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The Best of Times, The Worst of Times…

…so begins the famous line of Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, describing the extreme opposites of life in London and Paris during the 18th century. That contrast sums up life today for unions.

The best of times: the United Auto Workers concluded negotiations with VW for a first contract at VW's Chattanooga, TN facility. The four-year deal includes a 20% raise, enhanced healthcare benefits, and a ratification bonus of $6,550. UAW President Shawn Fain hopes to leverage this contract to organize union-free auto manufacturers and suppliers in southern states. According to Fain, "When union workers at the Big Three join together with auto workers in the South, we all win." Also on the labor negotiations front, the United Steelworkers recently reached a four-year agreement with oil and chemicals companies covering 30,000 employees nationally. The annual compensation increases—4%, 3.5%, 3.5% and 4%—are the highest the industry agreed to in over 30 years. Considering the primary workplace issue of affordability—particularly food and housing—it remains to be seen if unions can translate bargaining table success to an increase in membership.

The worst of times: the declining interest of union-free workplaces in becoming unionized. During 2025, there were a total of 1,498 NLRB-conducted elections, a stunning 30% decrease from 2024, when 2,124 elections were conducted—a 10-year high. One would think that during times of economic distress employees would become more interested in unions, not less. Speculating on why the decline of interest in unions, one must begin with company culture and workforce engagement. When employees understand the business and limitations on wage increases, employees don't like it, but they don't think unions will change those facts. Unions enjoy a high public approval rating, but not an outcome where employees believe that a union will help them.

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