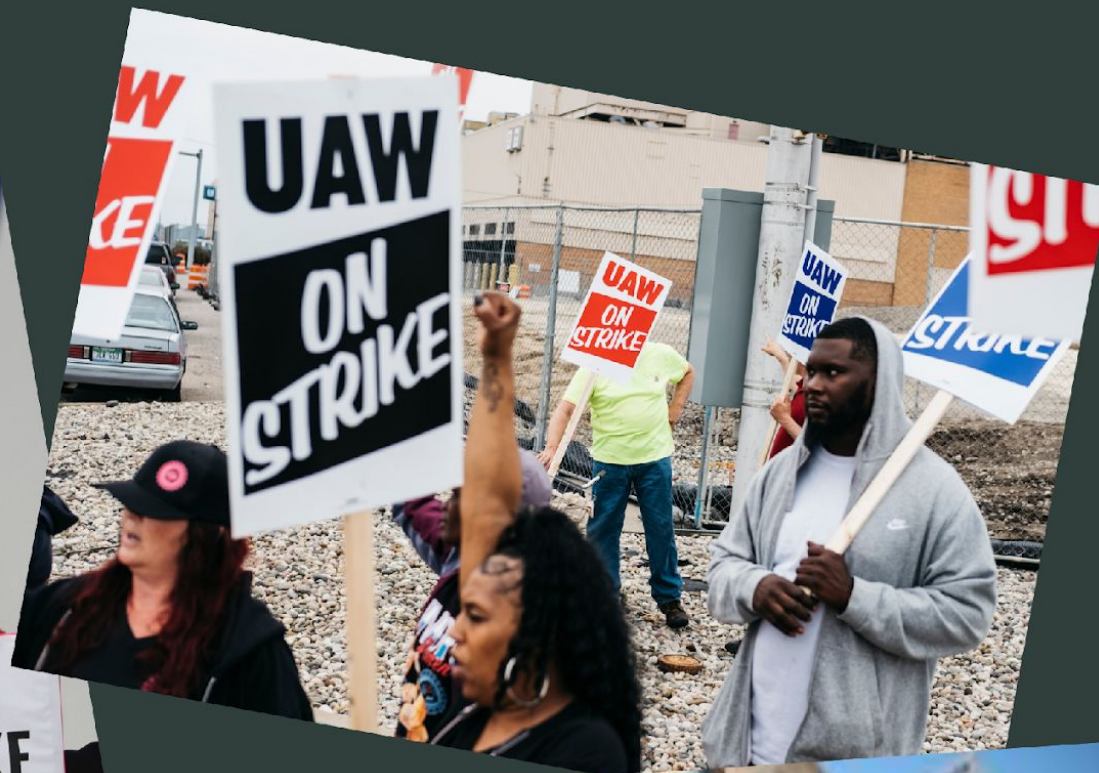
Wisconsin's Supreme Court election is the most expensive judicial race in U.S. history











## Public approval of labor unions continues to trend above 60%

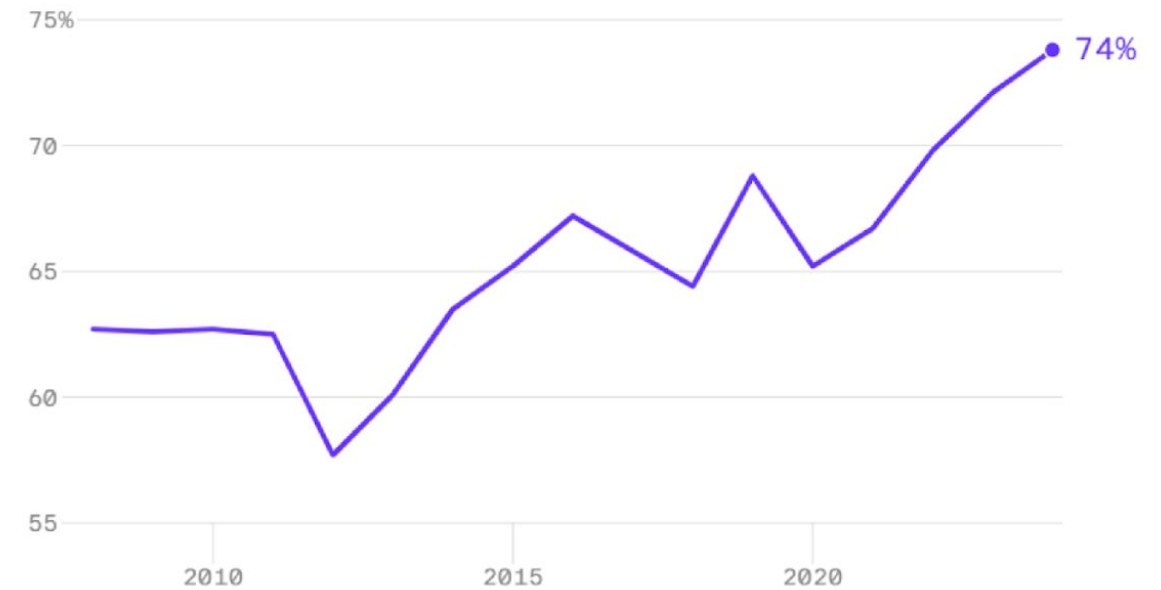
Share of poll respondents who say they approve of labor unions, 2004–2020



**Source:** Adapted from Megan Brennan, “[At 65%, Approval of Labor Unions in U.S. Remains High](#),” Gallup website, September 3, 2020.

## Share of National Labor Relations Board elections that resulted in union certification

Annually, 2008–2024; Through April 2024



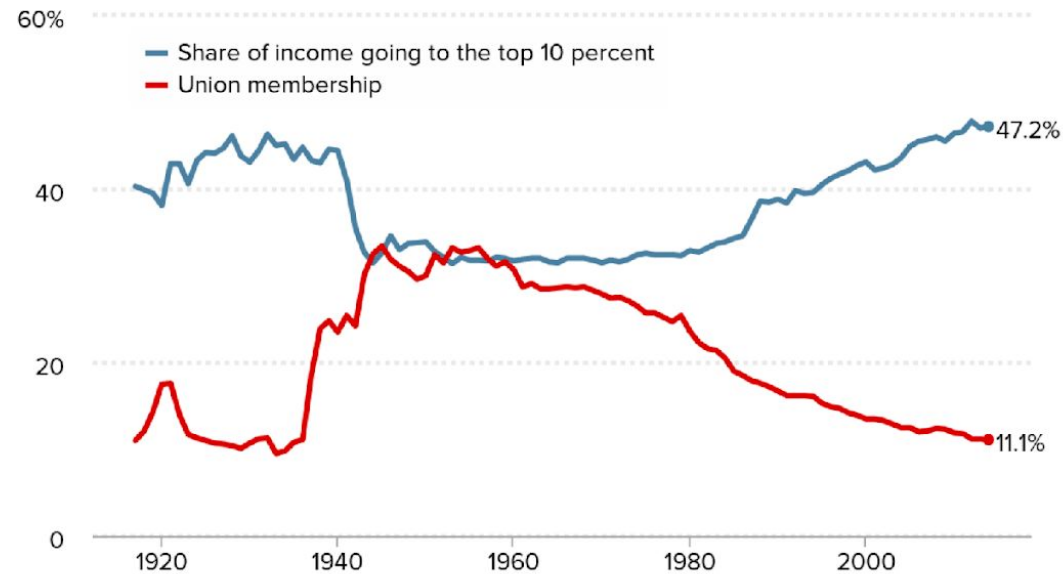
Data: Center for American Progress analysis of NLRB data; Chart: Axios Visuals



# Union Density and Union Support

## As union membership has fallen, the top 10 percent have been getting a larger share of income

Union membership and share of income going to the top 10%, 1917–2014



Source: Piketty and Saez (2014), Gordon (2013), and Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey public data series

Economic Policy Institute

- Highest union approval on record: 75%
- Union approval in 2023: 70%
- Highest union support, 1954 – 35%
- Union density in 2023 – 10%



# 2023

- 280% increase in major strike activity
- 466 strikes
- 539,000 workers on strike





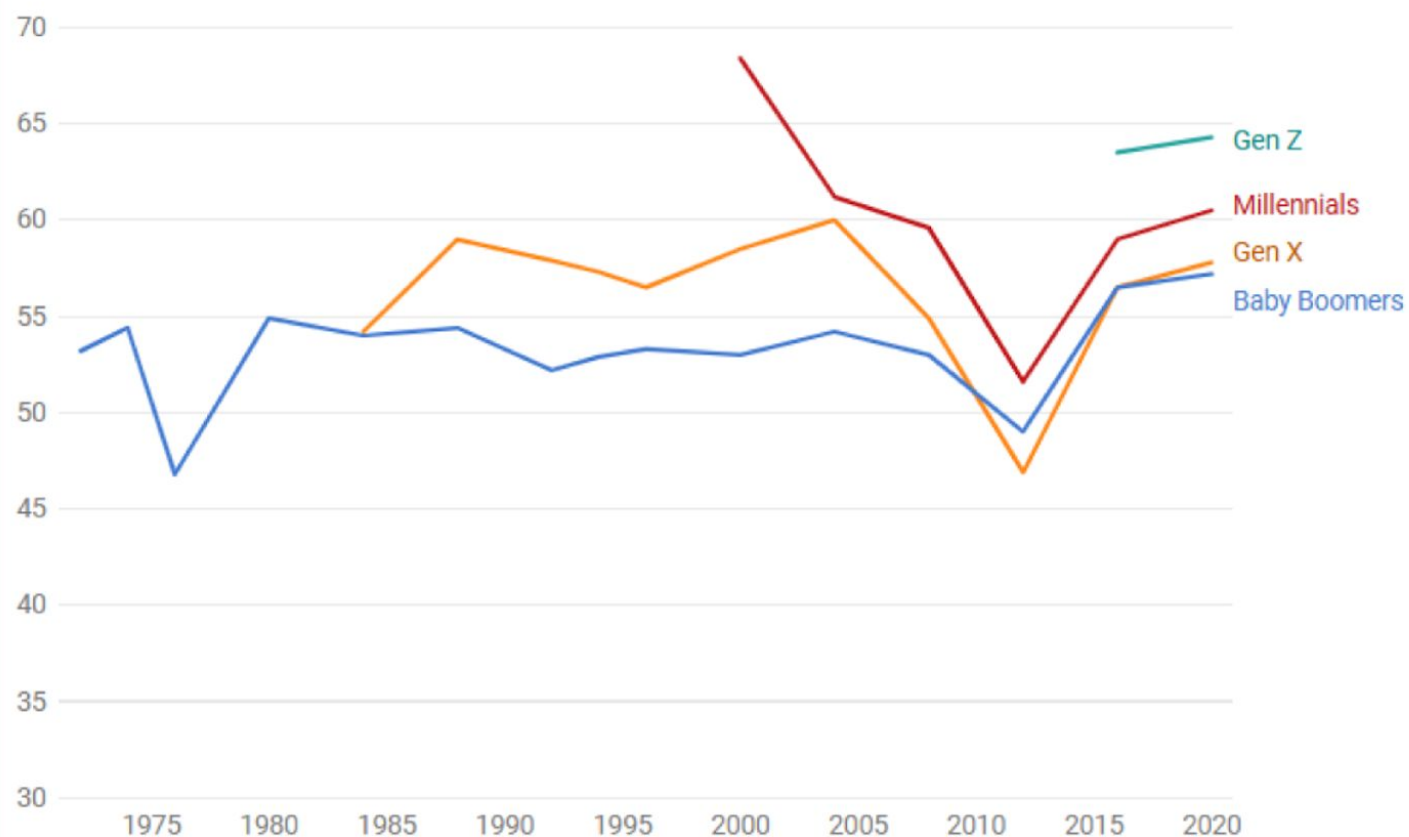
# 2024

- 271,500 striking workers
- 31 major strikes
- Slight decrease in union density to 9.9%



## Generation Z supports unions today more than older generations ever have

Mean union approval rating by generation over time, 1972–2020



*Hover or click to see values.*

*Note: Respondents were asked to rate their attitude toward unions on a scale from 0 to 100, with an approval of more than 50 representing a positive attitude and an approval of less than 50 representing a negative attitude.*

Source: American National Election Studies, ["Time Series Cumulative Data File \(1948-2020\)"](#), (last accessed June 2022).

Chart: Center for American Progress

# The Rank-and-File Reform Movement

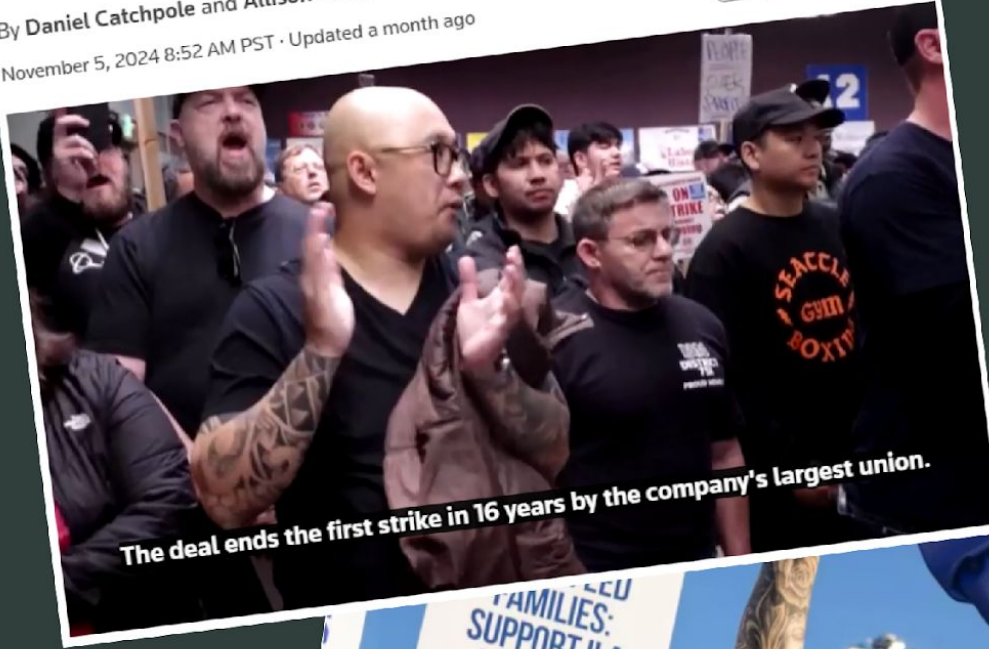
- Transparency in bargaining
- Member engagement
- Grassroots campaigns
- Aggressive organizing efforts





# Boeing strike ends as workers accept new contract

By Daniel Catchpole and Allison Lampert  
November 5, 2024 8:52 AM PST · Updated a month ago



The deal ends the first strike in 16 years by the company's largest union.

# The Hugely Important Strike You're Not Hearing Enough About

*The LA hotel workers' strike is vast, high-stakes, and being met with intense resistance. So why isn't it getting more national attention?*

SASHA ABRAMSKY

SHARE



LONGSHOREMAN STRIKE REMINDS COUNTRY THAT  
THE PEOPLE ARE MORE POWERFUL TOGETHER



Grizz | Published: October 4, 2024

Canva, Getty Images



PBS NEWS HOUR

## Migrants in U.S. legally and with no criminal history caught up in Trump crackdown

Mar 28, 2025 6:30 PM EDT

### Trump Firings at Labor Board Paralyze the Agency

The removal of the National Labor Relations Board's general counsel had been expected. But the firing of a Democratic member stops it from protecting workers' rights, for now.

Share full article



Jennifer Abruzzo in 2022. Ms. Abruzzo was fired on Monday as general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board. Amanda Andrade-Rhoades/Associated Press

COMMENTARY ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

### Trump's Rapid-Fire Anti-Worker Actions



FEBRUARY 16, 2025

The Nation.

MARCH 28, 2025

### Donald Trump Is Shuttering a Little-Known Labor-Management Agency That Supports Collective Bargaining

The administration's latest assault on independent agencies is also an attack on working people.

LYNN RHINEHART

SHARE



Seal of the USA Federal Mediation & Conciliation Service in its Cincinnati offices on Wednesday, March 14, 2007. (David Kohl / AP Photo)

### Federal Work Force Prepares for Another Round of Mass Firings as Deadline Nears

The Trump administration's drive to slash and overhaul the government, led by Elon Musk, has already led to tens of thousands of departures.

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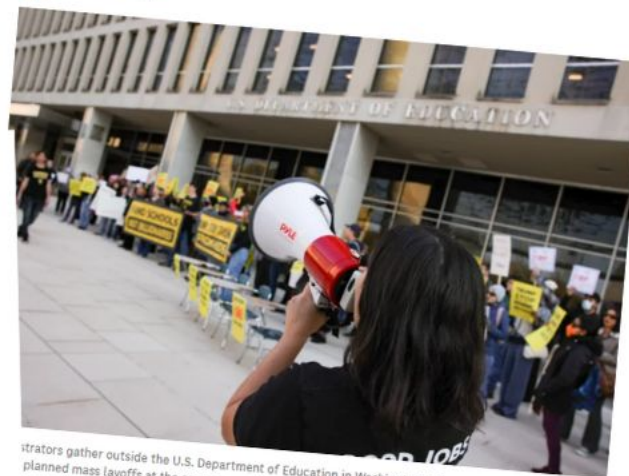


POLITICS

### Federal agencies plan for mass layoffs as Trump's workforce cuts continue

UPDATED MARCH 15, 2025 · 9:18 AM ET

Stephen Fowler



Protesters gather outside the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., on Thursday to protest planned mass layoffs at the agency. (Middle East Images/AFP via Getty Images)



# The New York Times.

## ROOSEVELT SIGNS THE WAGNER BILL AS 'JUST TO LABOR'

It is Important Step Toward  
Industrial Peace but Will Not  
Stop All Disputes, He Says.

### MEDIATION NOT AFFECTED

President Explains New Board  
Will Act Only on Violations  
of the Right to Organize.

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.  
WASHINGTON, July 8. — The  
Wagner Labor Disputes Bill, enact-  
ing into permanent law a Federal  
authorization for labor to organize  
for the purpose of collective bar-

ers and labor, was signed by Pres-  
ident Roosevelt today.

The signing had been postponed  
several days in an effort to  
a ceremony, but after it be-  
found impossible to get together  
the leaders who sponsored the  
lation, Mr. Roosevelt appro-  
bil at the White House this  
ing before going to the ex-  
offices.

Later he hailed the measure  
"an important step toward  
achievement of just and peace-  
labor relations in industry." In  
the same time warned the public  
that "it will not stop all labor  
disputes."

He used two pens in signing  
the bill, directing afterward that one  
presented to Senator Wagner,  
author of the bill with Represen-  
tative Cawley, and that the other  
to William Green, president of the  
American Federation of Labor, who  
has called the bill the "magna  
charta of labor."

The bill provides Federal machinery  
for the adjudication of disputes  
over the right of labor to organize  
when "violation of the legal right  
of independent self-organization  
would burden or obstruct interstate  
commerce," the President an-  
nounced.

Adjudication would be placed in



## The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)

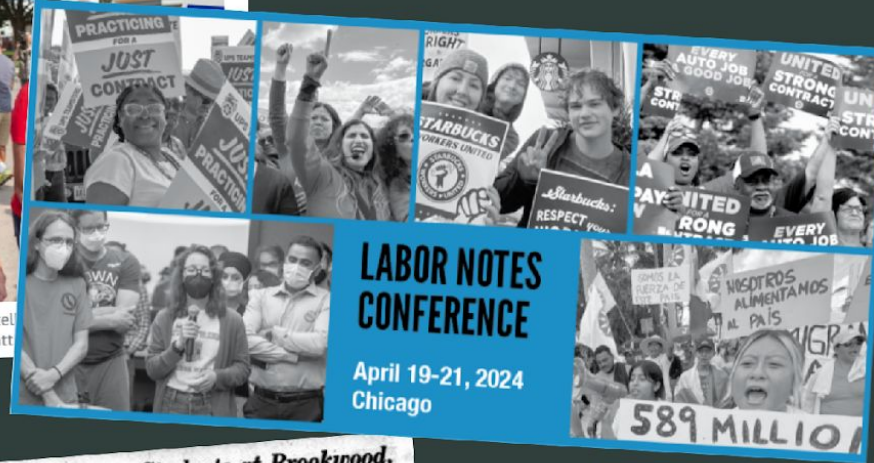
- Fundamental right to organize
- Protection from retaliation
- Right to concerted activity
- Right to bargain

## 'We want everybody walking out': UAW chief outlines mass strike for May 2028

Shawn Fain, the United Auto Workers president, reaffirms general strike on 1 May 2028, saying 'members need to come together'



UAW president Shawn Fain, union members and workers at a Stell picket outside the facility on 22 September 2023. Photograph: Matt



## The Task at Hand

- Don't mourn, organize!
- Meet the urgent nationwide appetite for labor education
  - Rank-and-file training and power building
  - Young worker education
- Widespread organizing campaigns!
  - New worker organizing
  - Salting programs

## A College for Laborers Only

Students at Brookwood, N. Y., Learning to Be Educated Labor Leaders

and Rivals of Corporation Lawyers, While Doing Their Own House-work and Farming



The Fine Old Colonial Mansion Which Has Become the Headquarters of Brookwood Labor College, at Katonah, N. Y.

When labor goes into a struggle with capital it is at a disadvantage. The masses of laborers are mostly of men, uneducated men with trained by special skilled laborers who are highly educated. But the laboring man when he comes to struggle with the trained mind of the world of capital is at a disadvantage. He is not trained like the lawyer and the doctor, but he is trained like the farmer and the worker. In an argument or an action he is at a disadvantage. The uneducated brain of the worker is at a disadvantage. The uneducated brain of the worker is at a disadvantage. The uneducated brain of the worker is at a disadvantage.

