

Proposed Bylaws Amendment: Defense Committee

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the problem you are trying to address?

Over the last six months, we (as individuals and as a union) have done an incredible amount of work. Picketers, captains, medics, designers, bargainers, people writing op-eds, people rallying their colleagues, people talking to the press and the public and faculty – hundreds of ASEs have collaborated to produce a contract with new protections for marginalized people, increased childcare and healthcare support, a new fees subsidy, and raises over the next 3 years.

However, these were not costless gains, and the process of achieving them was rarely smooth. Countless stories have come in from around the membership about frustrations and difficulties in gearing up and unifying. Some examples follow:

1. Members scrambling in the weeks after the Strike Authorization Vote to put together leaflets and advertisements due to an absence of pre-planned messaging and confusion over the processes for approving or printing materials;
2. International students lacking a consistent and supportive answer to implicit and explicit threats to their immigration status in the event that they chose to strike;
3. Duplicative, inconsistent, and rapidly-changing committees with ill-defined roles, responsibilities and leadership;
4. Little information on how members should get involved, absent personal connections to already-involved people;
5. Inconsistent, contradictory and often-absent messaging on the ongoing progress of negotiations and strike preparations.

Some degree of difficulty is expected; bargaining, striking and mass mobilization are hardly easy things to do. But many of them were avoidable with prior planning, and/or were noticed after the one-day strike on the 15th but persisted all the way to the ratification vote. The consequence of these problems and others was tremendous harm to our ability to organize and negotiate a fairer, and better, offer. Uncertainty and doubt left students scared about the financial and career consequences of striking, worried about the strength of our strike, and so reluctant to participate. This in turn weakened the Bargaining Committee's ability to negotiate: the threat of a strike is only effective if we are confident that a strike is viable. The result is a contract that contains many gains, but could have contained many more, and does not keep up with the cost of living increases in Seattle; a contract that has exhausted our membership; a contract that leaves UW smelling blood in the water for next time.

What is the proposal?

We do not blame anyone for this outcome. This is a structural problem; communication and organization responsibility fell almost exclusively on the Bargaining Committee, which has also spent five months tasked with continuous, exhausting negotiations with management for 60+ hours per week, with many members required to fulfil ASE duties due to the absence of a waiver. This is unsustainable in theory – *nobody* should be expected to complete 14 individually-exhausting jobs in parallel – and clearly proved unsustainable in practice.

This proposal describes and justifies the establishment of a Defense Committee tasked with organizing strikes and other union actions when they are necessary, and (when they are not) organizing and participating in solidarity actions with other unions and organizations on- and off-campus working in alignment with our goals as a local.

This has many advantages. Because the Committee is distinct from the Bargaining Team, more bandwidth is available to ensure that our communication and organization in the event of a strike is effective and consistent. Between bargaining sessions, the Defense Committee serves to build union bargaining power through development of contact networks and solidarity among students, faculty, and in particular, fellow unions. With all of this, the Committee also affords a constant stream of opportunities for new union members to get involved and for the local as a whole to see what does and does not work – in other words, opportunities to make our work even more effective, and keep members of the local involved, active and enthusiastic between bargaining campaigns.

We hope that the Defense Committee will provide a partial solution to the difficulties the local has faced during the 2018 bargaining campaign, ensuring that our work is more effective in the future.

Why ‘Defense Committee’?

The term ‘Defense Committee’ is very deliberately borrowed from the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who have (at each local) a General Defense Committee (GDC) – a committee to “provide for the general defense”. What this means is that the GDC not only works to support IWW members, but also other people or organizations who are fighting for equity and fairness. We have borrowed the name in allusion to our hope that this Committee’s work will help the UW community as a whole, as well as ASEs specifically.

Doesn’t the ‘standing strike committee’ cover this?

Yes and no. The idea of a standing strike committee is a good one, but it is largely ephemeral: the primary problems we ran into were not that there were not standing committees, but that the committees were not empowered to work semi-independently, to effectively get people

not already 'in the know' involved, or to communicate their work and needs out to membership.

Establishing a standing strike committee does not fix these problems; a standing committee has no formalized responsibility or powers. The result is that in practice we are likely to reproduce the same bottlenecks around communication, transparency and participation.

In contrast, the Defense Committee as proposed very intentionally contains explicit responsibilities, and explicit powers to execute those responsibilities – along with guarantees that it work in a transparent and participatory way, so that members are kept well-informed as to what the Committee is doing and how they can get involved.

What has changed between this version and the one from last meeting?

There have been a few changes introduced in response to feedback from other members since the proposal was announced at the meeting on the 7th. The big ones are:

1. Term limits. In the earlier version there weren't any; there now, well, are! No At Large member can serve for more than two terms.
2. Electoral requirements. In the earlier version any elected union official was ineligible to run for a Committee seat, with the exception of Chairs of standing committees. In response to (entirely legitimate and valuable) feedback pointing out that this functionally means that in small/inactive departments, the choice may be between running for this and their department having a Steward, we've added Stewards to the set of exceptions.
3. Elections. In the earlier version, Defense Committee members were elected exclusively at the Triennial Election, with no provision for resignations or replacement. We've tweaked this to be explicit that if there's an empty spot, that is filled at the next union election (whether a vacancy election or a Steward election or whatever), so we're down a person for as short a time as reasonable.

Who do I talk to if I have more questions, or some suggestions?

This amendment has been drafted by a whole group of people: new members and old, bargaining members, committee members and untitled volunteers. The point person for feedback right now is Oliver Keyes, who can be reached at okeyes@uw.edu – if you have thoughts, they welcome them! But ultimately the best discussion is the transparent kind, and so if your suggestions are for big changes it would be great to see you at the special membership meeting on Thursday the 21st of June, which is when this amendment will (cross fingers) be up for second reading – the point at which amendments *to* it are transparently discussed, debated and voted on. If you can't make it, that's totally understandable, and in that case we are more than happy to talk through proposing them ourselves or getting someone to stand in as a proxy :).

Amendment text

Following Article 23, Strikes, this amendment inserts into the UAW 4121 Bylaws:

Article 24, Defense Committee

Section 1. There shall be a permanent Defense Committee of the Local Union. The Defense Committee shall be responsible for undertaking work to directly defend and advance the goals of workers outside of the formal management-employee relationship, including but not limited to:

- A. Participating in and recruiting for solidarity actions with other unions.
- B. Conducting direct action campaigns in order to strengthen our position as a local.
- C. Building links between the Local and on- and off-campus organizations dedicated to advancing equity and fairness.

Section 2. It shall be the responsibility of the Defense Committee to prepare and build organizational capacity for, on an ongoing basis, industrial actions. Should an industrial action be called, and following the completion of the process laid out in Article 50 of the International Constitution if applicable, the Defense Committee shall direct and coordinate it.

Section 3. The Defense Committee shall consist of twenty-two (22) members. Twenty (20) of the members shall be members At Large, four (4) elected from each of the five (5) jurisdictional regions used by the Local Union to elect At Large Bargaining Team members (see Article 9 Bargaining Team). The remaining two (2) members of the Committee shall be At Large members of the Bargaining Team, selected by the Bargaining Team themselves.

Section 4. The first election of At Large members shall begin within one (1) month of final approval of this Article, and those elected shall serve until the next Triennial Elections for the Local Union. Thereafter, At Large Defense Committee Members shall be elected to three (3) year terms.

- A. No person may accept nomination to or hold both an At Large position on the Defense Committee and another elected office within the Local Union, with the exception of Stewards and the Chairs of standing committees.
- B. Members may only accept nomination in one jurisdictional region. Members may only accept nomination in a jurisdictional region in which they are enrolled or employed.
- C. No person may be elected as an At Large member of the Defense Committee more than twice.
- D. Any At Large positions left vacant due to the absence of candidates at the time of election, or member resignations, shall be reopened at the next available election for Stewards or other positions not included as part of the Local Union's Triennial Elections,

or as part of a vacancy election. Members elected to the Defense Committee as part of such an election will serve until the next Triennial Elections.

- E. All members in good standing of the Local Union shall be eligible to vote for all At Large Defense Committee Members.
- F. Except as described above, nominations and elections shall be executed consistent with Articles 14 and 15 of the Bylaws.
- G. Where not otherwise specified, resignations and removals shall follow the standards set out by the UAW Constitution and Local Elections guide.

Section 5. The Defense Committee shall elect a Secretary from amongst its members by simple majority vote. The Secretary shall have access to and the ability to publish through any Local communications medium, including but not limited to the website, mailing lists, and any social media platforms, along with the authority to delegate this access to other Defense Committee members.

Section 6. The Defense Committee shall conduct its business via meetings and a mailing list. Decisions shall be made by a simple majority vote. A simple majority of the Defense Committee shall constitute a quorum.

Section 7. Meetings and mailing lists shall be open to Local members, who shall have the right to comment on and ask questions about Defense Committee work, and otherwise participate in discussion. Prior to the adjournment of any meeting, the date, time and location of the next meeting shall be established. This will be posted on the Local website within 24 hours following scheduling.

Section 8. Meetings shall be minuted, and those minutes – along with any notes - shall be posted on the Local website within seven (7) days following a meeting.

Section 9. The Defense Committee may choose to establish, by majority vote, subcommittees for specific actions or purposes within the Defense Committee's remit. These subcommittees shall provide a report to each Defense Committee meeting, which shall be included in the minutes.

Section 10. The existence of Section 9, and the existence of any subcommittees established under it, is not intended to and shall not be interpreted as precluding work by existing standing committees or ad-hoc bodies that overlap with the remit of the Defense Committee.