



Local 1277

News

July, 2021

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President's report



Thinking About The Unthinkable

By Art Aguilar - President, Local 1277

We buried a part of our own Union, our *International* Union, and *ourselves* in those awful days after the horrific, senseless, completely unprovoked mass-shooting outrage at the Guadalupe Yard, in San Jose, one of the homes of our devastated sister union, ATU Local 265.

We buried a shattered worksite, destroyed friendships, and lost dreams and futures. We buried family relationships and jobsite camaraderie, and instead found ourselves trying to cope with gaping holes in our workplaces, our lives, and our sense of mortality.

We buried—for now, and maybe for a long time—a sense of security at work, a belief that we could get up, go to work, perform our jobs with professionalism and dedication, *and simply be able to come home after our shifts to families and friends.*

Worse, much worse, following the tragic events of May 26, 2021, we buried eight ATU brothers, one AFCSME brother, and then too sadly watched their families trying to fathom the unfathomable, trying to deal with the unthinkable. We grieve for:

- **Abdolvahab Alaghmandan, 63**
- **Adrian Balleza, 29**
- **Alex Ward Fritch, 49**
- **Jose Dejesus Hernandez, III, 35**
- **Lars Kepler Lane, 63**
- **Paul Delacruz Megia, 42 (AFSCME)**
- **Timothy Michael Romo, 49**
- **Michael Joseph Rudometkin, 40**
- **Taptejdeep Singh, 36**

We grieve, and we do that with the most heartfelt emotion and inexpressible grief. We try to understand, but it is impossible to delve into the tortured mind of a lost soul whose rage against his job, his co-workers, his former wife, and the world at large had no other outlet that mass killing and the destruction of other innocent lives and families.

Striking at our Heart

And to make things even worse (if that is even possible), the shooting at the Guadalupe Yard struck at the *very heart of organized labor's foundation*: A site visit to discuss issues and concerns of common interest; the free and easy camaraderie of working men and women at their jobs, doing their professional best to serve the mass transit-dependent needs of the vibrant and growing

San Jose/Santa Clara Valley, and the sense of security and well-being that comes with a good job that is rewarded by fair wages and strong benefits.

Just a few horrific minutes in the early morning of Wednesday, May 26, became, in a way, the Pearl Harbor or 9/11 to our way of life. May 26, 2021, becomes a date we will all remember and grieve over. All of us, in ATU Local 1277 and throughout our 200,000-member strong International Union across the United States and Canada will never—*can* never—forget the lives lost, the families shattered, the futures destroyed, and the everyday life and work at our jobsites that suddenly became less certain.

When is Enough, Enough?

This is *not* the place for a discussion about Second Amendment rights and the on-going, passionate debate over what is called “gun control” or what kind of weapons should even be allowed in people’s hands. Millions of Americans, and I am sure, many thousands of ATU brothers and sisters, are legal and responsible gun owners.

Further, this is *not* the place—nor do I have the expertise—to speculate about the psychological state of the shooter. Mental-health professionals have their work cut for them trying to make sense (if that’s possible) of the underlying impulses and motives behind the massacre. Most likely, we will never fully know what set off this sad, lost person.

But we *do* know this:

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are gone, taken from us, our sister union, and their loving families and friends *far* too early. *Far* too violently. *Far* too senselessly and incomprehensibly. We have holes in our hearts, an overwhelming sense of loss, *and a determination to continue our important work, just as our departed brothers would want us to do, even as we struggle to think about the unthinkable.*

Rest in eternal peace, brothers!

Your Reliable Shop Stewards Have Been True Giants Throughout the Pandemic!

By Mauro Varela - Treasurer, Local 1277

Finally, *finally* at long last, brothers and sisters, it looks like we may be seeing some light at the end of the tunnel that has been the long, demoralizing, and deadly. Covid-19 pandemic.

Let me say right out that *you*, the hard-working, front-line, dedicated, and brave members of ATU Local 1277, have all been real heroes! You showed up to work, day in and day out during this pandemic. You did your jobs professionally, ably, and often at great risk to both your own (and family's) health. You bravely served the mass transit-dependent public despite the rage, frustration, and thoughtlessness of some of your passengers.

But did you know we have some special giants among us? *Your Shop Stewards!* I, along the rest of the ATU Local 1277's Executive Board proudly and sincerely offer a hearty and well-deserved *thank you* to all our Shop Stewards for all their hard work and dedication during the last year and a half, a time we all-too-well remember as a time of incredible difficulty, uncertainty, and even fear.

Being a Shop Steward is a difficult enough undertaking in normal times (trust, me—I know from my own experience!) but doing so during a deadly global pandemic takes a special kind of person. One might fairly say a giant of a person. Many Shop Stewards can go most of their careers doing their duties for the members that they represent and not get any recognition, praise, or thanks along the way.

As Shop Stewards, we willingly take up the responsibility to represent *all* members in situations where our employer agencies may be overstepping the mark on discipline or violating one of our member's contractual rights. In reality, our Shop Stewards were instrumental in keeping our members safe on and off the job during these past months. They were our "boots on the ground", reporting to your Executive Board about the issues and concerns you brought up during the pandemic.

Your Shop Stewards were our go-to people when it was time to pass along information that affected your work and careers. I feel it is very important to recognize that these giants do this—take responsibility—because they *want to*, because they *like to*, and because they *believe in* the importance of being in a union and helping their fellow members. They truly believe in the power of unity and strength in numbers, and that when "*we fight together we win together.*"

So please join me in thanking ATU Local 1277's own first responders—your frontline representatives. ***I thank all our brothers and sisters who have the honor and privilege of calling themselves Shop Stewards. Thanks to all of you, at all our locations, for being the backbone of our Union!***



The Lunatics Have Officially Taken Over the Asylum!

It's come to this: Enough angry, deluded, and unthinking Californians (supported by boatloads of out-of-state, hard-right money) have qualified a silly, expensive and totally unnecessary recall effort against pro-union Governor Gavin Newsom for the ballot later this year.

This nonsensical effort to overturn a legitimate vote of millions of Californians will cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars—and achieve nothing. Governor Newsom, a good friend to unions, and especially to the ATU, and all front-line transit workers during the Covid pandemic will *not* be recalled. Nor should he! Even sillier, this recall will most likely be held less than a year before he would have to face the voters anyway, in a *regularly scheduled election!*

This is complete nonsense, any way you look at it. It is simply an attempted power grab by Republican and hard-right wing sore losers against a progressive, pro-labor governor. The recall supporters are the same deluded people who think Joe Biden was *not* elected President and now want to cancel the voting rights of millions of Americans across the country.

No way, brothers and sisters. It's not going to happen, and our Union, along with California's organized-labor muscle will make sure of it. In the months to come, we will go into detail about Newsom's record, his support for front-line transit workers, and why this recall effort is a complete, wasteful con game!



Democracy's backbone

Unions and the Essential Middle Class

By Errol Frazier - Vice President, Local 1277

America's working middle class—democracy's rock and the essential foundation for any stable, functioning, progressive society—faces many problems. Some, of course, have either been created or magnified by the global Covid pandemic, but some have plagued American working men, women, and families long before the health crisis.

Unions built and have strengthened our productive middle class. But, union membership and political/social/economic “clout” have been diminishing over the years, hitting an all-time rock bottom under the previous Presidential administration. Yes, things are certainly looking up under the Joe Biden Presidency but, still, far too many working families are trying to make ends meet with stagnant wages. In general, household debt far outstrips the ability to pay it, and income inequality—the financial gap between working people and the wealthy—is at an obscene all-time high.

Anyone—and this should apply to us, brothers and sisters—who is concerned about working families' wages, benefits, earning power, financial security, and the scourge of income inequality must understand two key points: 1) The hard-working middle class must be supported and maintained, and 2) There is a direct relationship between strengthening the middle class and keeping and expanding a strong union movement.

It is certainly true that, overall, the U.S. economy has grown significantly over the past decades, from the late 20th Century to today. And it is still true that the United States has the world's largest economy—although that is being rigorously challenged by China. *However, it remains a fact that too many working people and families are not receiving their fair share of the national economic gains.* While our working men and women are even more productive than ever, middle-class wages are not growing fast enough to support their achievements. And the rich keep getting richer.

Union Wages are Significantly Higher

A national study concluded that when union workers are compared to nonunionized employees, union members typically earn *10-20% more* than nonunion workers. That union-wage advantage is even *larger* for working men and women of color, those without a college education, and employees in unskilled jobs. This is a very important factor, considering the changing makeup of the American workforce and the shifting of many jobs from “smokestack” industries to high-tech “service” ones.



Further, union scale “threatens” nonunion worksites because the better wages and benefits from unionized jobs puts an upward pressure on nonunion jobsites to match them. When unions represent a clear majority of workers in a particular industry, nonunion businesses often have to raise their wage and benefit packages in order to match the industry (union) standard and keep their workers from joining a union.

Equally important, union membership contributes even *more* to the maintenance of the strong middle class. Because of “strength in numbers”, unions can—and *do*—negotiate quality, affordable healthcare insurance, paid sick leave, paid family leave, and secure retirement plans. Just consider how your membership in ATU Local 1277 positively affects you, your families, and your futures.

Our next generation benefits, too. Children in union households are more than *30%* likely to go to college, even if their parents never had that opportunity! And because of union wage scales, more and more working families can afford to send their children there! And, in areas that are heavily unionized, high-school dropout rates are *lower* and economic prospects are *better*.

A final note: *In the late 1960s, when private-industry union membership in America was at its peak (perhaps a third of the working force in those industries), the middle class held about 53% of the nation's income. Today, the situation is much more polarized and unfair: Union membership in private industry is depressingly low, and the wealthiest Americans now control almost 80% of our economic growth/power.*

And here is the ugly truth behind the income-inequality disaster: The decline of union membership in private industry, and the resulting loss of political/social/economic “clout”, has brought about, maintained, and *expanded* the obscene, unfair income gap between the working men and women who really make this country go and the profiteers at the top rake in the profits, avoid taxes, and “work” only to make even *more* money!

And so it goes: The rich get richer, the masses of poor grow more impoverished and desperate (violent crime continues to rise in our cities), and the hard-working, productive middle class—democracy's backbone—is squeezed in between these unyielding rocks. It is the union movement—and please never forget this—which is the source, strength, and only real hope for maintaining the all-important American working middle class!

Time for some Independence!

By John DiRito - Executive Board Member-at-Large

Good morning, afternoon, and evening brothers and sisters, I hope this newsletter finds you and your families healthy and safe. As we gear up for summer, including, unfortunately, record-breaking heat and drought conditions, along with an elevated and lengthy fire season, *we also get to celebrate a little American history on 4th of July*. This is no small thing!

Our Independence Day celebrates not only our freedom from British rule, but also the beginning of one of the greatest political and social experiments in history: *The American system of governing*. This is a system that has survived and, yes, prospered for 245 years—through wars, economic and social upheavals, and even some national political “leaders” who maybe should not have been there.

With Covid restrictions starting to ease up, we are starting to feel, at long last, like our old selves, happily getting back to our lives. With that in mind, let’s take a moment to reflect not only on the significance of this holiday, but also where we’re headed.

At the Beginning

Back in the “Old Glory Days” (during the 17th and 18th centuries), when America was not yet America, we were 13 separate colonies, struggling to survive, paving new ground, and adjusting to the new and harsh elements that came with this new land. Life certainly could not have been easy, and to top it off, being under British rule was equally not something to enjoy. British soldiers often did as they pleased in the name of the crown, settlers were expected to shelter and feed the soldiers as they travelled the country and collected taxes, and the colonists were expected to pay a tithe to the crown, which often came in the form of relinquishing most of the resources (farming and products) that they had toiled for.

Here’s a “fun fact” that tells us how life for many was then: *It was actually considered illegal for colonists to own single planks of oak measuring longer than eight feet*. Why? Because those resources were mandated to be sent back to Britain as building material for his Majesty’s Royal Navy. This is why it was so rare for the average settler to have grandiose dining tables. One would have to be of significant stature within the government or have been given specific privilege from the King to have such an item.

It is no wonder that when the Crown raised taxes yet again on the colonist—and coupled with the dismal realization that settlers had *zero* say in what transpired within British government (think of the famous words, “No taxation without representation”)—the 13 colonies got together and wrote what we know today as our Declaration of Independence. This historic and very-often copied document announced the creation of our own government, one made up of not kings or royal families, but of the people who resided within the colonies. It was completely unheard of and considered an outrage.

Our independence did not come easy, or without a fight, but ultimately the unity of the colonies and a shared vision of a better life became the building blocks in creating the country we love today. Are we a perfect country? No. Did we create an ideal society? No—*but we have always tried to improve it*. Sure, it’s taken time, a lot of frustration and heart-break, and a lot of twists and turns, but we have made—and continue to make—progress towards that vision of a socially, economically, and political fair society. *And, never forget, the union movement built the backbone of a truly functioning democracy: A stable, productive middle class!*

So, while we enjoy our slice of freedom, and strive to achieve our own American dream, let’s not forget that with unity and perseverance, we can overcome obstacles and make our own workplace a better one. *Happy Independence Day brothers and sisters. Enjoy and stay safe!*



HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY!