



Why are American Workers Striking (and Winning)?

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PREVIEW

- ❖ **Strike trends in the USA, 2005-2023**
- ❖ **Six reasons for strike surge:**
 1. Tight labor market
 2. COVID's effect on attitudes
 3. Political support
 4. New trade union leadership
 5. Increased inflation
 6. Strikes have been successful
- ❖ **Implications**

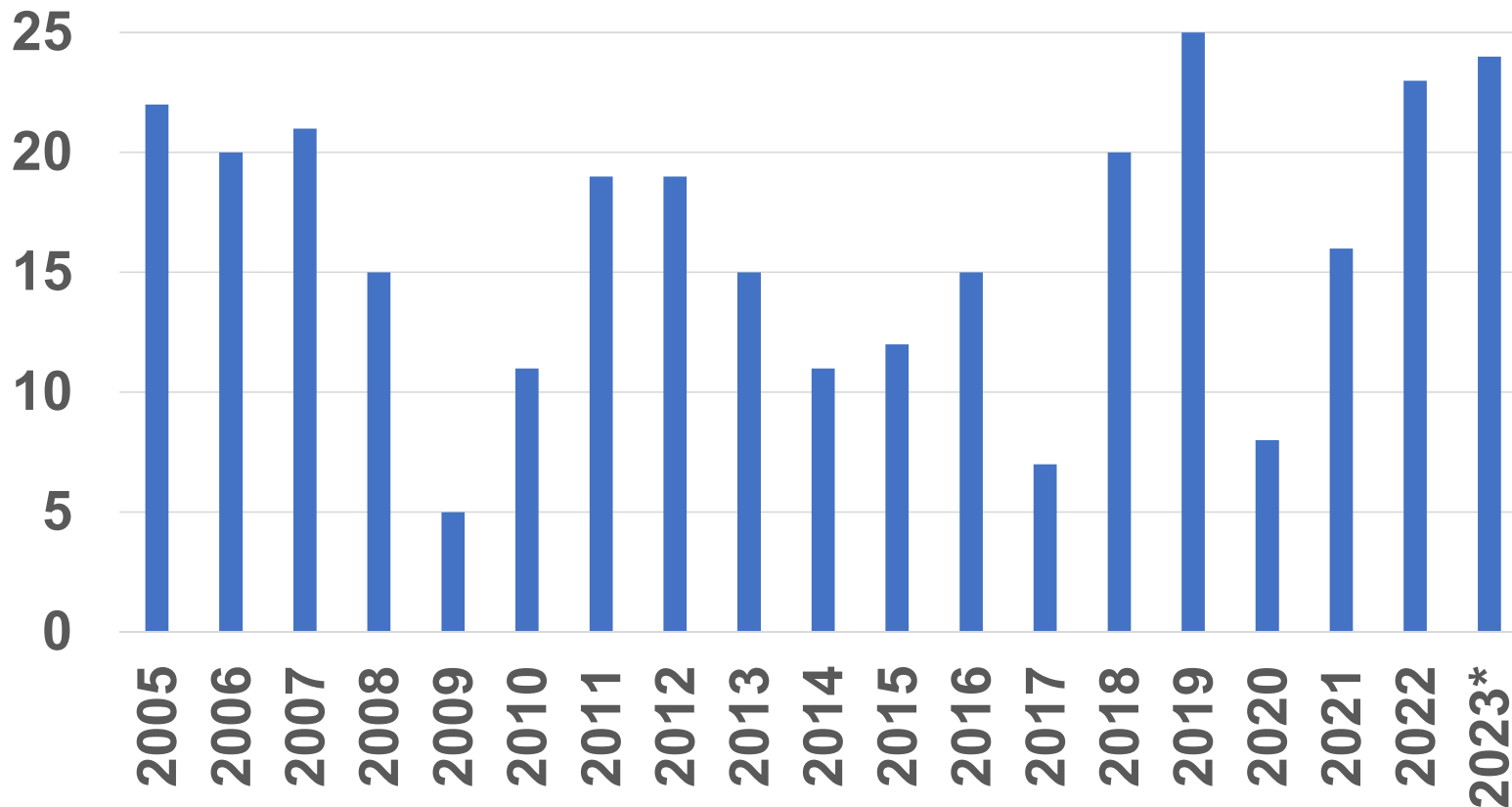


Strikes in the United States of America, 2005-2023



Number of Major Work Stoppages

Involving +1000 employees (2023 = January - October; Source: BLS)



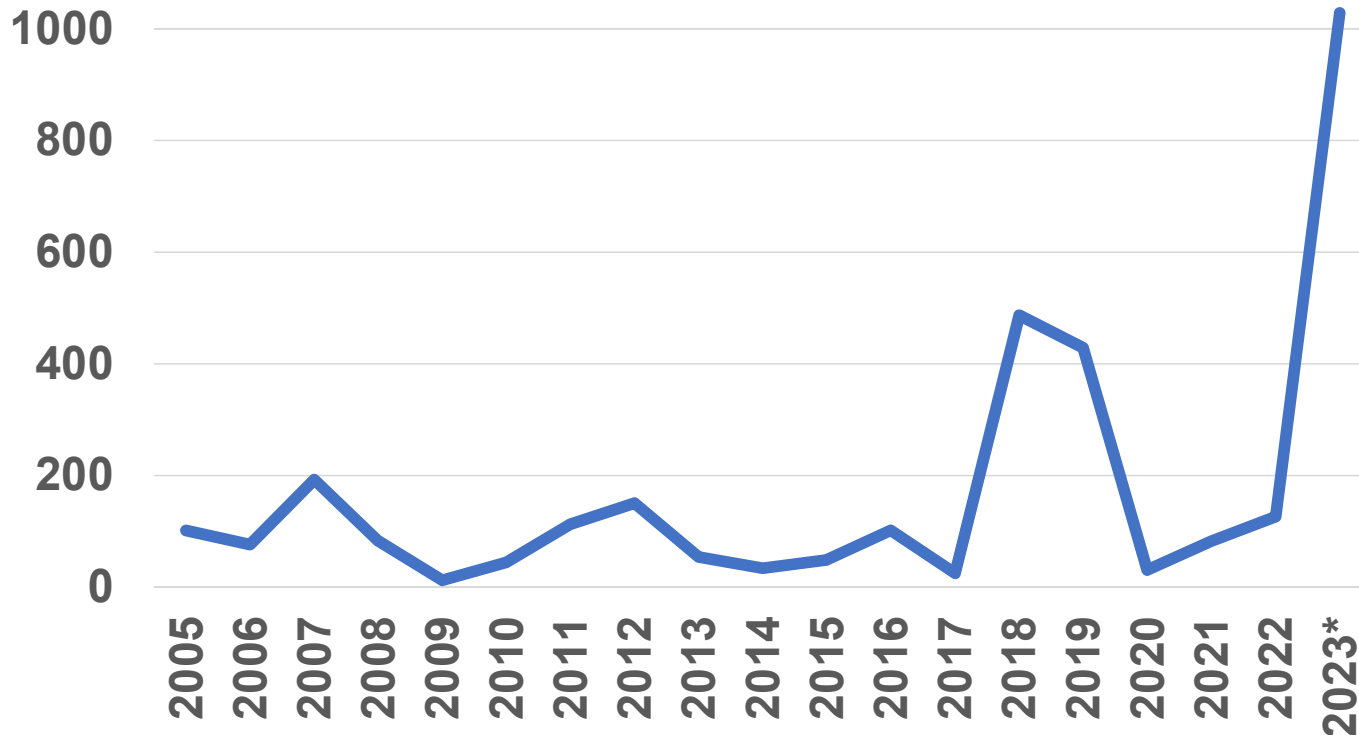
The number of *major* work stoppages in 2022 (i.e., 23) was **NOT** substantially larger than in previous years.

So far in 2023 there have been 24.



Number of Striking Workers (1000s)

(2023 = Jan - Oct; Source: BLS)



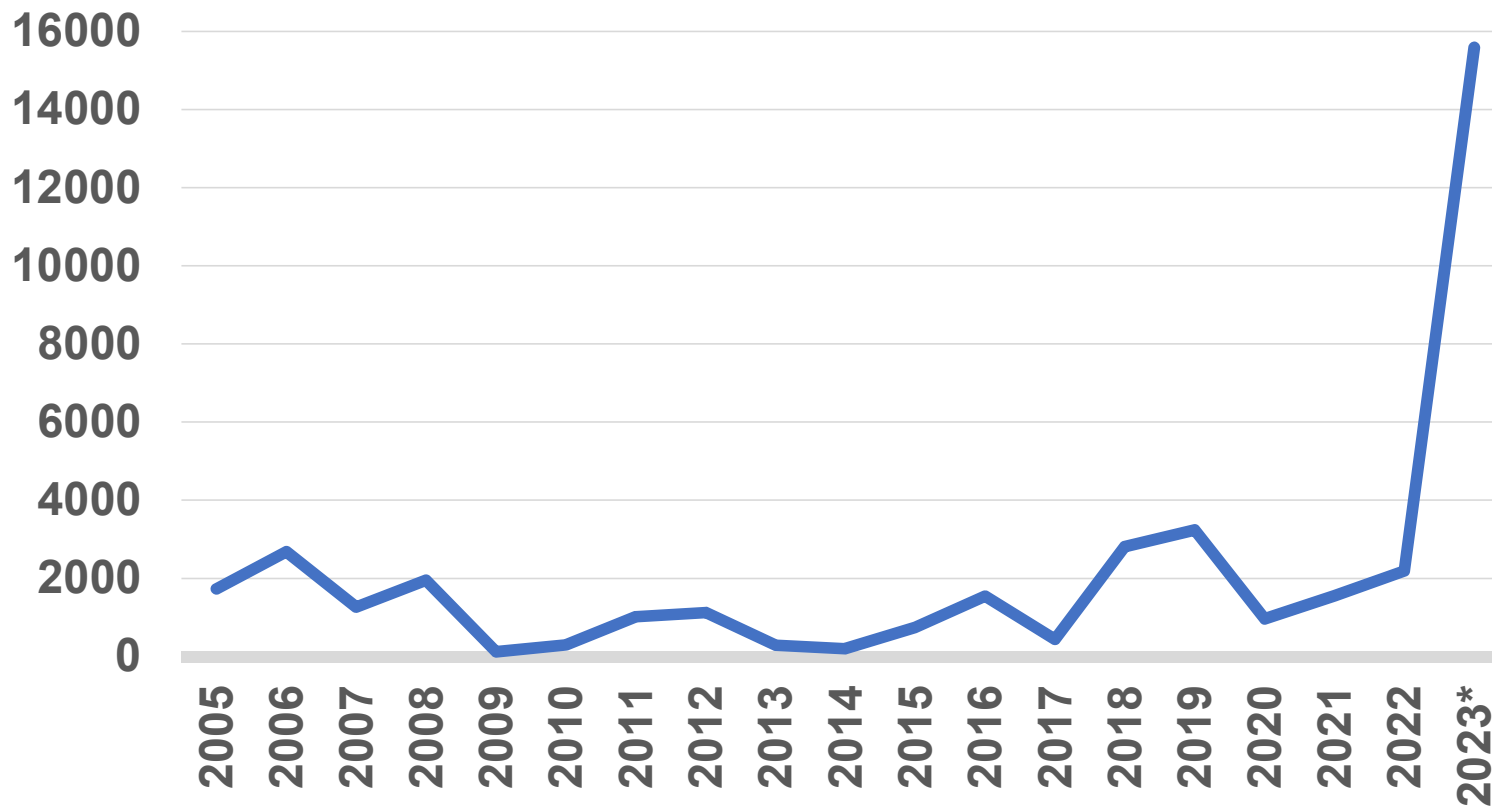
2023* = 1.028m

The number of striking workers for 2023 so far **is** substantially larger than in previous years, however.



Days Idle due to Strikes (1000s)

(2023 = Jan to Oct; Source: BLS)



2023* = 15.6m

There also have been many more idle days in 2023 due to strikes.

The last time this many hours were lost *annually* was 1981.



In summary: This year, the number of *major* strikes is likely to be only slightly higher than in past years.

BUT strikes have been at bigger enterprises and have lasted longer.

They therefore have resulted in many more employees being involved and many more hours being lost.



Aside: Are BLS data representative? Major strikes vs all industrial actions

Year	Stoppages		Striking Workers		Idle Days	
	BLS	Cornell	BLS	Cornell	BLS	Cornell
2021	16	279	82,500	140,000	1.6m	3.3m
2022	23	424	126,500	224,000	2.2m	4.4m

● In 2021, scholars at Cornell University started a “labor action tracker,” which collects data on *all* industrial actions by soliciting reports and scraping the web.

The difference between the two data sources is big for all three series, especially for “stoppages.”

<https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/faculty-and-research/labor-action-tracker-2022>



Why has there been a surge in industrial action in the United States?



1. Tight Labor Market



A tight labor market is a **necessary** but **NOT sufficient** causal variable.

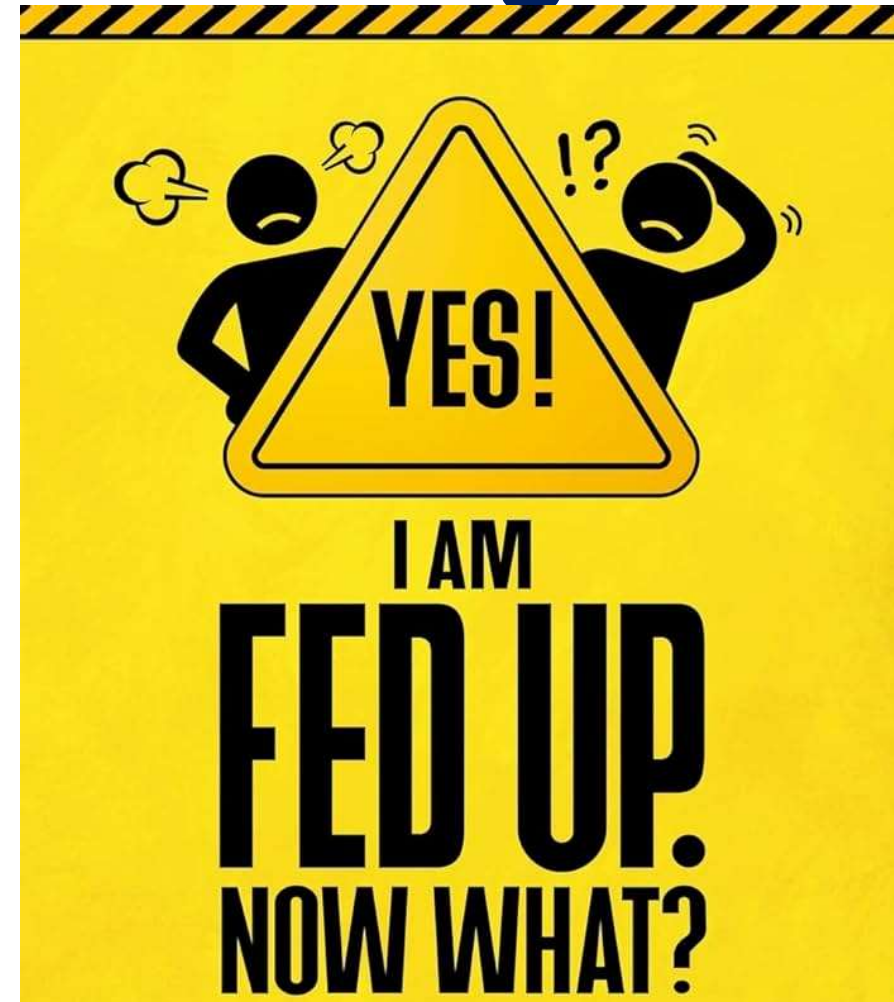
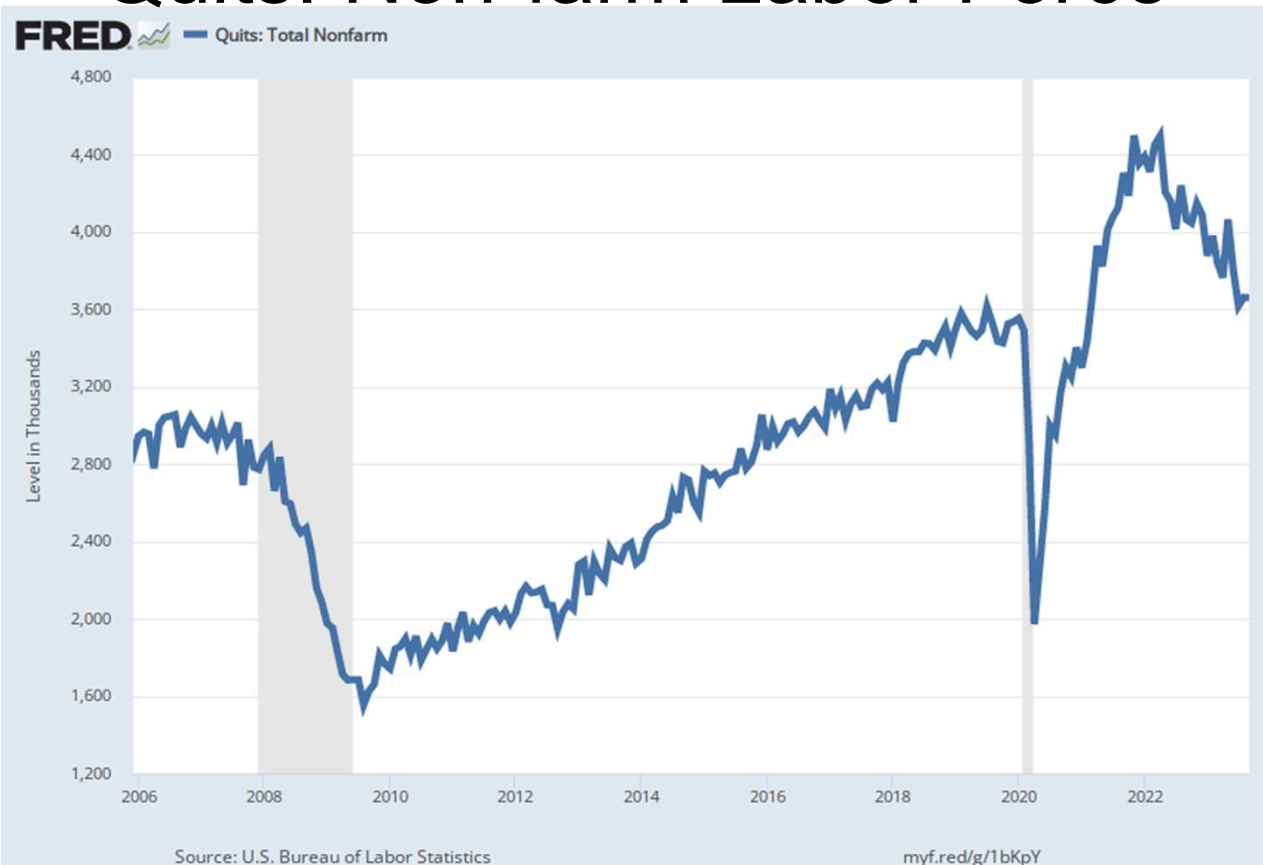
There was **NO** sizeable increase in major strikes or idle days due to strikes when the labor market was tight in the early 2000s and in the years before COVID.

There was some increase in the number of striking workers before COVID.



2. Post-COVID Attitude Change

Quits: Non-farm Labor Force





3. New Union Leadership



Shawn Fain, United Auto Workers



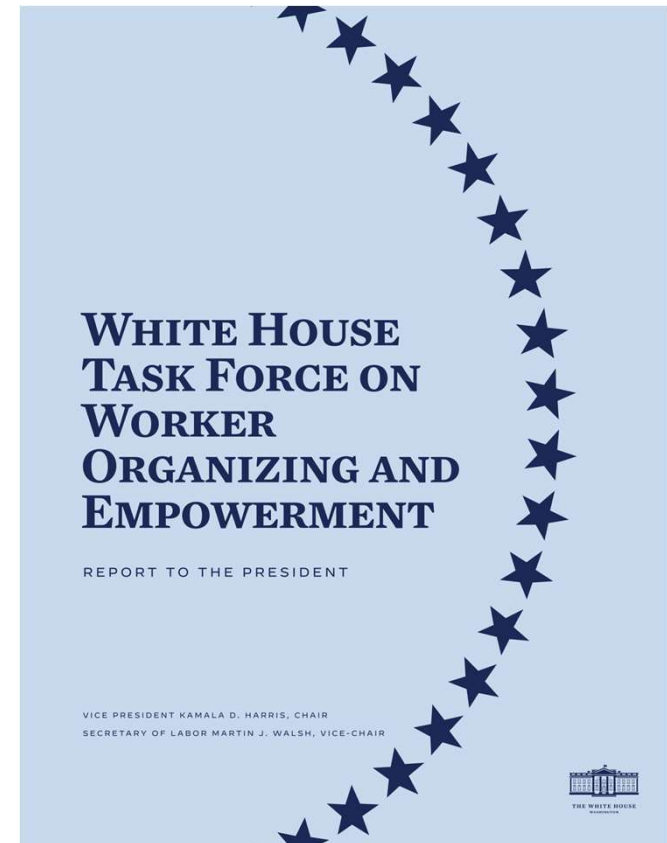
Sean O'Brien, International Brotherhood of Teamsters



Fran Drescher, Screen Actors Guild

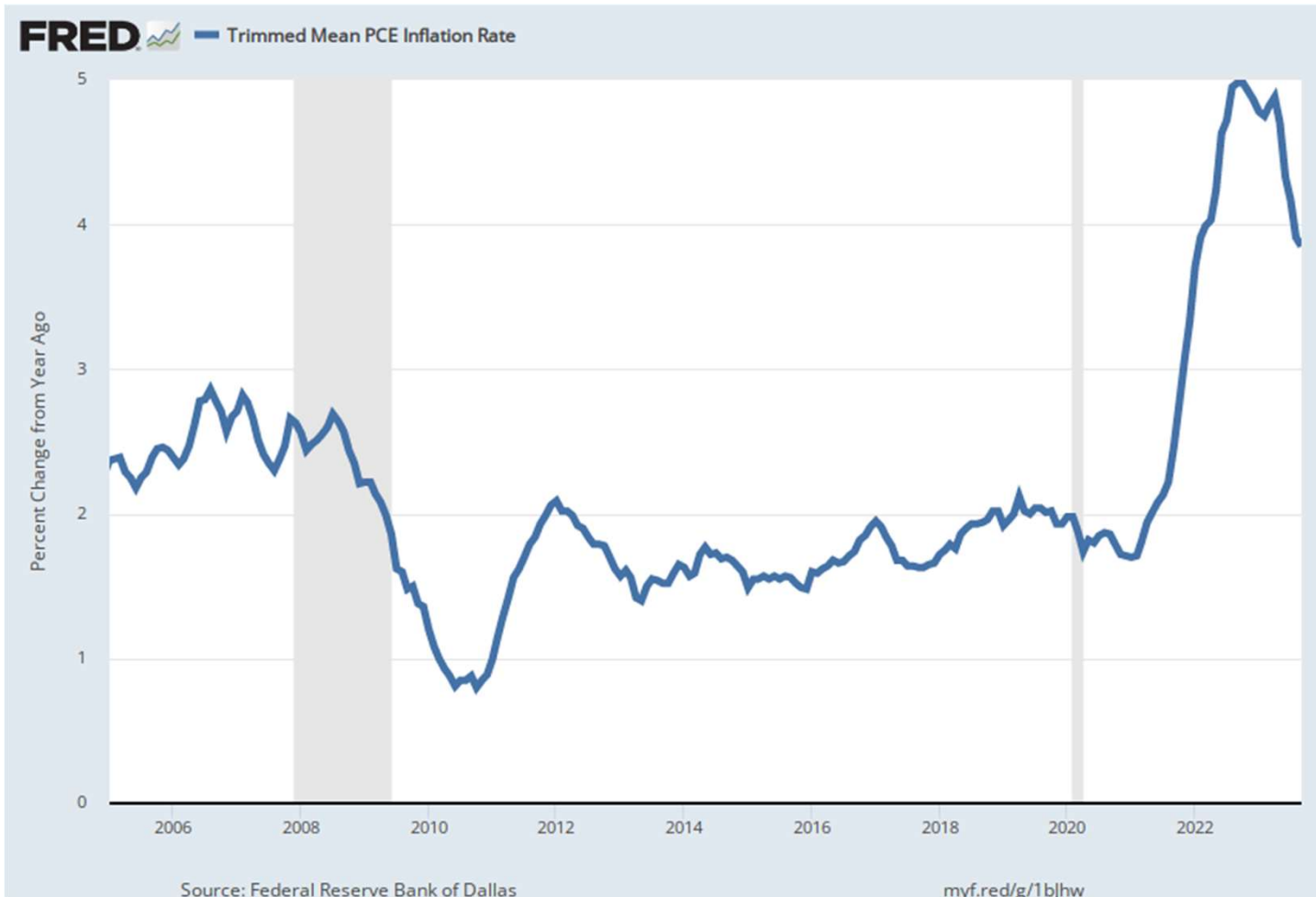


4. Political Change





5. Increased Inflation



Post-COVID surge in inflation has been the **trigger** for the surge in strikes.



6. Successful strikes lead to more

The strike wave is likely to continue even after inflation lessens, so long as the labor market remains strong.

"WE'VE CHANGED the GAME"

TEAMSTERS WIN HISTORIC UPS CONTRACT

RECORD PROFITS EQUAL RECORD CONTRACTS

Wage Increases in 2023 Ford Agreement

All Wage Increases from 2001-2022

25%

23%

STRIKE WAVE HITS KAISER

FRONTLINE WORKERS TAKE A STAND FOR RESPECT & QUALITY PATIENT CARE

700+ IUOE LOCAL 39 stationary & biomedical engineers at 24 hospitals in Northern California on United Labor Practice strike since September 18.

34,000+ Alliance Union members

TENTATIVE AGREEMENT REACHED 11/13

40,000+ SEIU-UHW, OPEIU 29, & IPFTE 20 Coalition Union members in Northern California prepare to hold 24-hour sympathy strike on November 18.

85,000 Coalition Union Members Strengthen the Fight

- ✓ **Sympathy Strikes:** 40,000 SEIU-UHW, OPEIU 29, and IPFTE 20 members authorize a 24-hour sympathy strike with Local 39 engineers in Northern CA on November 18. SEIU-UHW Southern CA sympathy strike called off when Alliance unions reach tentative agreement on 11/13.
- ✓ **Picket Lines and Actions:** Coalition Unions plan actions nationwide to shed light on Kaiser's illegal bargaining tactics and disrespect of frontline workers.

IS KAISER FOR PATIENTS OR FOR PROFITS?

- Made \$11.4 Billion in pandemic era profits and has billions more in reserves.
- Breaks labor law to get the upper hand in bargaining.
- Low-balls wage increases for "heroes."
- Sows division among workers making collaborative patient care committees a thing of the past.
- Pushed to lower pay and benefits for new hires, ignoring worsening labor shortage.

NATIONWIDE STICKER UP: THURSDAY, NOV 18

Kaiser: For Patients or For Profit?

COALITION OF UNIONS



SAG-AFTRA

TV/THEATRICAL/STREAMING CONTRACTS

\$1 billion in new wages and benefit plan funding

- New terms for proper hair and makeup services
- Coverage of Performance Capture work
- Doubling pay for singers who dance and dancers who sing
- Elimination of the discounted rehearsal rate for dancer rehearsals

...and more!

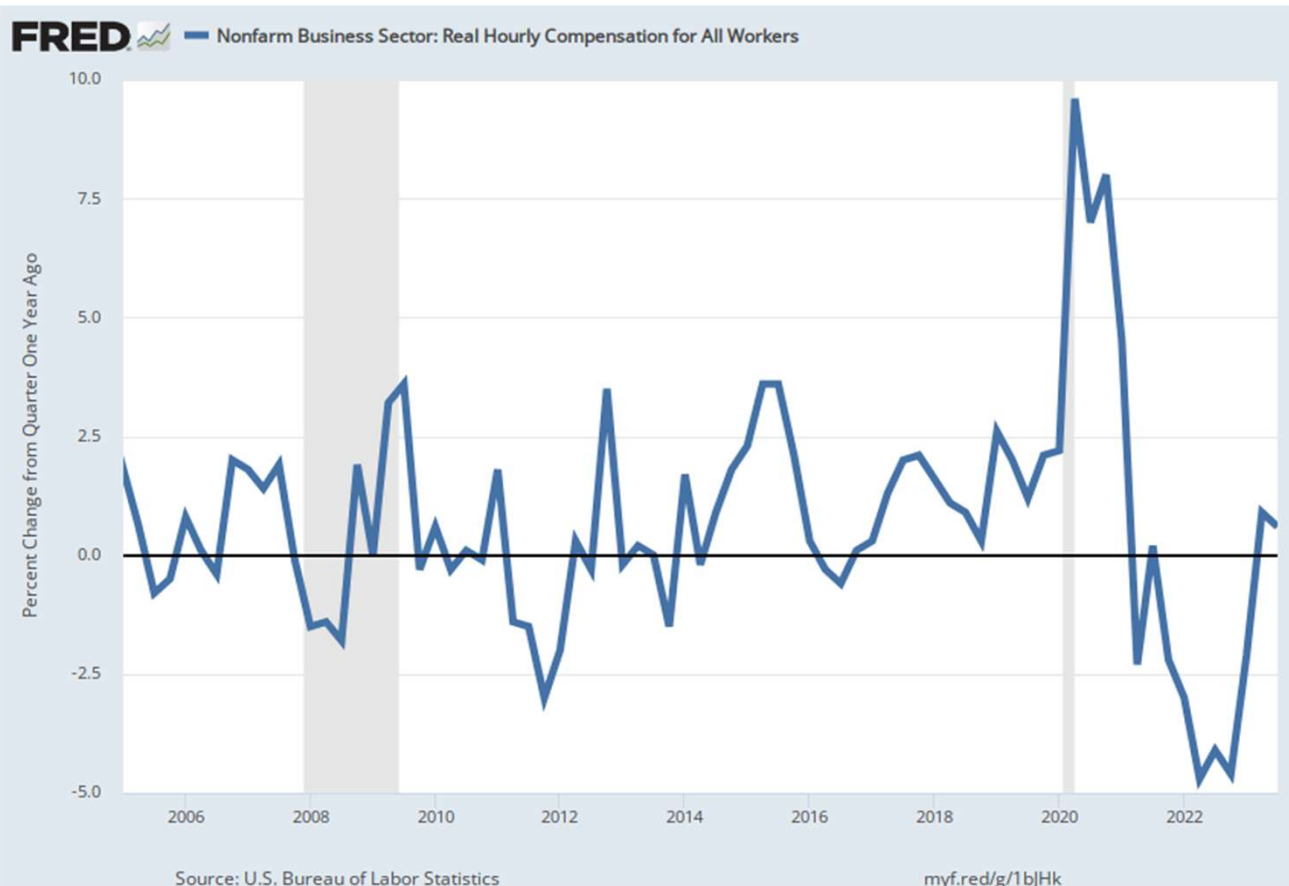
More details to come at sagaftra.org/contracts2023



IMPLICATIONS



Compensation



So far, real compensation has NOT surged.

Why not?

Unionization rate in the private sector is only 6 percent.

Too soon to assess size of any **demonstration effect** for other unions, or **spillover** into the non-union plants and sectors.



Will unionization spread?



Maybe, but since union organizing is so difficult in the United States, these strike victories alone are **NOT sufficient** to trigger greater unionization.



For example, almost two years after workers voted for union representation, there are still no collective agreements at Amazon or Starbucks because of employer resistance.





Thank you for your attention.

Questions?