**Headline:** How Worker Solidarity Protects What’s Left of the Middle Class

By Tom Conway

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**[Article Body:]**

Patrick Stock, president of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 105, wasn’t going to let anyone stop him from supporting the United Auto Workers’ strike against Deere & Co.

When a court issued an injunction limiting the number of picketers at a Deere facility in Davenport, Iowa, Stock gathered about 30 members of his local and other unions and [organized a rally along a four-lane highway](https://qctimes.com/news/photos-supporters-stand-with-uaw-strikers-at-the-davenport-work-thursday/collection_b24a7661-fa70-578d-a576-dd606d92a766.html#4) within sight of the plant gate.

He and the others gave up their afternoon—and risked injury from the vehicles whizzing past—because Deere’s attack on the Auto Workers was an attack on them, too.

Union contracts provide decent wages and benefits along with safe working conditions, retirement security and a means for workers to stand up for themselves.

One company’s efforts to gut a contract and trample on workers emboldens others to follow suit. That’s why workers from across the labor movement band together to protect one another.

They walk each other’s picket lines. They fire off letters of support to the local newspapers. They attend rallies and stick signs in their yards.

They also boycott offending employers and take up collections to ensure striking workers have food, diapers and other necessities.

Solidarity serves as a [counterweight to corporate power](https://www.epi.org/publication/why-unions-are-good-for-workers-especially-in-a-crisis-like-covid-19-12-policies-that-would-boost-worker-rights-safety-and-wages/) and helps to preserve what’s left of the middle class.

“We see the big picture, and we support everybody,” Stock said, adding he’s certain other unions will back his members, who work at Arconic’s Davenport Works, during their next contract negotiations.

Workers throughout the country [put their lives on the line](https://www.npr.org/2021/10/28/1050177227/striketober-could-have-lasting-impact-on-labor) and worked exhausting amounts of overtime to keep factories operating during the pandemic.

Despite those sacrifices, however, companies like Deere doubled down on greed. Even employers that made [record profits](https://www.npr.org/2021/05/11/995590225/company-after-company-reporting-record-profits-as-u-s-economy-reopens) during the pandemic want to further bloat their bottom lines on the backs of those who stepped up during the crisis.

That’s forced workers into a [wave of strikes](https://www.npr.org/2021/10/14/1046140341/striketober-is-here-with-workers-increasingly-vocal-about-what-they-want) around the country and underscored the power of solidarity in holding employers accountable.

“They couldn’t thank us enough for the support. It meant a lot to them, especially after the injunction,” Stock said of the Deere workers in Iowa, among 10,000 Auto Workers nationwide who [succeeded in winning a fair contract](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/john-deere-workers-approve-new-contract-offer-will-end-strike) from Deere after a five-week strike this fall.

At the same time that they were helping the Auto Workers stand up to Deere’s avarice, members of the USW and other unions mobilized to demand justice for 1,400 members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union.

Those workers began a nationwide strike against Kellogg’s in October after rejecting the cereal maker’s demands that they give up quality health care and other hard-won benefits.

The company initially tried to bully workers by threatening to move jobs across the border if they refused to accept the cuts. Now, it’s threatening to hire permanent replacements for striking workers, a ploy [sharply condemned](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/10/business/economy/kellogg-strike-biden.html) by President Joe Biden and social justice activists around the nation.

“Harm to one is harm to all,” said Dave McLimans, vice president of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) Chapter 7-4, explaining why he’s twice driven to the bakery workers’ picket line in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to show support. “You have to fight the fight.”

“I’ve been on strike before. I know the feeling,” added the longtime USW member, recalling a 105-day strike in 1991 against the Lukens Steel Co.

McLimans still remembers the company’s [refusal to give workers a fair share](https://www.upi.com/Archives/1991/10/01/USW-strikes-Lukens/5436686289600/) of its prosperity, the worries about paying bills as the strike wore on and the anxiety that rippled through his coworkers’ families and across the community. Also etched in his mind, however, is how members of other unions stepped forward to ensure he and his coworkers stayed the course.

“The support we got was tremendous,” he said.

Right now, the same kind of solidarity helps to buoy Chad Thompson and about 400 other members of USW Local 40 in their [two-month-long unfair labor practice strike](https://www.wowktv.com/news/local/special-metals-strike-continues-gathering-support-from-local-chapters/) against Special Metals in Huntington, West Virginia.

Thompson, the local president, said the city’s unionized police and firefighters stop some mornings to provide striking workers with coffee and breakfast sandwiches. Members of USW locals from as far away as Virginia and Maryland, along with workers from other national and international unions, donated hundreds of hams and turkeys and a truckload of grocery items. Volunteers from unions and their retiree groups help to staff the union hall and walk the picket line, giving Thompson’s coworkers a boost even in the rain and cold.

And donations enabled the local to buy holiday gifts for members’ children and even throw a holiday party.

Over the years, Thompson and his coworkers often supported other unions during their tough times. Today, when he tries to thank supporters for their generosity, many remind him of his own members’ past kindnesses.

“We haven’t forgotten what Local 40 did for us,” one worker told him.

Employers like Deere, Kellogg’s and Special Metals try to sow uncertainty, foment hardship and divide workers against each other.

Unions do exactly the opposite. Solidarity brings working people together to fight for justice and better lives. It anchors workers in place during some of the darkest days they’ll ever face.

“It gives you the strength to do it again tomorrow,” Thompson observed. “That’s what it’s all about—one day longer. The support makes all the difference.”