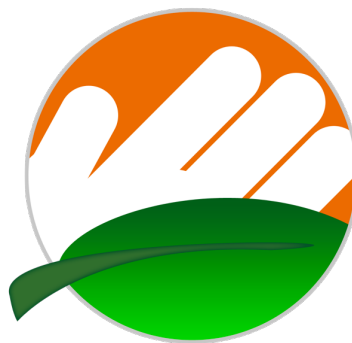


How You Can Support Striking Workers: An LNS Guide for Solidarity

Prepared by the Labor Network for Sustainability



LABOR NETWORK
FOR SUSTAINABILITY



WHY THIS GUIDE?

This is a guide for people who are not strikers themselves and who don't already have a lot of experience with strikes but are considering providing support for people who are out on strike.

Workers strike because the strike is one of the most powerful means available to achieve their objectives.

But why do people who are not on strike themselves often support the strikes of others? There are many reasons:

- They may see the strikers as fighting against injustice and support their just demands.
- They may support a strike to express solidarity with their other workers, their neighbors, and their community.
- They may see a strike as a means for fighting inequality and increasing equality for all.
- They may see supporting a strike as a means for building mutual support and alliances with other workers or community members. People remember those non-members who show up.
- They may support a strike because the strikers' demands include objectives of their own like civil rights, better funding for education, or a safe and healthy environment. This is becoming more common as unions increasingly "strike for the common good" by including such broad social objectives in their demands.
- Recently the environmental, climate, and climate justice movements have become increasingly active in support strikes. This is in good part because strikes are increasingly incorporating issues related to climate in their demands. For example, training in the proper use of environmentally sound products was a demand in a recent strike by Minneapolis janitors. Producing "green" locomotives was a demand in a recent strike by workers manufacturing railroad equipment. A "just transition" to climate-safe auto manufacturing was a union demand in the August, 2023 contract negotiations between the UAW and the Big Three auto corporations – leading more than 65 environmental, climate, climate justice, and allied organizations to throw their support behind the workers preparing to strike.

If you are considering supporting a strike for any of these reasons, this guide is for you.

A TINY PRIMER ON STRIKES

Workers rarely want to strike; most would rather settle disagreements in less stressful ways. But workers face an inequality of power between themselves and their employers, who possess incommensurable wealth, power, and influence over government and media. By withdrawing their labor power – striking – workers can gain a degree of counter-power.



Much of that counterpower grows directly from the dependence of employers on their employees' labor. But a complementary source of power for workers is the support they receive from other workers, communities, and the public. These supporters are able to add to the pressure workers can put on their employers, both directly by joining the picket line, and indirectly by tarnishing employers' reputations and pressuring governments and other institutions to act more favorably to workers. Such support has been critical in many recent strikes, such as the strikes by teachers in major US cities whose victories were in part a result of highly visible support from parents, other workers, and the general public.

The right to strike is a basic human right. But because strikes so effectively empower workers, employers have made great and often successful efforts to limit the freedom of workers to strike both directly and through legislation. For example, picketing on public property is generally protected under the Constitutional right of free speech. But generally it is illegal to block people entering a worksite, and even peaceful picketing on private property is generally treated as trespassing.

The power of strikes is based on workers' nonviolent refusal to work and the sympathy of others for that effort. For that reason those who oppose strikers often utilize and try to provoke violence. Attack by police, and incitement to violence by agent provocateurs, are realities that runs through the history of strikes. In order to win, strikers therefore need both to halt production and to forestall efforts to provoke violence that provide a pretext for repression. Strike supports can help contribute to both.

HOW YOU CAN JOIN A PICKET LINE

Picketing—workers gathering outside their employer's facilities to advocate or protest—is a crucial way workers express their concerns and put pressure on their employers. Picketing may aim to inform the public about a dispute or to dissuade employees, customers, or others from entering the facilities.

Picketing is usually organized into a stationary or moving picket line, accompanied by picket signs, banners, leaflets, and other ways to communicate the pickets' message.

FINDING OUT

You may hear about an impending or current strike from the media, other community members, or your organization. To find out more you can visit the picket line. For starters you can simply state your interest or support and ask for information. Look for a picket captain or a sign-in table; if you don't see one, just talk to people on the line.

Ask who to talk to about participating. Often someone will be right there who can answer your questions. Otherwise they can give you contact information for who to talk with. You can also find contact information on the union website.



Questions to ask:

- Do they want supporters to join the picket line?
- When is most useful? Are there picket shifts you can sign up for in advance?
- Where is most useful? Do picket locations change?
- Do they have guidelines for picket line behavior?
- What should you bring: Signs? Food? Anything else?
- Is there a good description of their demands and objectives?
- What would be helpful besides joining the picket line?

PREPARING FOR PICKETING

- Try to recruit others. Friends, family, neighbors, or members of your organization.
- See if you can schedule your or your group's participation in a way that is most useful for the strike. Sometimes strike strategy requires mass participation; at other times it is most helpful to fill in when numbers of picketers are low.
- Bring whatever will keep you safe and comfortable. Comfort food. Comfortable clothing, especially shoes. Protection: hats, sunscreen, etc.
- Wear something appropriate to the host group/union. You can wear the union colors, of the colors of your group.
- Bring whatever the strikers need, e.g. ponchos, water coolers, snacks, fruit, hand warmers, or other food or supplies.
- Discuss with strike organizers whether you should bring your own picket signs and banners and what they should say. Their strategy may or may not include materials identifying and including slogans of allied groups.
- If members of your group are unfamiliar and uncomfortable about joining a picket line, hold a training that explains the basis and provides an opportunity for role playing.

PICKET LINE DO'S

- Go positive; help build morale. It is meaningful for strikers to have community support. How meaningful it is for strikers to have community support on the line.
- Do engage in conversations with a variety of people. Just remember, you are there to provide them support, not to "push" your own organization or concerns.
- Learn and join in chants.
- Ask questions.
- You can explain to people briefly why you are there, especially if asked.
- Follow the guidance of strike leaders on questions like how to address people crossing the picket line.
- Generate social media about your support actions before, during, and after your participation.



PICKET LINE DON'TS

- Don't try to tell the strikers how to run their strike.
- Don't take a leadership role. Don't lead chants, give a speech, etc. unless asked.
- Don't evangelize. Don't pass out your own leaflets or push your own program.
- Any group of people is likely to include some with whom you disagree or even feel antagonism. Keep your cool – the picket line is no place for such conflicts!
- Don't debate or argue with people who try to disrupt the picket line and related actions.
- Don't try to provoke the police and don't be provoked by them.
- Don't agree to be interviewed or otherwise speak with the media unless you first clear doing so with the strike leadership. If they authorize you to talk with the media, focus on why you and your group are supporting the strike.

OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT STRIKERS

- Organizational endorsements and public statements of support.
- A joint letter by a group of community leaders.
- Op eds about why your organization is supporting the strike.
- Letters to the editor and calls to radio shows.
- Wearing and distributing strike buttons
- Fundraising for strike fund. This can range from a fundraising event to a gofundme campaign.
- Educating the public about the strike, the problems that provoked it, and why you are supporting it.
- Supporting strikers' "don't patronize" campaigns that ask the public to shun the employer who is being struck.
- Starting a social media solidarity group.
- Inviting strikers to a meeting or panel discussion in your organization.

When you turn out to support strikers, you are doing more than helping to win the strike. You are contributing to creating new relationships and helping create a movement based on common interests and mutual aid.