

The Delray Democrat

Walking the Line¹

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Jamelle Bouie, *The New York Times*'s invaluable columnist, recently reported that "Joe Biden became the first sitting American president to walk a picket line."

President Biden walked the line and spoke with striking members of the United Auto Workers at a General Motors plant during their six-week strike against the Big Three auto manufacturers.



The strike ended earlier this month, with workers achieving record gains, including a 25% pay increase over 4 years, increased pay for temporary workers, reinstatement of cost-of-living increases, and improved retirement benefits. The union is now targeting Tesla and non-union plants in the South.

According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), there were more than 20 major work stoppages in 2023, many of them lasting weeks or months. In addition to the 40-day UAW strike were those by Hollywood writers and actors, which lasted 118 and 148 days, respectively.

The strikes, and threatened strikes, led to significant gains for workers, both in salaries and benefits. The Culinary and Bartenders union secured the largest wage increase in its union's 88-year history

That in turn led to a chorus of complaints that higher wages would drive inflation, causing one reader to wryly comment, "I take it that the discussion is not about your wages." Another commenter wrote:

On one hand, Republicans complain when wages don't keep up with inflation.
On the other hand, Republicans complain when wages keep up with inflation.
It's like grandpa Abe yelling at the sky.

¹ [The Delray Democrat](#), January 2024, page 4.

Actually, unions help *all* workers, whether or not they belong to one. Biden’s Treasury Department recently released a chart that vividly demonstrates the inverse relationship between union membership and income inequality.

As union membership (blue line) was soaring from 10% at the time FDR’s National Labor Relations Board was established in 1935 to more than 30%, the income share of the top one percent (red line) fell from over 30% to around 1% (reflective of their percentage of the population). That began to change in the early 1970s, when the gains of the prior decades started to be rolled back.

