

Jarrett Brown: PRO Act needs union democracy provisions

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Democrats in Congress, including all Wisconsin Democrats, have lauded the Protecting the Right to Organize Act (PRO Act) as a means to give workers a voice in the workplace. The idea that the PRO Act would give workers a voice is well-founded, but it doesn't go far enough. In order to give workers a real voice in the workplace union democracy provisions should be added.

In general, union workers enjoy higher wages, more benefits, and better working conditions than their non-union counterparts. However, not all unions are the same and not all union leaders share the same devotion to the interests of their members.

Union democracy exists when there is electoral democracy, transparency, and accountability. Free and fair elections encourage union members to be engaged in the decision-making processes of the union and to run for a post if they feel they have something to contribute. Transparency enables union members to know what decisions are being made, how they are being made, and what the outcomes are. Accountability forces union leaders to do what is in the best interests of the members and to be responsive to their concerns.

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Without free and fair elections, transparency, and accountability union members have no way to check the power of their leaders. As a labor activist and former union steward, I urge the Wisconsin delegation to add union democracy provisions to the PRO Act.

- Brown is a graduate student, labor activist, and writer from Green Bay.