

TAM

E D U C A T O R

Update for Stewards

Vol. 11, No. 6

MOVIES

That Motivate



Movies that Motivate!

How hard can it be to find a good film about working people and unionism? Sometimes, too hard! This article offers a handy guide to “movies that motivate,” a film list that you can take to your local library or use to order online. There’s nothing like a good labor movie to get yourself energized, to use as a draw to get people to a union meeting—or both.

How did I build this list? I recommend only films that I have screened with success with trade unionists over the years. I selected the films that best tell labor’s story with respect and also that show us not only winning, but *how* to win. Too often popular films from Hollywood have portrayed labor in an unfavorable light, causing some people to wonder how we ever got anything done if we spent all our time with the crooks and scoundrels that these movie folks often show us as surrounded by.

Feature Films

This is a gold standard list, in reverse chronological order, with both old and new feature films. All will get us cheering in our seats or on our living room couches.

Ten Thousand Black Men Named George, 2002. A dramatization of union activist A. Philip Randolph’s efforts to organize the black porters of the Pullman Rail Company in 1920s America. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters became the first African-American union to be granted a charter by the AFL.

Bread and Roses, 2000. A dramatization of SEIU’s Justice for Janitors campaign in LA that explains—with Academy Award winner Adrian Brody as an organizer!—the nuts and bolts of the campaign to organize the immigrant labor force.

Newsies, 1992. Some adults find it silly, but your potential pre teen labor organizer may love this Disney family film, in which NYC’s newsboys organize to defeat evil newspaper bosses; based on actual incidents in 1899, it also includes an incredibly militant trolleyman’s strike that inspired the newsies.

Matewan, 1987. Based on the West Virginia coal wars after World War I, local miners learn that in order to win a strike they must accept into their ranks the Italian immigrants and African Americans who had been brought in to scab.

The Killing Floor, 1984. Feature film on organizing in the meatpacking industry in Chicago, when black white conflicts before and after World War I had to be resolved for workers to win.

Norma Rae, 1979. This is the one most of us know by heart, based on a true story, in which we see how an unusual team of leaders—big city organizer, small town gal who gets around, co-workers—win a recognition vote by defeating apathy, favoritism, racism, company police coziness, and just about everything else.

Salt of the Earth, 1954. A blacklisted feature film in which the wives of Mexican American miners carry on the struggle, not only against the mine owners but against their suspicious husbands.

The Grapes of Wrath, 1940. It’s a Hollywood black-and-white classic that has never gone out of style: it exposes the cooperation between farm owners and sheriff’s lackeys and points to the need for solidarity among the migrant workers of the 1930s, as Henry Fonda brings John Steinbeck’s hero Tom Joad to life.

Documentaries

Too many people hear the word “documentary” and groan (“not exciting,” they say, or “not entertaining”), but I know you’ll find these five documentaries not only exciting and entertaining but good guys win and show you how they do.

Morristown: In the Air and Sun, 2007. The story of the workers of both Mexico

and Tennessee and those who migrate from the former to the latter. It concludes with a union victory at a poultry processing plant. Order at appalshop.org

One Day Longer, 2000. The moving story of the HEREIU strike at the Frontier Casino in Las Vegas, when workers walked the picket line for six years and won. Order at balmaidenfilms.com.

Justice in the Coalfields, 1995. How the United Mine Workers fused a successful coalition of supporting unions, regional workers, and national organizations to stop Pittston Coal from destroying the health provisions of their contract. Order at www.appalshop.org.

At the River I Stand, 1994. The story of the bravery of the Memphis sanitation workers, all African-American, whose AFSCME strike brought Martin Luther King to the city to help, with tragic consequences. Order at newsreel.com.

Harlan County, USA, 1977. Academy Award-winning documentary on a strike won in part by miners’ militant wives in eastern Kentucky.

Sources

If the films listed here are not available at your local library, you can buy, download or stream them directly from some distributors. Netflix and Amazon now dominate the download market, but other sources include: Deep Discount DVD (deepdiscountdvd.com); eBay at ebay.com; Facets Video at facets.org; Movies Unlimited at Moviesunlimited.com. California Newsreel (newsreel.org); Icarus Films (icarusfilms.com); Labor Heritage Foundation (laborheritage.org); and New Day Films (newday.com).

—Tom Zaniello. The writer is former director of the honors program at Northern Kentucky University. He is the author of two books, including *Working Stiffs*, *Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Expanded Guide to Films about Labor*, available at www.unionist.com. He teaches online courses in labor and globalization in film for the National Labor College and is currently writing *Working in the Megalopolis: A Guide to Films of the 21st Century*.



New Ways to Welcome New Workers

Remember your first day on the job? OK, if you can't remember back that far, then imagine it. All those new faces and names. Bluffing your way through the first few days. It's a rough time.

But it's also the steward's prime time to build the union among workers who may not even know what a union is. And these days, technology, like digital cameras and the Internet, can help you become more effective than ever.

Have a Plan

Research shows that workers form their opinions about their union often within the first few days on the job. How do you approach new workers?

■ On the first day, does anyone from the union greet new workers? *If so, good!* The union should establish itself right away, offering a friendly, welcoming introduction to the workplace.

■ Does your employer sign up new workers for the union while they're signing health insurance forms and W 2s? *If so, bad!* If the union application comes from the employer it comes across as just another paycheck deduction item, with no explanation of what the union is and how it works on behalf of the employees.

■ Who tells new workers where the bathrooms are, or which vending machine steals money and which one gives two Pepsi's for the price of one? If your answer is "I don't know," you've got some room for improvement.

You can greet new workers at a union negotiated new employee orientation session (yes, you can negotiate this into your contract) or during a break, and you can always tell the new worker where to meet you at lunchtime or after work so you can talk more freely.

Your union orientation packet should include:

- a contract, with a short summary of the latest improvements
- information about how to find worksite leaders
- a schedule of union meeting times and places
- a letter of introduction from the union

Reminders About Attitude

The way you frame issues in that first conversation with a new worker can make the difference between someone who relates the union to problems, dues and strikes, and someone who sees the union as a group of people working together to improve their working lives. So when you talk about the union, you're defining what the union is. It's best not to focus solely on problems ("If you get in trouble, contact me") and better to emphasize solutions ("Through negotiations, we've been able to keep a really good vacation schedule").

For example, there's that familiar approach, Union—Good Guy and Management—Bad Guy. Remember, a new employee has no reason to think

the smiling face who just gave him a job is a bad guy. So, while you could say, "Management tried to rip us off but we threatened to strike and the greedy jerks backed down," you'll build more credibility with this new person if you try this approach instead: "The company pushed real hard for a wage freeze last time around, but we wouldn't accept that and they finally saw the light." Workers will learn for themselves who to trust and who not to trust.

Using New Technology

In the old days, you handed out a contract and maybe a letter from the union. Now, you can give the union a face, making it much easier for a new worker to find you. If you don't own a digital camera or a cell-phone that can take pictures, ask around and you'll find someone at work who does. You can take photos of stewards and leaders and put them on a flyer to hand out or circulate by email. Include a couple of sentences (not more!) of welcome, along with the name, work area and shift and contact information of the leaders in the photos. If possible, include a phone number and e-mail address and the location where leaders usually take breaks, so new employees can find them when they need to. You can update them as your stewards or their phone numbers change.

If your local has a website, especially one with frequently asked questions about the union or the contract, be sure to include that address too. The web gives workers an opportunity to study the contract or their union in the comfort of their own homes, at a time convenient to them, without the boss looking over their shoulders.

Technology is doing a lot to our lives, some good things and some bad. This is one way to turn technology to your advantage, and bring more informed members into the union.

—Susan Erem. The writer is a veteran union activist and freelance labor writer.

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Off-Duty Conduct Issues

People can, and do, get disciplined or fired for things they do off the job, even if it is something like dating or politics that may have nothing to do with their performance at work. If they are covered by a union contract, there are ways a union steward can respond—but defending a member against discipline for off-duty conduct has become much more complicated than it was ten or twenty years ago, so it's worth a fresh look.

The specific accusation an employer will make is likely to be that the worker's actions were dangerous to workplace safety, showed "moral turpitude," or "brought the employer into disrepute." In practice, these accusations fall into three categories: lifestyle/health issues, criminal or other legal issues, and free speech issues. In all three, the burden of proof is on the employer as moving party. If you can prove the employer's accusation false, you have a direct defense, which is the best defense. A broader defense that applies to all three categories is to counter the claim that the worker has done something that materially affects the legitimate business interests of the enterprise. "Business interests" includes the employer's reputation.

Look at Past Practice

In fighting a charge against someone for off-duty conduct, start with a good investigation. What has past practice been? Do an information request. Be sure to look at how management has been treated in similar circumstances. There is good arbitral precedent on disparate treatment on this issue. In addition, since discipline for something a worker does off-duty, unless it affects health and safety, will strike most workers as unfair, what other workers in the workplace say can influence how the problem is handled. Petitions and statements can undermine the argument that productivity was affected, morale was lowered, or that the reputation of the business was harmed.

Many employer policies have wording such as "conduct unbecoming" a nurse, police officer, teacher, and so on. Such

policies are not enforceable on the face without proof of actual harm being done. It is an ironic truth that while public sector workers are protected by the Bill of Rights just like everyone else, they are generally held to a higher standard of off-duty conduct since their job is to serve the public interest, not just make profits for a private party.

What's the Impact on Business?

The standard that the employer must show impact on business interests is especially important in lifestyle issues. Before teacher unions became strong, anything forbidden to babies—like marriage—was forbidden to teachers. Today, if a union member is arrested, spends the night in jail and misses a day at work, he or she may be disciplined for missing the day at work or not calling in but cannot be disciplined for being arrested. Where the employee spent the night has no impact on the employer's business interests. Similarly, the argument for anti-fraternization policies, when applied to relationships among workers, is that it affects morale and therefore lowers productivity. But does it, really? The question again is whether there is a real impact on the employer's legitimate business interests.

Lifestyle issues can include health and safety. The employer's accusation may not point to the real problem here. A worker who is getting divorced or who has a battering partner could be accused of "moral turpitude," but the real problem is safety: an irate partner could be a problem because he or she could invade the workplace and harm people. There have been situations where a worker goes to court against a battering partner and the worker gets fired. If this is what is happening, the union can take the initiative to reframe the problem to keep the worker from being twice a victim and to protect other workers as well.

Criminal issues are the classic cases about off-duty conduct that result in attempted employer discipline. In a general Google search on union grievances of off-duty conduct, three of the top four that

show up are police cases. These are cases of off-duty police officers beating someone up and getting caught.

Free speech issues, meaning things that people say or political activity that they engage in off-duty, have a long history. The Ford Service Department, the spy agency of the Ford Motor Company that kept Ford nonunion for five years longer than General Motors, investigated workers in their off-duty lives with regard to social and political activity. This was their union avoidance strategy that worked quite well between 1910 and 1940.

Later, many people lost their jobs during the McCarthy period, accused of being Communists or subversives. Surveillance now is increasingly tied to developments in technology and social media. Today, speech off duty, whether it is oral, written or electronic, may be protected by the NLRB as part of concerted activity. A message sent out as a union blog or as part of a listserve may be considered concerted activity. However, this is an area of active litigation right now, so check what is going on currently, and, for public employees and Canadians, in your state or province.

Local Laws May Vary

Additionally, some states, like New York, have laws preventing employers from disciplining workers for recreational activities such as legal drinking, smoking, or activities that might be risky. This is something that you should research for your particular state or province. These days, even the issue of what is "off-duty," especially for professional workers like teachers or professors, is a matter of dispute.

The main thing to keep in mind when representing workers in this area is that the union's goal is to protect and expand the rights of workers off the job from the ever-increasing attempts by employers to control all aspects of our lives in exchange for the "privilege" of cashing our paychecks.

—Helena Worthen and Joe Berry. The writers are veteran labor educators.

What Makes a Good Steward

A union steward often gets locked into handling only day to day problems in a particular workplace—dealing with the contract, with a specific workforce, with a narrow set of problems. A broader definition of a steward's job description includes building the union: increasing membership involvement, creating group grievances, even signing up new members—but, still, focused only on the steward's particular workplace.

As employers become more belligerent, however, it becomes clear that focusing just on your own workplace can weaken the union, making a steward's job even tougher. A steward needs to first look at building the union, convincing the members that they are participants in a movement, and not purchasers of a service. Unionism, as many of our members have forgotten, is a movement founded upon solidarity: one worker joining with others to form a group, and groups helping each other. As the percentage of union dues payers dwindles, our need to stand together for mutual aid grows. Looking at unionism as a movement opens up a much larger opportunity.

Forming "Outside Friendships"

This decline of union numbers, and political power, over the years stimulated the national convention of the AFL-CIO in September 2013, to propose a whole new, and very controversial, structure because "labor needs friends." Encouraging participation from "outside" groups like the Sierra Club and the NAACP provoked some union officers to rethink the importance of bringing in "outside" information to the workplace. There has also been a revival of interest among labor historians in "community unionism." In the old days, unions looked to support from families, neighbors, and local religious and political groups to overcome ferocious employer opposition,

from which in the old days organized against ferocious opposition only with support

All of these grand plans, however, are just words and more words unless the steward begins to spread among the members this sense of solidarity by bringing in news of outside activities and encouraging the members to participate in community-wide, or worldwide, activities. The most important aspect of this change is that it is in the straight self-interest of the steward and the members because having support from "outside" means greater leverage in settling grievances and in negotiating new union contracts.

Working through the community is especially important for public sector stewards, where each grievance, or negotiation, seems to pit the union against the public—their "employers." Creating strong relationships with the "customers"—the riders of public transit or the parents of schoolchildren—can create a strong coalition to resist cuts in wages and benefits.

How can a steward effectively carry out such a campaign?

- Include news of outside activities in your regular steward's news reports—and you DO have a regular steward's report, don't you? These reports usually include grievance results and updates on contract negotiations in your own workplace, but you can expand them to provide information of both local and more distant union activities. Workers have to learn that across different workplaces, and among different unions, there are common problems that confront us all.

- Encourage solidarity. Provide lists of union products and services, especially local ones, to support our brothers and sisters. It was distressing to hear, at a recent local union meeting I visited, a union health fund adviser was urging retirees to get their prescriptions filled at Walmart.

- Is another union in town picketing or leafleting? Go get some fresh air and help

them out—then you can ask for help when you need it. It is so important for union stewards to be proactive: to help out other groups before you need help so you have some money in the bank, so to speak.

- Your members need to accept that we now live in a global workplace. Multinational corporations should have to deal with truly international unions so a steward can distribute information about workers' movements in many countries. Expanding solidarity means that supporting underpaid workers of your same employer, or in your same industry, in a foreign country is not just charity but a way to increase your bargaining power.

- Encourage the participation of family members in your union activities and stress the importance of your members being involved in their communities. Many of them are, of course, as church officers or Little League coaches, but focus on how these relationships can strengthen your union.

- Expand your communications network. As a steward, you need to be able to reach out to all of your members, by leaflets, by e-mail, by text, by Twitter or Facebook, by web page—you name it and technology keeps making it easier. Post short videos on your site of union activities in your community and around the world.

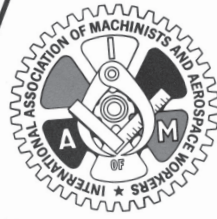
- Your members need to appreciate the importance of new organizing and to understand that organizing is the responsibility of every member. A sharp steward will create a list showing nearby nonunion operations, and begin to create contact lists of likely pro-union workers.

One of the most important aspects is that expanding your information and activities will require that you keep up. Learn more about union activities in your area, go out and walk a picket line and report back to your members. You will be a much better steward for it.

—Bill Barry. The writer recently retired as director of labor studies at the Community College of Baltimore County. *Unequal discipline*

Labor's declining power and the need for "community unionism"

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OFFICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

Dear IAM Shop Steward,

I hope everyone in the IAM had a happy holiday season with their family and loved ones. Another year has gone and now it is time to focus on the year ahead.

We closed out 2013 with the hopeful beginnings of a change in the national mood, away from tea party conservatism and more toward reasonable government. In Virginia, for the first time in the state's history, voters elected a Democratic governor over an extreme right-wing opponent. It's the first time in the state's history that someone from the same party as the winner of the previous presidential election was elected. That race plus others in the nation signaled voters may have had enough of extreme right-wing politics and the damage it is doing to the economy.

That makes what we do this year so important. With the House of Representatives and many state governments in the hands of extreme anti-labor politicians, we have seen an all-out attack on working families. In Canada, the Conservative Harper government takes every chance to weaken unions and social programs that help their middle class. Now we have a chance to turn that around.

In the United States, 2014 is a crucial mid-term election year with control of Congress, governors' offices and many state legislatures up for grabs. In Canada, the Conservative Harper government faces federal elections in the fall of 2015.

If we educate our members, volunteer to help pro-labor candidates and keep the momentum from the recent elections going, we can turn our two countries around and have politicians who are willing to help working families by creating jobs and investing in our schools and infrastructure.

2014 could be a watershed year in which we put the North American economy on a path to more employment, more training for our workforces and more investments in infrastructure, which will let our economies grow faster and thrive in the years ahead.

And, as union members, we will continue to fight for dignity on the job, a secure retirement, and a rewarding work life.

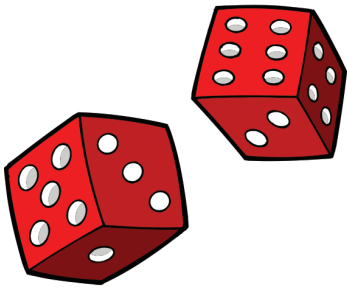
Thank you for all you do and have a safe and prosperous 2014.

In Solidarity,

R. Thomas Buffenbarger

R. Thomas Buffenbarger
International President





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February 2 - 7
February 16 - 21
March 30 - April 4
July 6 - 11
July 27 - August 1
September 7 - 12
September 21 - 26
October 12 - 17



French Leadership I Cours de leadership I

August 3 - 8
3 août au 8 août



Spanish Leadership I Liderazgo I

March 23 - 28
23 - 28 Marzo
October 12 - 17
12 - 17 Octubre



Leadership II

May 11 - 18
July 20 - 25
September 14 - 19
October 19 - 24
December 7 - 12



French Leadership II Cours de leadership II

August 10 - 15
10 août au 15 août



Spanish Leadership II Liderazgo II

July 20 - 25
20 - 25 Julio



Advanced Leadership

June 22 - 27
August 10 - 15
November 2 - 7
December 14 - 19



French Advanced Leadership Écoles de Leadership Avancé

August 10 - 15
10 août au 15 août



Spanish Advanced Leadership Liderazgo Avanzado

September 14 - 19
14 - 19 Septiembre



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March 2 - 7
June 1 - 6
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Spanish Train-the-Trainer Entrenar al Entrenador

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