

"BUILDING BRIDGES"

by Jennifer Thorpe

The reality of unions is this: they are indispensable. They are a symbol and a beacon for a better world. They represent democracy in action. They stand for worker's rights, and by extension, set a precedent for the value of every human on this planet's right to a life of dignity and self worth.

Does this sound like hyperbole? An overstatement of the importance of unions in everyday life?

It is not.

Without unions, we are simply islands in a raging storm, subject to the whims of those who hold our livelihoods in their hands. Unions build the bridges that unite us, that weather the storms, that bend and sway, change and grow with the passing of time and the vagaries of changing power, government, and popular opinion.

Unions build the bridges, literally.

And to those who say "Unions are corrupt!", "Unions take our money and do nothing for us!", they are not seeing what is right in front of them. They are buying into the powers that be's attempts to obfuscate and confuse you into thinking that you would be better off without someone having your back, looking out for you, representing you in every sense of the word.

Union dues are a small price to pay for the invaluable work that is done on our behalf. But powerful lobbyists and right wing politicians continue to try and undermine the importance of unions to workers everywhere, in every field. Unions are like first responders; they are waiting in the background preparing and learning how to best help us when, all of a sudden, we need them. And we need them. Because the bosses bottom lines are all about the money, and the union's bottom lines are all about the worker. Unions can bridge that chasm with negotiation, compromise, discussion, understanding, and working together. We all represent our own interests, but unions unite us in recognizing our collective interests, commonalities, our need for fair wages, fair representation, a good life/work balance, benefits, help in times of crisis, information (For information is power!), education and community.

As the bosses scream in your ear about how unions are corrupt, do not listen. Don't buy the stories of the ruling class that tell us how the work of the union only serves it's own financial gain. The union is us, and therefore fallible. But the union is us, and therefore capable of greatness. The idea, the concept of unions is beyond human reproach, and we must strive to reach its full realization. The vast majority of the union's work goes unnoticed, as they work away behind the scenes. The good stuff is not newsworthy, for it is happening all the time, all around us. It's only when the shit hits the fan that all of a sudden, we are called to question the very validity of unions.

I will never question the importance and validity of unions. I might question a particular member or leader, or a policy that needs to be improved. But the idea of unions, the notion, the very concept of what it is and what it does for its members is something I have no doubts about.

After all, unions build bridges.