

Unions and the American Middle Class

The American middle class did not rise by accident—it was built by Unions. In the post-war decades when Union density was high, so was shared prosperity. Unions secured not just wages, but retirement security, health coverage, vacation time, and protection against arbitrary discipline. They empowered the working class to participate in America's prosperity on fair terms. As Union influence declined, so too did the stability of the middle class. Wage growth slowed, benefits shrank, and the wealth gap exploded. The data is clear: Union strength correlates directly with middle-class health. The more organized labor we have, the more shared prosperity we enjoy.

Answering the Critics: The Value of Due Process

Critics often claim that Unions protect unproductive or misbehaving employees. But this critique misunderstands the role of Unions. Unions do not defend misconduct—they defend due process. They ensure workers are treated fairly and not subject to arbitrary or retaliatory actions. As William Blackstone once wrote: “It is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer.” This principle of justice should not stop at the courthouse door. It belongs in the workplace too. When workers are denied a voice or a defense, dignity and fairness vanish. Even if some employees exploit the system, the alternative—unchecked employer authority—is a far greater threat to equity and democracy.

Unions as Economic Checks and Balances

Our Constitution is based on the idea that concentrated power must be held in check. The three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial—are balanced to prevent abuse. In the economic sphere, Unions serve a parallel function. They are the checks and balances on the power of employers, and this is a powerful facet of American exceptionalism. Without organized labor, employers hold disproportionate power over wages, benefits, schedules, and job security. With Unions, workers can bargain collectively, balancing that power and creating more stable, fair, and prosperous workplaces. This isn't just about fairness—it's about economic logic.

Trickle-Up Economics and the Multiplier Effect

When Unions negotiate better wages, the money goes directly into the hands of people who spend it—not stash it. This is the essence of a trickle-up economy. Higher wages create higher demand. Demand grows business. Business creates jobs. This multiplier effect doesn't just benefit workers—it benefits entrepreneurs, investors, and the economy as a whole. Unions don't just raise wages. They circulate prosperity. And in doing so, they fuel the same system that business owners rely on for profits and growth.

American Exceptionalism Rooted in Empathy and Balance

American Exceptionalism is not defined by how much wealth we generate, but how broadly we share it. We are exceptional when we align freedom with fairness, and strength with compassion. Empathy demands we see workers not as costs, but as citizens. Democracy demands we empower them to speak, organize, and negotiate. Just as government functions best with checks and balances, so too does capitalism. Unions are not a barrier to progress—they are a prerequisite for it. And in restoring labor's rightful place in our economy, we will restore the American middle class—and the American Dream itself.