



# BAND OF BROTHERS

The Reuther Brothers bring you the union

**BROTHERS ON THE LINE:** Directed and written by Sasha Reuther. Cinematography, Joe Gabriel. Editor, Deborah Peretz. Music, Michael Whalen. Porter Street Pictures, 2012. 80 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Like socialism, the words labor and union, have become dirty in today's political climate. But this wasn't always so. These words have undergone a slow, steady and deliberate connotation reassignment, now signifying fascism, communism, redistribution of wealth and anti-democratic and anti-competitive practices, and perhaps that's why anyone born after 1980 is probably not familiar with the Reuther family like they are with the Kennedys. The Reuther brothers — Walter, Roy and Victor — who led the United Auto Workers (UAW) through its most successful era, acquiring high wages, pensions and collective bargaining rights for generations of autoworkers, setting the precedent for organized labor. The Reuther brothers marched with Martin Luther King and stood united with Cesar Chavez and striking farm workers and survived several assassination attempts. Filmmaker Sasha Reuther made *Brothers On the Line*, a historically striking and fast-paced 80-minute documentary chronicling the rise of the UAW, civil rights and the Reuther brothers because, he says, people either forgot or they were never taught.

"The labor story was pulled out of the history books," Sasha Reuther, grandson of Victor Reuther, tells *EW*. "It's a terrible shame. If you study that era — when you have a strong labor movement — our country does well."

The film opens in a time when one-fifth of Detroit's population was employed by auto-related industry and the only union that existed — the American Federation of Labor — protected solely skilled workers, leaving 90 percent of laborers unprotected. Enter Walter Reuther, eldest of the brothers, and as good as any protagonist that Hollywood could conjure; he had boyish good looks, slicked back flaming red hair, political smarts and a robust and relentless vision. In 1927 at the age of 20, Walter found his first job at the Briggs Manufacturing Company, where working 13-hours nights was the norm and fainting on the job was not unusual. Soon, his brothers joined him, and the charismatic trio decided to organize, speaking with fellow laborers and demanding rights.

*Brothers* clips along, with the help of narrator Martin Sheen, through historical milestones — the assassination of JFK and MLK, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the presidency of LBJ — chapters in history that most never knew were molded in the hands of the Reuthers. Relying heavily on archival footage, Sasha Reuther creates a black and white lens into the past that is just as vibrant as the interviews with the late Victor Reuther and Ed Kennedy. Some of the film's most powerful moments are still images of Walter in freedom marches — the UAW financed marches in Detroit and Washington, D.C.

Women, however, are mostly absent in this film, which is not representative of reality at the time. In fact, early on in the film, a woman helped kick-start the union movement by agreeing to fake fainting in the Kelsey Hayes Wheel Co. factory, throwing the spotlight on the inhumane working conditions. *Brothers* also briefly touches on the roles of the Reuther brothers' wives in the movement, but only long enough to leave you asking why it was not explored. Sasha Reuther wishes he could have delved further into the role of women in the union movement, pointing to how many women joined the workforce during World War II. "A lot of women UAW members brought [the union] back to their community," he says.

Watching this film, I kept asking myself, "Why don't I know about this?" Because, no matter your politics, it's a fascinating story. Unions did, after all, bring us the weekend, a minimum wage, paid vacations, paid sick leave, child labor laws, safety standards, an eight-hour workday, wrongful termination laws and unemployment benefits. Who can argue with that?

*Brothers On the Line* is part of the Good Works Film Festival, which also features films like *Blue Collar Boys*, a feature-length film about construction workers hit hard by the recession. *Brothers On the Line* will screen, with free admission, Oct. 28 and 29, at Bijou Art Cinemas. Filmmaker Sasha Reuther will do a Q&A Skype session with the audience on Oct. 28. To make advance reservations, visit [goodworksfilmfestival.org](http://goodworksfilmfestival.org). ■

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	6:15 8:25	CHICKEN WITH PLUMS IN FRENCH WITH SUBTITLES		4:00	NOON 4:00	NOON	9:45	7:30 9:45
	9:20	SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN		10:10	10:10	GOOD WORKS FILM FESTIVAL presents BROTHERS ON THE LINE w/director Skype on 10/28		MOOD AREA 52 presents NOSFERATU and LA VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE \$10 NO PASSES 8:00
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