

Labor 101

Socialism and the Labor Movement

Fred Glass

Unions have been essential institutions for worker empowerment for more than a century and a half, and they remain so today.

More than fourteen million workers in the United States belong to unions. Yet in a workforce of roughly 150 million, union density has fallen to just 10 percent, a ninety-five-year low. The result is that many people have never seen a union in action, even as inequality deepens and insecurity spreads. That loss matters. In a society dominated by corporate power, institutions that give working people real collective leverage are rare. If you want more control over your work, more stability in your life, and more say in the direction of society, unions remain one of the clearest paths forward.

This pamphlet tackles the questions people are rarely taught to ask. Why do workers still need unions today? What have unions actually won? How was the labor movement weakened, and by whom? And what does rebuilding working class power look like now?

Labor 101 was originally published by the Labor Committee of East Bay Democratic Socialists of America during the COVID-19 pandemic. This updated edition brings the story to the present moment. Labor historian and retired union communications director Fred Glass revises and expands the text for PM Press, offering a concise, accessible guide to why unions still matter and how they can broaden their impact.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred B. Glass was the communications director for the California Federation of Teachers and taught in the Labor and Community Studies Department at City College of San Francisco. He is the author of *From Mission to Microchip: A History of the California Labor Movement*, and wrote and directed the half hour documentary video *We Mean to Make Things Over: A History of May Day*. He lives in Berkeley.



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EUROPE DISTRIBUTION

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◆ PM PRESS ◆

P.O. Box 23912 • Oakland, CA 94623

www.pmpress.org • info@pmpress.org

510-703-0327

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