



CABIN CREEK FILMS

presents

UNION TOWN

A film by Barbara Kopple

USA | 106 min. | 2026

World Premiere - 2026 Venice International Film Festival
North American Premiere - 2026 Toronto International Film Festival

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LOGLINE

UNION TOWN completes Barbara Kopple's trilogy on labor rights following her Oscar-winning HARLAN COUNTY USA and AMERICAN DREAM, two landmark cinéma vérité documentaries. Set against the backdrop of New York City, the film follows delivery industry workers as they take on some of the world's most powerful corporations, revealing the challenges, passion, and humanity at the heart of this growing labor movement.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

UNION TOWN completes Barbara Kopple's trilogy on labor rights following her Oscar-winning HARLAN COUNTY USA and AMERICAN DREAM, two landmark cinéma vérité documentaries. The film chronicles essential workers in New York City's last-mile delivery industry amid an explosive resurgence of organized labor in the nation's largest metropolis. Interweaving struggles within UPS, Amazon, and the mostly immigrant app-based bike delivery workforce, UNION TOWN uncovers the human face of modern labor and organizing. Filmed over the course of three years, the film asks what solidarity means in a world divided between those who have power, and those who must fight for it.

LONG SYNOPSIS

It is summer 2023, New York has become a hotbed of union activity, and all eyes are on the looming UPS contract battle. Teamster Local 804 is rallying workers and organizers across the country. Lifelong UPS driver and father of two, Antonio Rosario talks to workers outside warehouses, meeting the members who will be most affected. They include driver Shellyann Elliston, who struggles under the physical demands of long shifts. Or warehouse worker Dexter Cox, forced to sleep in his car so he can work a grueling "split-shift" to make his 8-hour day. And Will Weiss, a part-timer whose low wages force him to live on government assistance.

Narrowly evading a nationwide strike, the Teamsters secure a tentative contract agreement with UPS, and union-wide voting for ratification begins.

At a nearby Amazon warehouse in Maspeth, Queens, a small but mighty coalition of pro-union workers fight to organize their warehouse. One of its leaders is Ira Pollock, a passionate worker and the strategist of the group who is sharp and analytical but, above all else, is driven by the love for his community. The team is hit hard when one of their drivers, Carl Hooks, is fired for working with the union. They are able to rally their colleagues to stand up to management, but it's becoming clear that the group is struggling to take on Amazon on their own.

As a result, the warehouse votes to become part of the Teamsters Union. Now, with the force of the Teamsters organization behind them, Antonio and his team at Local 804 help Ira and his colleagues plan their boldest action yet — a shutdown during Amazon's busiest week of the year, just before Christmas.

Across the East River in Brooklyn, the Workers Justice Project (WJP) is led by Ligia Gualpa and Yadira Sanchez, who are seeking a more dignified life for the immigrants who make up the majority of New York's bike delivery workforce. The women are joined by "Deliveristas" William Medina, Antonio Solis, and Alejandro Grajales, as they seek justice for their fellow workers. As noncitizens, they don't have a pathway through unionism, yet continue to face their fight with unending persistence and joy. Fresh off a recent victory, where they secured minimum wage for app-based delivery workers, the Deliveristas face new obstacles, including wage theft, unjust deactivations, and dangerous working conditions.

Filmed over the course of three years, the film follows the haves and have-nots in New York City's delivery industry and discovers what it means for workers to fight back in today's world.

BACKGROUND

"Get up, get down, New York is a union town!" Heard at strikes across the city, this is not simply a rallying cry for unionizing laborers, but also a testament to New York's legacy as a simmering hub for grassroots organization. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a powder keg, swiftly ignited as soon as it began to dawn on the city's "essential workers" that billion-dollar companies like UPS and Amazon still undervalued their labor, despite putting their lives on the line.

As UNION TOWN begins, we're now witnessing the aftermath of this galvanizing event. In just a few years, across boroughs and neighborhoods, demographics and language barriers, historic organizations and new unions alike are gaining traction and building momentum, ushering in a new era for labor reform.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters has something of a tarnished reputation, shaped by years of mob violence and a president by the name of James Hoffa Jr. The union's newest leadership is looking to change that image: Boston-born Sean O'Brien was elected in 2022 on a platform of rank-and-file Teamster reform. Since his election, O'Brien has been no stranger to media attention, between his numerous political clashes and the unprecedented move to refuse endorsement of a presidential candidate — later delivering a speech at the Republican National Convention. However, it was under O'Brien's tenure that UPS drivers managed to negotiate a new contract, premised on the powerful threat of a widespread strike.

It's the same power that Amazon workers hope to wield in their own efforts to organize. Despite setbacks in Bessemer, Alabama, and intense union-busting in warehouses across the country, Amazonians United still has high hopes to unionize one of the many mammoth warehouses in the New York area — DBK4 in Maspeth, Queens, one of the most militant and organized Amazon warehouses in the country.

There is a significant coalition of Haitian immigrants within DBK4, whose temporary protected status expired in August of this year, their future increasingly jeopardized under the Trump administration. Months earlier, at the headquarters of the Workers Justice Project in Brooklyn,

Ligia Gualpa led a workshop on how app-based delivery workers — Los Deliveristas Unidos (LDU) — can advocate for their own rights if ICE agents show up at their workplace. The event took place less than a month after Trump's inauguration in January 2025. In line with the WJP's mission, this kind of workshop reveals the precarious position that these low-wage immigrant workers occupy, as well as the essential role that the WJP plays in their lives.

At the very heart of this film are the individual people — the families, parents, and children — who are most affected by the cruelty of the current US administration's policies. Their stories, both their trials and their triumphs, might only be told in our film, but they represent a larger struggle which is threaded through the very fabric of our nation.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My filmmaking journey started with an incredible passion for telling the intimate stories of workers who are fighting for dignity, for fairness, for their voices to be heard, and for the basic rights that should be afforded to all of us. For my first two feature films, HARLAN COUNTY USA and AMERICAN DREAM, the crew and I found ourselves in coal mines and meatpacking plants, offering a rare window into the hardship, determination, and shared struggles of working people and their families.

This new film is a culmination of everything I've learned over the years. Every experience, every mistake, every lesson in patience and trust, makes me feel like everything has led up to this moment. The story at the heart of the film is about people fighting for justice within systems that were never built to protect them. It's about courage and sacrifice, and the belief that things can and must change.

When I made HARLAN COUNTY USA and AMERICAN DREAM, I became a part of the community in both Kentucky and Minnesota respectively, living with these workers for many months, and even years. I felt deeply honored to be welcomed into their spaces, and I did everything I could to honor that trust. We stood on the picket lines when the temperature was 60 degrees below zero with a windchill. We were machine-gunned with semi-automatic carbines. But we never stopped filming. We stood with the workers, because they wanted us there. When we ran out of film, we would pretend that we were still filming, to stand guard and to show the workers that they weren't alone.

With UNION TOWN, I bring the same commitment, love, and passion. Over the years, I've been fortunate to have so many people open up their lives to me. I care deeply for them, and I always strive to tell the best, most honest story I can. The people in this new film have moved me in ways I didn't expect. Their courage, their humor, and their resilience remind me of those communities which I have filmed with before, and yet they have also been able to teach me something new. Today's labor struggles share so much with the past, but they also include these increasingly frightening layers of complexity: the "gig"-ification of the economy, constant surveillance, and other forms of union-busting techniques in this age of artificial intelligence and

digitization. Sadly, immigrant workers, those that are most vulnerable, have again become pawns for an administration that prides itself on spearheading one of the most aggressive crackdowns on newcomers to our country.

I hope this film helps others to see what I see: the extraordinary strength and humanity in these people who are fighting not just for themselves, but for all of us, despite these incredible challenges they face. At its essence, this film is an act of solidarity for workers across the world.

KEY CREATIVE TEAM

BARBARA KOPPLE ***DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER***

Barbara Kopple has dedicated her career to directing and producing powerful and emotionally affecting films about important social issues — including labor justice, freedom of speech, transgender acceptance, and anti-war advocacy — along with an array of musical documentaries. She is the two-time Academy Award-winning director of *HARLAN COUNTY USA* (1976) and *AMERICAN DREAM* (1990). In 1991, *HARLAN COUNTY USA* was added to the National Film Registry by the Library of Congress and designated as an American Film Classic. In the spring of 2026, Janus Films re-released both films, in 4K restorations, in theaters throughout the US.

Kopple founded the New York-based production company Cabin Creek Films and her projects have frequently premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, and DOC NYC. She most recently completed the documentary *GUMBO COALITION* (2022) for HBO Max, about national social justice leaders Marc Morial and Janet Murguía. The film had its world premiere at DOC NYC and its European premiere at IDFA. Previously, she directed *DESERT ONE* (2019), about the daring and ill-fated US Special Ops mission in the midst of the Iranian Hostage Crisis, which is currently available to stream on the History Channel; *NEW HOMELAND* (2018), which documented the experiences of refugee children from Syria and Iraq at a summer camp in the Canadian wilderness; *A MURDER IN MANSFIELD* (2017), an examination of a murder trial in the '90s where a son testified against his father for the murder of his mother. Other recent films include *THIS IS EVERYTHING: GIGI GORGEOUS* (2017), *MISS SHARON JONES!* (2015), *HOT TYPE: 150 YEARS OF THE NATION* (2013), *RUNNING FROM CRAZY* (2013), and *SHUT UP AND SING* (2006). For her continued work across nonfiction and narrative film and TV, she has been recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Emmy, the National Society of Film Critics Award, the Human Rights Watch Film Festival Irene Diamond Award, the Los Angeles Film Critics Award, and more. She is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, the Director's Guild of America, New York Women in Film and Television's Honorary Board, and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

HANNES HOSP***PRODUCER, EDITOR, CINEMATOGRAPHER***

Hannes Hosp is an Austrian filmmaker and editor whose work focuses on social justice, governmental accountability, and human rights. For UNION TOWN, he collaborated closely with Barbara Kopple over three years to shape the film's story and artistic vision. His editing credits include the vérité-driven civil rights documentary GUMBO COALITION (HBO Max, IDFA) as well as several episodes of the prolific PBS documentary series Frontline, including AMERICA AND THE TALIBAN (Peabody Award for Public Service winner) and THE CROWN PRINCE (duPont-Columbia Award finalist). He was featured in DOC NYC's "40 Under 40" cohort, which spotlights emerging documentary talent. UNION TOWN marks Hannes's feature producing debut.

FRANCISCO BELLO***EDITOR***

Francisco Bello (ACE) shot and produced the Oscar-nominated documentary short SALIM BABA and co-directed the Telluride Film Festival-premiering short doc DREAMING AGAINST THE WORLD. Additional work includes the Peabody-winning BEST KEPT SECRET (co-writer and editor), Barbara Kopple's Emmy-nominated DESERT ONE (editor), the Oscar-shortlisted TAKEOVER (co-writer and editor), and the Emmy-winning THE FIRST WAVE (editor). His narrative work includes the SXSW Grand Jury Prize-winning feature MOST BEAUTIFUL ISLAND. He was a board member for the Karen Schmeer Film Editing Fellowship and is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and American Cinema Editors (ACE).

DEBORAH PERETZ***EDITOR***

Deborah Peretz is an ACE and Emmy Award-winning editor with over 25 years of experience within the field of documentary film. She has collaborated on many projects with director Susan Lacy including HBO's SPIELBERG (2017) and has edited many acclaimed films for the American Masters, American Experience and Frontline series. Other career highlights include music films on subjects such as Leonard Bernstein, Joni Mitchell and John Lennon, as well as politically engaged films such as BROTHERS ON THE LINE (2012), FREE RENTY: LANIER v HARVARD (2021), and JANUARY 6TH (2022), as well as eight episodes of the long-running documentary series American Masters.

TIMOTHY GRUCZA***CINEMATOGRAPHER***

Timothy Grucza is a three-time Emmy Award-winning cinematographer and documentary filmmaker originally from Australia. For 16 years he shot, co-produced or contributed to 39 episodes of PBS investigative documentary program, Frontline. His work has covered wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the devastating earthquake in Haiti that killed 220,000 people, heroin addiction on the streets of Seattle, immigration policy on the Mexican border, and the first COVID outbreak in New York City. Since then, he has worked on films such as UNSCHOOLED (2020), JOAN BAEZ: I AM A NOISE (2023), and AMERICAN SYMPHONY (2023).

RACHEL BETH ANDERSON
CINEMATOGRAPHER

Rachel Beth Anderson is an Emmy Award-nominated cinematographer and documentary filmmaker. For the 2014 film E-TEAM, she shared the Cinematography Award at the Sundance Film Festival with director Ross Kauffman. She has been the recipient of additional honors for her cinematography work from the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, the International Documentary Association, and the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards. Her most recent film, GREAT PHOTO, LOVELY LIFE, premiered at SXSW in 2023 and was subsequently released by HBO Films. The same year, she was included as one of DOC NYC's "40 under 40" filmmakers.

JONGNIC BONTEMPS
ORIGINAL SCORE

Jongnic "JB" Bontemps is a distinguished film composer whose critically acclaimed work reverberates around the world. His score for TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE BEASTS, directed by Steven Caple Jr., was recognized with the inaugural NAACP Image Award for Outstanding TV/Film Score and received a nomination for a Hollywood Music in Media Award for Sci/Action Score. Additionally, Bontemps composed the score for the Oscar-nominated short documentary THE BARBER OF LITTLE ROCK, directed by John Hoffman and Christine Turner, and produced by Dwayne Wade. His score for HER FIGHT HIS NAME, a documentary directed by Academy Award winner Brad Bailey about Gwen Car's life (the mother of Eric Gardner), received a 2025 New York Emmy Award. Amazon Studio's MY NAME IS PAULI MURRAY, directed by Academy Award winners Julie Cohen and Betsy West, was nominated for a Critics Choice Award.

MAIN CREDITS:

DIRECTOR: BARBARA KOPPLE

PRODUCERS: HANNES HOSP, BARBARA KOPPLE, PETER PALANDJIAN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: PETER PALANDJIAN, GLENN RIGBERG

EDITORS: FRANCISCO BELLO, HANNES HOSP, DEBORAH PERETZ

CINEMATOGRAPHERS: TIMOTHY GRUCZA, HANNES HOSP, RACHEL BETH ANDERSON

COMPOSER: JONGNIC BONTEMPS

INTERNATIONAL SALES: AUTLOOK FILMSALES

US SALES: AUTLOOK FILMSALES

FESTIVALS NORTH AMERICA: JEFFREY WINTER, THE FILM COLLABORATIVE

PUBLICITY: SUSAN NORGET FILM PROMOTION

PRODUCTION COMPANY: CABIN CREEK FILMS

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:

LANGUAGE (DIALOGUE): ENGLISH, SPANISH, BENGALI

LANGUAGE (SUBTITLES): ENGLISH, ITALIAN

ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES: SUBTITLES

DCP: COLOR, UNENCRYPTED

SOUND: 5.1

ASPECT RATIO: 17:9, DCI 4K FLAT

FRAME RATE: 23.98