



Planning and Mobilization

Key Takeaways:

- The Union must engage in long-term, strategic planning with continuity and momentum between actions.
- The Union must establish permanent mobilizing structures that reach all members individually and ensure consistent contact between the same mobilizers and mobilizees.
- The Union must prioritize strategies that utilize its labor power and existing community support.
- The Union must raise its expectations for participation from its rank-and-file members.

Executive Summary / Introduction

Mobilization is key to ensuring a union runs efficiently, effectively, and democratically. Presently, UAW 4121 does not have effective mobilizing structures. This was made apparent during the 2023 / 2024 bargaining period, when planning and mobilization for actions was done on an ad hoc basis with whoever self-nominated themselves to undertake these actions. Consequently, actions were poorly thought out and lacked efficacy. Additionally, many union members were not available to help with planning or preparation, or to attend the actions. To remedy these problems, it is imperative for the Union to adopt mobilizing structures that consistently alert all members to union actions, events, and planning meetings in a way that ensures their ability to participate if they so choose. These structures ought to rely on personal contact between established mobilizers and mobilizees who come to build a rapport and are aware of each other's limitations. This kind of mobilizing will make commitments to planning, mobilization, and attending events secure, efficient, and consistent. Constructing a phone tree is the most efficient way to create the desired structures, but other solutions can likely complement this tool.

In its planning process, the Union should also focus on planning legal actions that take advantage of its strengths relative to the university administration, namely labor power and community support. Especially during the 2023 / 24 bargaining process, the Union relied heavily on illegal actions like sit-ins to generate leverage. While these actions can be effective when used appropriately, they both present high barriers to participation and potentially carry significant long-term consequences that simultaneously distract from further organizing. Moreover, they fail to exploit the dynamic in which the University relies on ASE labor to carry out its core functions. This situation is precisely what gives ASEs bargaining power and must therefore be its crutch in



negotiations and other exercises of power. ASEs also enjoy significant community support from faculty, undergraduates, and Seattle and Washington residents that provides them considerable leverage when engaging with UW, a non-profit, government-supported entity. Illegal actions not only fail to utilize this community support, they make it impossible for the community to participate and risk alienating potential supporters. Hence, UAW 4121 ought to move away from sit-ins and the like and towards call-ins, write-ins, sick outs, strikes, slowdowns, and similar actions that utilize its greatest assets.

Finally, the Union should work towards setting minimum participation expectations from its members. Effective planning and mobilization is most effective when each person can be predictably relied upon to contribute a known quantity. The ability to rely on contributions from the rank-and-file, rather than just hope they materialize, empowers the organization to make plans while aware of its resources and have consistent estimates of how well attended - and thus how effective - its actions will be. Establishing a union culture where everyone is expected to contribute an at least minimal amount greatly aids in this effort and should therefore be established through strategic deployment of social pressure and other mechanisms.

Extended Analysis

Lack of Long-Term Planning

Throughout the 2023 / 24 bargaining process, leadership showed little willingness or ability to engage in long-term planning. This is to say that plans were developed on an ad hoc basis when opportune moments seemed to present themselves or when crises seemed to call for immediate responses. Several predictable outcomes resulted as a consequence of this kind of planning, all of which were detrimental to union organization and served to degrade the Union's bargaining power.

First, an absence of long-term plans entailed that the tactics deployed were poorly executed. Too little time was available to prepare for these actions, subsequently dampening their efficacy. For example, in the week leading up to the strike, the Union decided, at the last moment, to host a series of sit-ins. However, the hurried timeline associated with the actions meant that sit-in locations were chosen more or less on the spur of the moment. Very little research was conducted on whether these were indeed the most effective locations for a sit-in, nor was there time to sufficiently research which locations would have been the most impactful. Likewise, materials for the sit-ins could not be delivered until the actions had been underway for a significant period of time. Signs to tape to the back of laptops to indicate union support while sitting in, for instance, were not delivered until three or four hours into the first sit-in, primarily because the printer did not receive word he needed to print the signs until 10pm the night before the action.



Second, a lack of long-term planning meant that mobilizations could not be carried out systematically or, consequently, effectively. Nearly day-of planning meant that there was no time to pick mobilizers and assign specific mobilizing targets to them. Instead, mobilizations were sporadic, primarily relying on people in the planning meeting telling their social circles and hoping for chain mobilizations, the inefficiencies of which have already been discussed. Moreover, potential participants' ability to participate in the actions was curtailed due to prior commitments. With an earlier warning, however, these plans could have most likely been either initially scheduled so as not to conflict with the actions or rescheduled in a minimally disruptive manner. Had sufficient time been dedicated to planning the actions that occurred throughout the bargaining period, it is almost certain that each action would have had several times the number of participants that actually materialized.

Third, the dearth of long-term planning further entailed that members' ability to help plan actions was curtailed. Without a regularized meeting space in which decisions were routinely made, meetings to plan actions were typically called in the spur of the moment. Hence, only those in the space at the precise moment the planning meetings were called were able to participate. For instance, during the strike one ASE Head Steward created a direct action committee that met for the first and only time less than twenty four hours from creation and planned a sit-in for two days later. The meeting plans were only minimally altered after push back from other members, eventually leading the meeting to be delayed five hours (though still less than a full day from when it was announced). A failure to make plans ahead of time led to the creation of hurried meeting spaces such as this one which deprived members from having a say in how their union functioned. More important tactically, though, is that it kept members who could bring fresh ideas to the table from participating. This in turn almost certainly removed tactical potentials from the Union's repertoire and led to less effective action.

Fourth, lack of long-term planning left many member-participants confused about what was actually about to concur, and often either abandoning their commitment to an action when it became riskier than what they had signed up for or leaving disappointed that events they thought would transpire had not come to pass. This was the result of the hastiness with which actions were thought up and organized. Rushed planning meant that urgent mobilization was needed. Consequently, mobilization began before final plans had been drawn up. The action that members were mobilized for, then, was too frequently not the action that ended up being executed; plans had changed overnight and with no time left to spread news of the changes.

Fifth, lack of long-term planning meant that actions were disconnected from one another and failed to consistently build upon or escalate past actions. Typically, labor organizations attempt to carry out actions in a structured manner, using old actions to set up new ones and gradually applying pressure over a greater extent of the workplace so as to maximize the effect of each action, both by themselves and as they occur in sequence. This is only possible, however, if proper planning works out a "grand" strategy that allows the interconnectedness of the actions to



flourish. Contrary to this goal, the ad hoc nature through which plans were made during the last bargaining period ensured that each action started from a baseline pressure of zero, spiked during the course of the action, and went back to nothing immediately when the action concluded. Rather than a steadily spreading blaze encompassing the entire campus, the administration was able to cope by simply putting out a series of sporadic little fires everywhere.

Moving forward, it is imperative for union tacticians to engage in a much longer planning process. This means both spending more time on planning and planning further into the future than it previously has. Doing so will empower the Union to maximize its advantages, minimize its vulnerabilities, and generate the leverage it needs to extract a strong contract from university administration.

Ineffective Mobilizing Structures

UAW 4121 is notable for its inefficient mobilizing structures, which, both before and during the 2023 / 24 bargaining period, lacked consistency, breadth, depth, and accuracy. Given these lacks it is difficult to say the Union maintained any mobilizing structures at all. Indeed, throughout the authors' time at UW, Union mobilization structures have always been either low visibility or ad hoc.

Union mobilization has always primarily occurred through emails to members' personal email addresses. This poses numerous problems:

1. The union does not have access to all ASEs emails, despite its contract guaranteeing receipt of contact information for all eligible unit members from the University (it appears the union does not grieve this clause). Consequently, many members and potential members are uncontactable through this primary method, a problem of *breadth*.
2. Many, and possibly most, ASEs do not regularly check their personal emails. Instead, they primarily concentrate on their work emails, which regularly receive the members' most consequential correspondence but which the Union does not use for good reason. Consequently, members fail to receive mobilization requests in a timely manner, a problem of *consistency* and *accuracy*.
3. Members' personal emails tend to receive lots of irrelevant and unwanted communications from any number of parties including police alerts from the University, email notifications from subscription services (Google Calendar, Discord, Slack, etc.), promotional materials from various companies, receipts for purchases, appointment reminders from service providers, and so on. Consequently, members are likely to miss emails from the Union amidst a flurry of other, unwanted communications, a problem of *consistency* and *accuracy*.



4. There have been persistent problems with members receiving union communications via email even when they are on the lookout for them, as, to name one example, the ballot debacle for the most recent Tentative Agreement Ratification Election (“the Election”) easily demonstrates. As an aside, ASE members on fellowship often have to ask in Slack for important union communications to be forwarded to them nearly every time one is sent, and in turn often miss less important communications. This is a problem of *consistency, accuracy, and breadth*.

The sum total of these factors is that the large majority of Union mobilization efforts are almost certainly missed by their intended recipients, if they are delivered at all. This results in a *shallow* mobilization.

Even when members receive *and* engage with the Union’s email mobilizations, they obviously only do so digitally. This is a problem because digital engagement carries less psychological weight than human engagement. *It is much easier to cancel (or forget) an RSVP that is entirely digital than it is to brush off a commitment made to a real person.* Yet the Union maintains no permanent in-person mobilization structures. When face-to-face or phone mobilization occurs, it is done by volunteers on an ad hoc basis while facing hard and imminent deadlines. Several problems thus emerge:

1. Volunteers are always few (due to other structural factors, discussed elsewhere) and the number of people to contact is enormous. In fact, the number of people mobilizing is always few enough that it is *impossible* for them to contact all union members. Thus, problems of mobilizing *breadth* and *depth* appear. There are never enough mobilizers to contact everyone who needs to be contacted.
2. While attempts to solve the above problem by encouraging contacted members to engage in “chain mobilization” (i.e., please tell x number of people what I just told you, and ask them to pass it on as well, *ad infinitum*), such mobilization lacks oversight and systematicity. The result is that there is no ability to ensure a) that the message *is* passed on or, b) that the message reaches a new person each time it is passed on. This creates problems of *breadth* (the message fails to reach the vast majority of members) and *accuracy* (some people are mobilized multiple times, while others are never mobilized at all).
3. Because mobilizers are always chosen on a volunteer, last-minute basis, there is no *consistency* of contact between mobilizers and mobilizees. Yet mobilizees are unlikely to respond to unknown mobilizers. For one, the natural suspicion of strangers emerges: who is this person to ask me to interrupt my routine *for them*? What authority do they have? Why should I trust them? These questions earn heightened suspicion when contact is made by phone (a far more efficient method of mass mobilization than face-to-face contact). People



are reticent to pick up a call from an unknown phone number (which, of course, raises accuracy problems).

4. “Existing” personal mobilization structures, inefficient as they are at contacting members, routinely fail to produce accurate RSVP numbers or hold people accountable for following through on RSVPs. This results in difficulties gauging how many people have responded to a given mobilization and how many people are consistently mobilizable (let alone potentially mobilizable). Problems of *accuracy, breadth, depth, and consistency* therefore arise.

The above problems were all on full display during mobilization for the most recent strike and its accompanying series of direct actions.

Fortunately, the solution to the Union’s mobilization problems is simple, time-tested, and easy to implement: a phone tree. A phone tree entails that mobilizers take on long-term commitments to contact a set list of members whenever mobilizations are required. Thus, mobilizations no longer depend on the shallow email tool, nor do they proceed in an ad hoc fashion. Furthermore, regular contact between mobilizees and the same mobilizers builds trust, responsibility, and accountability. Systematicity, and hence accuracy and consistency, are improved too. Problems of missing contact information or unresponsive mobilizees suddenly have set people in charge of solving these issues. The number of mobilizers can be aligned with the number of mobilizees to ensure that all potential mobilizees can be contacted. A hope for chain mobilization (that either fails to materialize or creates contact redundancies) is no longer needed. And standard reporting measures of consistency of mobilization and responsiveness among mobilizees can be developed, allowing for accurate predictions of mobilizing strength at both planned and potential actions.

The best current option for establishing a phone tree is to designate union stewards as mobilizers for their departments. That said, this is not a permanent solution. Empty steward positions abound, and some departments have far too many ASEs for stewards to effectively mobilize everyone. Still, it provides us with a start, a way to put at least a partially comprehensive mobilization structure in place while recruiting additional mobilizers to fill the gaps.

No Use of Labor Power or Diversity in Tactics

In any class struggle, there are a wide array of options for building power. Some of these are time-tested, while others are of more recent vintage. Either way, the range of possibilities is nearly limitless. That said, UAW 4121 has chosen to forgo almost the entire range of possibilities to instead concentrate on a narrow band of dubiously effective tactics that, based on results, were unable to achieve its goals.

Throughout the 2023 / 24 bargaining period, the Union focused almost exclusively on a single tactic to gain leverage on administration: the sit-in. The Union’s sit-ins took several forms, sometimes being traditional sit-ins, sometimes being combined with work (the “work-in”),



sometimes following a rally, sometimes lasting a fixed amount of time, and sometimes being called off early. Whatever form the sit-in took, though, the goal was always to remain in a set location for an extended period of time. The goals beyond this were dubious. While sit-ins are typically undertaken to stop typical occupants from using the space, this does not appear to have happened at sit-ins during the bargaining period save one. In all other instances, the Union either made sure or was so ineffective that occupants were able to move around the sit-in space freely and accomplish their objectives without hindrance. This is largely because a) there did not seem to be willingness to turn sit-ins into occupations that would indefinitely take up the space and b) the sit-ins typically occurred in atria that had capacity for the protestors and then some. Especially in light of the eventual outcome of the bargaining process – a bad contract – the sit-in strategy must be deemed to have failed.

While there are many problems with the sit-in strategy, the most important is that it does not exercise members' labor power to achieve its ends. Yet labor power was the one resource the Union had a monopoly on during the bargaining process and thus constituted its main advantage in negotiations with the administration. Indeed, labor power is the key to union strength in all settings. The structural dynamic of a capitalist workplace entails that the employer has the capital the workers need, while *the workers have the labor power the employer needs*. It is only by taking advantage of this dynamic that unions are able to achieve their goals. And, by failing to exploit its structural advantage over its class adversaries, UAW 4121 inadvertently revealed just how important this dynamic is. Anything short of exercising labor power, i.e., the vast majority of actions the Union undertook, is simply appealing to the nonexistent generosity of the higher classes.

Another key issue with the sit-in strategy was its monotony, which both advantaged the employer and disadvantaged the Union. In terms of advantaging UW, the repetition of sit-ins gave the University ample opportunity to a) determine how disruptive such a strategy really was, and hence whether it needed to be combatted and b) figure out tools to minimize the disruptive effects of the sit-ins and hence limit their efficacy. From the authors' perspective, once UW appeared to (correctly) calculate that the sit-ins were minimally disruptive, they realized that they could make only minimal concessions at the bargaining table; the Union's main tactic could not compel them to give up more. Given that admin's primary tactic is to stall at the bargaining table and not make any concessions until the last minute (if they make concessions at all), providing them with ample opportunity to sit back and calculate their position is one of the gravest missteps the Union can make. The way to maximally disrupt this strategy from admin is to keep them on their toes with a diversity of tactics which continually escalates and grows pressure.

In terms of disadvantaging the Union, the sit-ins offered little chance for new members to get involved in other courses of action. Sit-ins discriminate against potential participants in numerous ways. They require ample time to participate, requiring that potential participants have the agility to rearrange their plans and expend extensive time resources on the occupation. They can be highly confrontational, leading to conflict with either passersby or the police that many



people fear. They are physically demanding, typically requiring participants to remain in uncomfortable locations for extended periods. They are geographically limited, meaning that only those with access to the space where the sit-in occurs (e.g., not those in Bothell or South Lake Union) can participate. And the list goes on, with the ultimate conclusion that sit-ins set a high bar for potential participation. By only planning sit-ins as protest tactics, the Union systematically (if inadvertently) limited participation to only those who cleared this high bar. It therefore weakened its strength by drastically limiting the number of members asked or able to act.

Additionally, the Union failed to utilize its probably wide base of communal support in planning actions. UW is a beloved community institution in the Seattle area. It is widely respected as an educational institution among Washington state residents, employers rely on it to produce competent employees, and fans flock to Husky Stadium every Saturday to watch its students give other schools' students concussions. Of course, none of the community support UW enjoys is the result of its administration. The community is ambivalent about President Cauce. What they do care about is the quality of education and research that occurs at the University and, by extension, the educators and researchers who work there, i.e., the ASEs/PDs/RSEs. Almost certainly, any plan by the Union to rally the community around its flag would have succeeded in drawing some community support to the Union's cause. Given UW's reliance on popular support as a government-funded, non-profit institution, this community support would have made excellent leverage for obtaining a good contract. Nevertheless, the Union failed to develop any community mobilization plan.

Particularly glaring in the Union's failure to engage the broader community was its failure to engage the campus community. Though the authors lack formal statistics, nearly every piece of anecdotal evidence in our possession indicates overwhelming support from undergraduate students. While faculty had more diverse opinions, a large, possibly majority, contingent of them were supportive too. And the highly unionized non-academic staff would certainly have supported the Union's cause. Indeed, the authors' understanding is that some of the staff unions even proactively made contact to offer assistance. None of these highly valuable resources were in any way utilized.

In the future, the Union must cease a strategy of monotonous protest tactics and implement one that takes advantage of its structural advantages (labor and people power) in active collaboration with community allies. Sit-ins, while potentially effective if used sparingly, must be complemented with call-ins, teach-ins, slowdowns, working to rule, time-limited strikes, and the like. Furthermore, these tactics should, as previously discussed, be deployed in an escalatory, inclusive fashion. Finally, they should encompass a range of areas of struggle, from (first and foremost) the economic to the political to the social. A strategy that follows these guidelines will be much more effective than the strategy that was previously deployed, with the result being that the contract obtained from such a strategy will be much stronger than the contract previously obtained.



No Minimum Expectations

Unions can only thrive when they have high levels of member participation, something UAW 4121 currently lacks. As discussed above, union structure is imperative to securing this participation. Yet structure alone is insufficient. An ideology and appropriate incentives encouraging participation are also needed. Crucially, this includes establishing minimum expectations of member involvement and enforcing them, at very least, through social pressure. Moving forward, the Union must formulate its conception of these minimum expectations, which must exceed paying dues, and figure out incentives to encourage members to meet them.

Illegal Activities

Engaging in illegal activities is not bad *per se*. Many historic labor actions have been both illegal and extremely effective including the wave of teachers' strikes that swept the country in 2018 and 2019. The fact is that labor law frequently limits labor's capacity much more than it limits employers' and must therefore be disregarded when the time is right.

The key to considering illegal action is, however, "when the time is right." In addition to potential efficacy, illegal action has numerous, significant downsides *that typically outweigh the rewards*. The most obvious of these is its tendency to get labor activists involved in time-consuming, expensive, and usually losing legal struggles that sap organizational capacity and redirect it towards almost certain sanction. Additionally, legal struggles pose a risk of alienating less-involved members who are on par less inclined to militant action than those who are more heavily engaged in union activities. Public sympathy, too, is risked when illegal actions are taken since media narratives tend to center the illegality of the actions rather than their necessity. Finally, illegal activity remains typically unnecessary despite the constraints placed on labor,. The plain fact is that labor's ability to take advantage of structural capitalist dynamics remains strong even when considering the legal restraints it faces. Illegal actions typically do not utilize this structural dynamic, which is by far the Union's greatest strength. For these reasons, illegal actions, while sometimes appropriate, should be used sparingly.

However, UAW 4121 does not use illegal actions sparingly. Instead, it puts these at the center of its organizing strategy to its detriment. This has been apparent in the bargaining campaigns that extended over the last two academic years. In the 2022 / 23 bargaining period, the Union loudly and openly encouraged members in non-striking units to engage in illegal sympathy strikes with members of other units. Though this violated both the law and the existing contract, requests to leadership to rescind these calls were repeatedly denied. Nor were the potential consequences of participating in these activities at any point explained to the members being asked to partake in them. More recently, the Union's sit-in strategy was blatantly illegal, as sit-ins constitute criminal trespass. Consequently, the Union was subject to police eviction as it carried



out its protests and is now facing an Unfair Labor Practice charge for its activities. It is possibly lucky that members are allowed to remain on campus and do not face criminal charges.

In the future, it is advised that the Union desist from undertaking illegal actions so blithely. It must much more deeply consider whether licit or illicit activities are called for in the situation and should be advised that illicit ones are rarely more effective, especially given the consequences. Furthermore, it must, regardless of the extent to which an action is illegal, advise members of the potential consequences of participating in such actions. That it has not done so to this point is more than a tactical misstep; it is a full-on moral failing.