

Title: Organized Labor

Format: Television Series

Creator: Richard Parker

Logline:

Set in 1970s Baltimore, *Organized Labor* follows Charleston Cohen, a Black ironworker navigating the racist, Italian-dominated world of unions. Through cunning and determination, he rises to lead the union for the next 40 years, balancing the demands of power, family, and his community in a city on the cusp of change.

Character Biographies

1. Charleston Cohen

- A determined, shrewd, and resilient Black man with no more than a high school education, Charleston begins his career in the steelworks, seeking a middle-class life for his family. His natural street smarts and flair for strategic thinking help him navigate the hostile world of union politics. While he has a knack for outmaneuvering adversaries, he often finds himself at odds with his moral compass—embodied by his wife, Gloria. Charleston's journey is one of survival, ambition, and legacy-building.

2. Gloria Cook-Cohen

- Charleston's wife and moral anchor. A Morgan State graduate and bank teller, Gloria is pragmatic and principled, often acting as Charleston's voice of

reason. She challenges him to think beyond the moment, guiding his path even when he veers into morally gray territory. Her famous mantra, “You look over your shoulder less if you thought ahead more,” underscores her practical wisdom.

3. Samuel “Sammy” Schwartz

- Initially a gatekeeper to Charleston’s early advancement, Sammy relegates Charleston to a furnace job, dismissing his potential. However, impressed by Charleston’s resourcefulness and grit, Sammy becomes a mentor and a key ally, helping Charleston climb the union ranks. Their relationship is marked by mutual respect and a shared knack for calculated risks.

4. Joseph “Butterbean” Milken

- One of Charleston’s earliest allies among the white workers. Butterbean’s easygoing demeanor and ability to blend into spaces Charleston cannot access make him a crucial behind-the-scenes operative. His loyalty to Charleston stems from a shared sense of justice and camaraderie.

5. Chad Tutwiler

- Charleston’s modern-day second-in-command. A Dartmouth-educated strategist, Chad struggles to gain respect among rank-and-file workers. While he brings a corporate polish and political savvy to the union, his

perceived lack of grit makes him a contentious figure. Charleston values Chad's skills but remains wary of his motives.

6. DeAndre Stephens

- Charleston's modern-day protégé and spiritual successor. A military veteran and former congressional aide, DeAndre brings both grit and intellect to the union. He represents the bridge between the working-class roots of the union and the new generation's activism. Charleston sees himself in DeAndre's drive, though Chad views him as a threat.

7. Michael Henson

- Charleston's primary rival in the union world. Young and ambitious, Mike's rise to power was unearned, but he wields influence through charm and political connections. Though outwardly loyal, he's always looking for opportunities to unseat Charleston and establish his own legacy.

Episode Outlines

Episode 1: The Pilot

The series opens with Charleston in his twilight years, facing the fallout from having to fire his most promising protégé, D'Andre. In a flashback, we see young Charleston entering the steelworks and navigating racial hostility, including his first confrontation with Sammy Schwartz.

The episode interweaves past and present, introducing the major players in Charleston's life and setting the stage for the central conflict: preserving his legacy while ensuring the union remains a force for good.

Episode 2: The Furnace Operator

Charleston takes his first union job, working the grueling furnace shift. He begins to observe the inner workings of union politics, learning how power flows through unofficial networks. His budding friendship with Butterbean hints at the alliances he'll need to survive.

Episode 3: Gloria's Ultimatum

Gloria delivers a stark choice: leave the streets behind or risk losing her and their future family. Charleston reluctantly agrees and takes his first steps toward leadership, starting with a bold move to expose corruption in the union's hiring practices.

Episode 4: The Strike

A union-wide strike threatens the livelihood of Charleston and his coworkers. Charleston takes a risky gamble, proposing a compromise that puts him in direct conflict with Sammy but earns him the respect of other workers.

Episode 5: Modern Union Wars

In the present day, Charleston grapples with balancing the demands of the union's diverse membership. Chad and Mike work behind the scenes to undermine D'Andre, forcing Charleston to intervene and make a decision that threatens to fracture the union.

Central Themes

1. The Role of Black Workers in the Union Movement

- The series highlights the challenges and triumphs of Black workers in predominantly white, often exclusionary unions, focusing on how they carved out space for themselves in a hostile environment.

2. The Value of Unions

- Each episode explores how unions have historically improved workers' lives, addressing both their achievements and their shortcomings in a changing economic landscape.

3. Baltimore as a Character

- The city of Baltimore, with its rich Black history and industrial legacy, is integral to the series, offering a nuanced depiction of its struggles and resilience.

4. Generational Conflict

- The show examines the tension between traditional union values and the demands of a modern, politically

correct workforce, as seen through the relationships between Charleston, Chad, and DeAndre.

5. Legacy and Leadership

- The series delves into the sacrifices and compromises Charleston makes to secure his legacy, questioning whether his rise to power comes at too great a personal and moral cost.

Organized Labor combines historical drama with a modern lens, weaving personal and political narratives into a compelling exploration of power, race, and the enduring value of collective action.