

Union Night at the Movies

Next time you're at the video store look for one of these titles and get some insight into union struggles, union issues and union spirit.

Iron Maze (1991) In this Oliver Stone-produced film, a Japanese businessman inspecting the site of an abandoned steel mill for the location of a new amusement park is attacked. A laid-off steelworker is accused of the attack, causing the underlying tension between jobless workers and the new corporate foreign owners to boil over.

Roger and Me (1989) Filmmaker Michael Moore's cynical, hilarious portrayal of his futile attempts to contact then General Motors (GM) owner Roger Smith and question him about the closing of the Flint, Mich. GM plant.

Matewan (1987) John Sayles' epic film is based on the true story of a bloody coal miners' strike in West Virginia in the 1920s. Sayles pits an old-time pacifist against a company trying to break the strike. A full-scale war erupts when the company sends in its own private army to quell the uprising.

Wall Street (1987) Bearing an uncanny resemblance to the real life drama of the Eastern Airlines/Machinists dispute, this film takes a surprisingly realistic view of unions. The machinists' local at a small airline has been made the pawn in a stock war between two big Wall Street investors.

Silkwood (1983) Director Mike Nichols tells the terrifying story of Karen Silkwood, the courageous woman who struggled to assert her rights against a powerful company which she suspected of cutting dangerous corners.

Norma Rae (1979) Sally Field in an Oscar-winning performance portrays a woman who helps organize a union at a textile mill against enormous pressures. Field begins the story as a non-believer who slowly becomes a union supporter and then a union recruiter.

You Could Look it Up

You can also learn more about unions and the labor movement by reading books. Your local library should have books on unions, labor history, and social justice.

In 1998, Local 17 started the Labor and Democracy Project to ensure that new books about labor were widely available in the Seattle Public Library system. With the help of members and friends in labor, Local 17 raised about \$20,000 to purchase 157 book and video titles to create the labor collection.

A few titles in that collection include *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism*, by Dana Frank; *Joe Hill, a Biographical Novel*, by Wallace Stegner; *Why Unions Matter*, by Michael Yates; *Working Class America: Essays on Labor, Community and American Society*.

Welcome to the union movement.



The benefits have just begun.



There is power in the union, power to make life better.

When you joined Local 17, you began partaking of the kind of benefits and advantages enjoyed by millions of union members in America. Union workers get a voice in the workplace and renewed pride in their labor, and they also see material benefits that outpace those of non-union workers. Here are a few statistics.



- Dental insurance covers 71% of union workers, but only 43% of non-union workers. When it comes to health insurance, 92% of union workers have some form of health care coverage, while only 75% of non-union workers do.
- According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2001, full-time wage and salary union members had median usual weekly earnings of \$718, compared with a median of \$575 for wage and salary workers who were not represented by unions.
- In 2001, workers in the public sector continued to have unionization rates that were about four times higher than their counterparts in private industry. The unionization rate of government workers was 37.4%, compared with 9% among private sector employees.
- Professional specialty workers, including teachers, had a higher than average union membership rate, at 19.1%.
- In both 2001 and 2000, about 16.3 million wage and salary workers were union members.
- Most union members can count on a defined benefit pension when they retire – 87% of union members have a guaranteed pension while only 36% of non-union workers have any pension guarantees.



- Union membership improves pay equity for women and minority groups. Union women working full-time, on average, earn \$115 more per week than non-union full-time women workers.
- Hispanic workers who are union members earn \$146 more per week than non-union Hispanic workers. African American workers earn an average of \$135 more per week than non-union African Americans.



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