



CapTel
Disconnect
Special Edition

Produced by the CapTel Workers Union

Maybe you've heard of us

You've probably heard of CapTel Workers Union by now.

Maybe you came across our Facebook page. Maybe a coworker invited you to a meeting or handed you a pamphlet. Perhaps you saw the union picketing outside of the building.

If you haven't heard of the union that has been steadily growing in your workplace by now, management is probably the reason. Despite the CapTel handbook clearly stating that the company does not discourage union organizing they have taken it upon themselves to lie about, harrass, and try to stop the union's formation at every opportunity.

When the union began placing free menstrual products for our coworkers in the bathrooms CapTel admin was seen throwing the products in the trash. The company is so scared of unionizing that they would rather an employee go without a tampon or a pad than see the CWU logo on the box they got it from.

The union bought books from library sales and stocked the lending libraries on the call floors with them, leaving a small sticker with the union logo on the inside of the covers. Those tiny stickers are such a threat to CapTel admin that floor ops went through every book checking for it, throwing away those that had it. A service being provided to their employees means nothing to them if it will let them know about a group working to raise wages.

A supervisor was overheard telling people before our picket that anyone who showed up would be fired. This is both blatantly illegal and an outright lie. To date, no member of the union has been fired for exercising their legal right to demonstrate and to organize their coworkers.

A woman asked HR about joining the union and she was told that no such group exists. A committee from the union had been in the HR office a few months earlier to speak with them.

Knowing how capricious and vindictive admin can be only illustrates for us how desperately this workplace needs to be run by the workers and not bureaucrats who do nothing all day but scheme about how to keep wages and benefits low while keeping profits high.

Another supervisor told a woman that CapTel was going to give everyone \$15/hour until the union asked for it and then they changed their minds, as though CapTel was champing at the bit to pay people more but very regretfully decided not to after it became a union demand. It would be funny if it wasn't such a blatant lie.

On Valentine's Day some members of the union handed out homemade cookies frosted to say \$15. Leftover cookies were left in the breakrooms on placemats that featured Helen Keller and her quote "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." FOS Nate was seen ripping up one of these pictures of Helen Keller in what has to be one of the most hilariously ironic things to ever happen at this call center.

These efforts on the part of CapTel have only increased our resolve to see our coworkers unionize. Knowing how capricious and vindictive admin can be only illustrates for us how desperately this workplace needs to be run by the workers and not bureaucrats who do nothing all day but scheme about how to keep wages and benefits low while keeping profits high. They are right to be afraid of us because they know that worker power means the end of this backwards and immoral set of priorities that they have built their careers on.

CapTel has made it clear at this point that despite their claim to not discourage unionizing they are very concerned about workers standing up for themselves as a group and very interested in suppressing union activity. More and more CAs join the union every month and as we grow closer to a fully unionized workplace we can only expect CapTel's anti-union rhetoric to escalate.

That is why we are releasing this special edition of the CapTel Disconnect. When CapTel attempts to lie to us, cheat us, and manipulate us we will be ready.

We are CapTel Workers Union. Maybe you've heard of us.

Who We Are

We are every color, every size, every age, every gender. We are overworked and under paid, overlooked and under pressure. We are disrespected. And yet, we are the backbone of CapTel, and we deserve to be heard.

5-Point Platform



A Living Wage

This means a minimum of \$15/hr for CAs. CapTel Inc currently makes \$1.82/minute of captioned calls. CAs make \$0.18/minute for captioning. That is less than 10% of the capital we create for this company coming back to us. We demand that our wages be immediately increased to at least \$15/hr. This would increase our income to \$0.25/min. \$15/hr is only the first step on the road to more equal wage distribution, but it helps ensure that workers can afford medical bills, family expenses, tuition/debt, and living expenses.



Ninety Percent Adherence

We demand that CapTel reduce our monthly adherence compliance threshold from 95% to 90%. From needing to use the bathroom frequently to having to step out due to triggering call content, there are many reasons for reducing the adherence limit. In addition there are times in which we are doing work necessary to our jobs at CapTel that are considered out of adherence. Our adherence time is already stretched as is. We believe that 90% per day is a fair ask that will minimize the harm of the times when CapTel requires that we be out of adherence while doing our jobs, and give us a little extra time to care for our physical and mental health.

3

Better Equipment and Maintenance

CapTel needs an immediate equipment makeover. Old and failing CRT monitors give workers headaches and often display incorrectly, many of our keyboards have important keys missing, most of our chairs are broken in some way, and breakdowns in the kitchen or at the water fountains go unattended for weeks if not months. We demand updates to our monitors and desks. In addition, we ask that CapTel hire additional maintenance personnel to insure that the equipment we already have is well cared for and swiftly repaired.

4

Transportation Compensation

CAs need to be reimbursed for transportation expenses. Since the Milwaukee location doesn't have a designated parking lot (like the Madison location, for instance), CAs are expected to pay for parking. In addition the rising cost of public transportation takes a significant bite out of our paychecks. We demand that CapTel take on some of the cost of our commute. We want at least \$10 a week to be added to our income specifically for the purposes of subsidizing our transportation. Until CapTel can provide free parking and waivers for bus transport they should be at least partially responsible for our travel expenses.

5

Union Liasons

We demand that CapTel recognize the voice of CAs on an institutional level. To do this we ask that CapTel accept the appointment of at least one (likely more) person compensated by the union with direct access to admin meetings and information as well as the ability to serve as a mediator between workers and HR/admin. Workers deserve to have more concrete information about how the company is run and deserve the chance to voice concerns or make suggestions.

What is a union?

A union is workers joining together to pursue policies and goals beneficial to one and all. Nothing more, nothing less. In other words, a union is you and your fellow workers, acting in concert to better your everyday working conditions.

A union is what gives the individual worker a voice in decisions and events that directly affect them in an undertaking that constitutes a major portion of life, their work.

A union allows workers a say in changing workplace conditions and solving workplace problems. With a union contract and grievance procedure to back them up, workers don't have to suffer in silence or feel that their only option to unacceptable conditions is to quit their jobs.

As a worker, you have a right under federal law to form a union, select representatives of your choice and bargain collectively with your employer. This helps balance the power that employers have over individual employees.

Belonging to a union gives you rights under law that you do not have as an individual. Once you have formed a union, your employer must bargain with you over your wages, hours and working conditions.



Anti-union tactics

Are you happy that you have an 8-hour work day instead of 12 or 14? Unions made that the standard. Do you like overtime pay? Thank unions. Happy that we have workplace safety standards in this country? Unions again. Child labor laws? A minimum wage? We'll let you guess if it was unions or employers who fought for those.

Union workers make on average 27-30% more than non-union workers. They have better insurance plans, better pension plans, and higher levels of job satisfaction.

Unions make workers' lives better and give them a tool to fight for a better standard of living and real respect on the job. This is why businesses fearmonger, cajole, threaten, and lie to crush them. Unions are such a fundamentally, objectively, and obviously great idea for workers that businesses can only keep them out by throwing huge amounts of money and propaganda at the task. That's why union-busting is a multi-billion dollar industry in the United States.

Luckily, all of the various slick professionals that these firms employ use the same tactics and talking points. Here's what you need to look out for.

The captive audience meeting

Milwaukee's own Stone Creek Coffee was forming a union in 2019. In response the owners of the cafe closed the business down for two days while still requiring employees to come in for their scheduled shifts. Instead of working they were made to sit through back-to-back 8-hour meetings where the owners harangued them about the alleged evils of unions all day long. By the end of these two days many workers were understandably rattled and scared to

unionize.

This is called a captive audience meeting. It isn't always as extreme as what happened at Stone Creek but it is a very common union-busting tactic that takes advantage of the employer's ability to force workers to assemble and listen to whatever they care to say. Sometimes it is simply a monthly team meeting being used to show workers an anti-union propaganda video or to make them listen to a talk from a representative of a union-busting firm.

The “employee-led” anti-union campaign

In many workplaces “Vote No” or “No Union” committees spring up. The materials they circulate present the employer's perspective, even though they generally have a “homemade” appearance so it won't look like the employer is paying for it (which is against the law). Frequently, members of anti-union committees are recruited from among workers who are friends or relatives of someone in management or are politically opposed to unions.

Pressuring supervisors to pressure you

Employers usually order supervisors to take the lead in campaigns against unions. Supervisors typically hold one-on-one meetings with workers, often because their employers have pressured the first-line supervisors to do all they can to eliminate any talk of unions.

Redbaiting

This is less common than it used to be during the Cold War era but it does still occur. Redbaiting is the tactic of trying to fear-monger about radical politics that bosses will imply are inherent to the union movement. “You want to have insurance copays that don't put your account in the negative? What are you, some kind of dirty communist? Why do you hate America?”

In the case of IWW unions, bosses have sometimes pointed out that we have a very large membership among incarcerated people in the United States. This implies that we are a union of law-breakers who can't help but wind up in prison. The truth is that the IWW believes incarcerated people are workers who are often exploited as a source of cheap labor and so we help imprisoned people join the union and organize for better pay and living conditions.

The straw boss

Sometimes management will identify popular workers or people they think might be leading the union movement in the workplace and try to curry favor with them. They will give these workers promotions in the hope that this special treatment will make them look favorably on the company and that they will convince their coworkers to stop unionizing. They do this because giving a few workers promotions and raises is much cheaper than the cost of better wages and insurance for all employees.

These are called "straw bosses" because they are being given very little power and money in exchange for working against the union but being made to feel important and like they are being handsomely rewarded – a suit stuffed with straw.

“Union busting is a field populated by bullies and built on deceit. A campaign against a union is an assault on individuals and a war on truth. As such, it is a war without honor. The only way to bust a union is to lie, distort, manipulate, threaten, and always, always attack.”

-Martin Jay Levitt, 1993, Confessions of a Union Buster

“What’s disgusting? / Union busting! / What’s outrageous? / Low, low wages!”

-old union chant

They say, we know

Bosses say: My door is always open.

Union workers know: Bosses say this to make it sound as though you can come to them with whatever problem you have and so there is no need for a union to represent you. They may put a friendly face on their interactions with you but your relationship is not a relationship of equals. When you talk with the boss as an individual they have all the power and can deny requests and punish as they see fit. Unions level this playing field. United we bargain, divided we beg.

When you're part of a union, you are entitled to have union representation in any meeting with a manager or supervisor that you believe could impact your employment (this is known as your Weingarten rights). But you don't have to. There are no union rules about whether or not you can talk to managers or supervisors as an individual.

Bosses say: You don't want a third party to come between you and your employer.

Union workers know: The implication here is that the union is a scary "other," an unknown outsider that will come into your workplace and institute rules about how things are done. In reality, the union is made up of you and your coworkers. Union members have control over their union, not the other way around. You are the union.

In the current situation you already have no say in the rules and regulations that govern your workplace while CapTel has total authority. This is what they don't want to change.

Bosses say: Please give us another chance!

Sometimes bosses will begin to improve working conditions in an attempt to show that they have learned their lesson and are going to begin treating their workers better without being forced to by the union. They may begin to give out raises or be less austere with how much work they demand of you. It is important to know that this is not done out of the goodness of their hearts but because they are scared of the union.

Remember, if they are making these concessions it is because they know they will have to treat you even better once they are forced to bargain with the union. Also, they are able to revoke these better conditions at any time. It isn't uncommon for bosses to improve working conditions just long enough for the union drive to lose steam and then go back to the way things were, taking away the laxer work requirements and pay raises as easily as they gave them. The bosses promises are just words; a union contract is set in stone.

Bosses say: The union is a bunch of troublemakers!

Union workers know: What the bosses mean by order is continuing to underpay and overwork with no complaint from the workforce. What they mean by trouble is workers standing up for themselves. The truth is that workers have a right to unionize themselves and it is the bosses who are "troublemakers" for trying to interfere with this legally protected process.

Sometimes companies will hire extra security during a union drive to make it look as though they are on the alert for those dangerous pro-union employees, with the implication that they must be very bad people if we need extra guards to keep us safe from them. Employers have even been caught slashing employee tires

and vandalizing property and then trying to pin it on unions.

Bosses say: We won't accept a contract anyway so there's no point in forming a union.

Union workers know: This is illegal. Employers are required by labor law to bargain in good faith with a union. Very often employers will get around this with oblique statements that merely carry this implication but it is a threat that they cannot legally make good on. The IWW believes in direct action, which means that we use both the legal system and our ability to withhold our labor as a group to win demands. When employers do not want to cooperate we are able to force them to by threatening the only thing that matters to them: their profit margins.

Union myths and facts

Myth: Unions are outside, special-interest groups.

Fact: Workers are the union. A union is simply a democratic organization of working people standing up for their rights on the job and in society. Unions also bring people together in the community to stand up for issues that matter to all working people.

Myth: Unions mean more conflict in the workplace.

Fact: Unions can make the workplace a more harmonious place to work. A union contract allows the company and workers to sit down as equals and discuss problems as they come up. Without a union, workers' lives are often in more turmoil because they have to deal with more favoritism and less economic security.

Myth: Companies close due to unions.

Fact: Companies close for economic reasons— and the vast majority of companies that close are nonunion. Some companies, however, like to keep this myth alive by illegally threatening workers who attempt to form a union by saying the company will close. Studies have shown that, in fact, unions help decrease employee turnover and can increase efficiency.

Myth: Unions just want workers' dues.

Fact: Money that workers pay in dues goes back into running the organization— unions are not for-profit organizations. The improvements workers win in pay, benefits and fair treatment through their unions are far greater than the cost of dues.

Myth: Unions are quickly shrinking.

Fact: Actually, the number of union members has stayed steady for the past 50 years, but the workforce itself has grown. Sixteen million people in the United States are union members.

Myth: Unions used to be effective but they're not anymore.

Fact: Unions are still by far the best way for working people to win economic security and have a voice on the job. The numbers tell the story. Union members make at least 25% more in wages than workers who don't have a union. Union members are much more likely to have a defined-benefit pension plan and health care than workers without unions. Unions also curb discrimination on the job, keep the workplace safe and give workers a much-needed voice.

**“We are the voice! / We are the power! / We all deserve / 15 an
hour!”**

-CapTel picket chant

A look at anti-union propaganda

This poster was put up by Delta Airlines after their employees began a unionizing campaign. It is obviously quite patronizing and infantilizing and illustrates how dumb bosses think we are. After an employee leaked this photo of one of the posters Delta was mocked endlessly on social media and they ended up taking them down.

This is common rhetoric for bosses to use, though. Most working class people do not have a lot of money to spare and so the prospect of an organization like a union taking hundreds of dollars from them can be very scary.

Bosses aren't concerned about you giving your money to a union because they want you to have more in your pocket, though. If that was their concern they would just raise your wages. Companies worry about their employees joining a union because as a group workers are able to demand higher wages and better health-care plans. Unionized workers can demand the firing of abusive managers and the replacement of old work equipment.

IWW dues are \$6 per month (with the option to pay as much as \$33 if you're so inclined). Would you miss a one-time payment of \$6 if it meant that your wages were raised to \$15/hr plus any raises you have accrued? Would you miss \$6 if your insurance premiums and copays were drastically reduced? Would the mandatory presence of a union liaison who wants to save your job during disciplinary meetings be worth \$6?

\$6 a month is \$72 a year. The raise that the union is demanding for all CapTel workers would mean that someone who works 40 hours per week takes home an extra \$8,320 per year.

Your union is worth it.

UNION DUES COST AROUND \$700 A YEAR.

A NEW VIDEO GAME SYSTEM WITH THE LATEST HITS SOUNDS LIKE FUN.
PUT YOUR MONEY TOWARDS THAT INSTEAD OF PAYING DUES TO THE UNION.



 **DELTA**

DontRiskItDontSignIt.com

IT'S YOUR MONEY. DON'T YOU THINK YOU SHOULD...

What is the IWW?

CapTel Workers Union is a workplace organizing committee of the Industrial Workers of the World. Maybe you are familiar with the CWU but have no idea what the IWW is all about or perhaps you wonder why we chose this particular union to organize through and affiliate ourselves with.

Here are some of the reasons that we believe the IWW is the best union there is to fight for the rights of working class people.

- The IWW is organized horizontally. There is no President of the union or chain of command that has authority over the workers below it. Workers make every decision related to the organizing at their workplace themselves.
- The IWW is cross-industry, unlike many unions which are trade-specific and require that you be a certain kind of worker such as a welder or an engineer. This means that we organize every kind of worker, from bike messengers to fast food workers to steelworkers to gig economy workers. Because of this the IWW is sometimes referred to as the One Big Union.

The IWW does not restrict its membership from being members of other unions so many dual-card, holding membership in the IWW as well a union specific to their trade. For example, some MPS teachers are in both the IWW and the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association union.

Many CapTel workers have even chosen to continue their involvement with the IWW once they leave CapTel and find a new workplace.

- The IWW has sliding scale dues. Many unions have flat-rate dues that they require all members regardless of income level to pay. Because the IWW has members in every industry its members have vastly different incomes. In recognition of this, your dues rate is based on your wages. CapTel workers are at the lowest end of the dues rate and pay only \$6 unless they opt

to pay more.

- The IWW has no political affiliation. Although individual IWW members have their own political leanings and are free to express them how they wish, our constitution forbids us from endorsing or supporting political candidates as the union. Many unions endorse candidates that pay lip service to unions but who are actually extremely anti-workers' rights. Sometimes these candidates court both unions and union-busting firms for support! Oftentimes unions will donate money that they gained through rank-and-file members paying dues to a candidate's campaign, even if the majority of their members do not support that candidate.

When you pay dues to the IWW you know that the money gets put back into directly helping working class people, not into the campaign funds of a candidate you may or may not support. You can vote on how this money is allocated by attending our General Membership Board meetings and CapTel Workers Union meetings.

The Milwaukee IWW is made up of CapTel workers as well as members of other Milwaukee workplaces and subcommittees organized to fight for the working class. If you would like to attend one of the monthly branch meetings you can see when and where the next one is scheduled by visiting mkegmb.org/events.

Help the work along

“Big Bill” Haywood was an IWW member and a leading light of the American labor movement in the 1800s. He would sign his letters “Help the work along.” This has become a slogan for the Industrial Workers of the World.

The key to building a successful union is people working together to accomplish a goal that is far larger than anything one person can achieve. Everybody has different amounts of time to give and some people are extremely active union organizers while others find that life doesn't allow them as much time and energy to devote to the cause. Here are some ways that we can all help the work along.

1

Pass this zine along

Share this zine and your knowledge with your coworkers. We all need something to do between calls and reading the latest Disconnect is a great way to pass the time. It could be the most important thing you read this year.

2

Write an article for the next issue

The CapTel Disconnect is a magazine completely written and published by your coworkers. That's a unique and awesome thing. The Disconnect provides a voice for people who spend their days repeating the words of others. People send in comics, poems, essays and rants. Send your submissions to captelworker@gmail.com

3

Join your union!

Reach out to us! A member of the union will be happy to buy you a coffee and talk to you about signing up and getting your IWW membership card, the Red Card.

A word about COVID-19

CapTel workers, as admin reminds us, caption emergency calls and thus are classified as Telecommunications Service Priority Level 3, meaning that we do not shut down in times of crisis. Even as Orlando CAs have had to weather hurricanes, we all must weather this pandemic.

The issue is that we all work very closely to one another and share equipment all day long. We take over uncleaned cubes from one another during CTOs and all punch in using the same few time clocks. There are many people who work at CapTel because they are elderly or chronically ill and unable to do more physically demanding jobs. Additionally, CAs come to work from every corner of the city. CapTel is the perfect breeding ground for this virus and could find itself responsible both for the serious illness of its employees and the rapid spread of COVID-19.

CapTel's current response to this issue is simply not enough and less than the bare minimum they are morally obligated to do. They may be forgiving call-ins for illness but most CAs live paycheck to paycheck and cannot afford the extended absence that diagnosis and recovery from this virus would require.

If we provide an "essential service" then we should be paid like people who provide an essential service. This pandemic has shown that it is the workers like us, the shelf stockers and the janitors and the carers and the service workers, who are the most essential to a functioning society. We deserve sick pay and a living wage and CapTel is shirking its civic duty by not providing these.

On Misinformation: an open letter from a former CA

Every side in a conflict will have an agenda. To think otherwise is a fallacy. We as unionists are honest about and proactive about our agenda. What are our immediate goals? For all of us to have higher wages and better working conditions. What are our long-term goals? To gain larger control over our jobs and industries which will result in more control over our lives as workers, more control over our fate as individuals.

This relies on a collective effort and we have no reason to lie or misinform about this. We need as many people on our side as possible which is why our rhetoric values honesty, truth, and trust. Our opponents do not rely on collective effort; to the contrary, they rely on us behaving as individual workers with individual metrics and individual wages rather than acting as one working class. They rely on this to win; they're already winning for the moment.

In our situation those with the power are the bosses, the owners and managers. They will do everything it takes to maintain their own power, privilege, and salaries. They will deliberately spread misinformation to you and your coworkers.

They will tell you that our union is only out for your dues money. Yes, our members pay dues because it is the most democratic way of self-funding an organization that otherwise receives no alternative cash flow. And you have an equal vote at the local level as to how the dues money is spent. But no, we want more than your dues money. We want you to be an active participant in an effort

to take back control of our lives.

They will tell you that our union is only interested in disruption. They will tell you that our union has an agenda, maybe even a political agenda. Yes, we have an agenda; we are in conflict with the owners and managers because we demand a better life for 8 hours of our day, yet they demand complete control of us during those hours.

When the campaign for a better life on the job (which of course results in a better life off the job) takes critical momentum you will inevitably hear those with more power over you tell you “their side” of the story. They will present arguments convincing you to remain an isolated individual, to continue to do your part for the company. They will say “we care about you” and they will keep reminding you that they pay you more than minimum wage as if it’s any consolation.

They need you to obey. We need you as an individual to join us in order to better ourselves as a whole. Our opponents will be misinforming you if they aren’t already, and we know they will do so to divide us for the sake of maintaining their own status.

We want you to win. We want you to have a better life. We can’t win or have a better life unless you do, unless we band together as a union.

Don’t believe their propaganda and lies.

Sincerely,

A former CapTel Worker and current other call-center worker



Contact Us

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